

## GIVING MBA PROGRAMS THE THIRD DEGREE

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*Many critics of management education believe that MBA programs are facing a crisis because their curricula fail to adequately address the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that students must acquire in order to succeed in the business world. Because the traditional approaches to MBA curriculum development have failed to identify these KSAs, a new approach is needed. This article proposes a step-by-step guide to implementing such an approach, called "the proactive mission-based approach," that will better provide graduates with KSAs valuable to them and employers.*

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The modern MBA degree is facing a crisis as the academic and business communities have begun questioning its value and relevance. Pfeffer and Fong (2002) argued that business schools do not adequately prepare students for future success because the knowledge and skills taught in MBA programs bear little resemblance to those needed in the real world of business. Their argument is supported by empirical evidence indicating that non-MBAs perform their jobs as well or better than those who possess an MBA degree (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, p. 81). Cognizant of this fact, companies have become increasingly willing to promote employees who lack this degree, thus lowering the demand for MBA graduates (Merritt, 2005, p. 29). Because of this

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reduced demand, starting salaries for new MBAs have barely budged in the past 6 years (Merritt, 2005, p. 29).

Business schools must make fundamental curriculum changes to ensure that students are provided with the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are needed for success in the business world. In this article, we describe the two approaches that business schools have traditionally taken when developing their MBA curricula. We then identify the shortcomings of each approach and propose an alternative that attempts to overcome these shortcomings, one that better prepares students for future jobs by providing them with the requisite KSAs.

## Approaches to MBA Curricular Development

### THE FIRST DEGREE: THE NORMATIVE MBA

Following World War II, many working professionals who lacked a business education, such as engineers and nurses, were rapidly being promoted into management positions. The MBA's original aim was to help these individuals do a better job by providing them with knowledge of the core areas of business. To accomplish this aim, business schools developed their MBA curricula by building a core set of courses covering each of the functional areas of business. However, these programs earned little academic respect as they were viewed as vocational rather than as academic programs. Schools thus began modifying their MBA curricula in an effort to more closely resemble other academic programs of the time. They accomplished this aim by injecting the scientific method and quantitative analysis into their curricula. This new approach gradually became institutionalized, creating a normative model of what an MBA program should look like. Because all normative MBA programs have built their core curricula around this set of topics, it comes as no surprise that these programs are remarkably similar across business schools (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Porter & McKibbon, 1988).

Why have normative MBA programs failed to provide their graduates with the appropriate KSAs? One problem, we believe, is the assumption underlying normative MBA programs that there is a single knowledge set that all MBA students should acquire. MBA programs prepare students for a variety of professional business positions, such as entry, middle, and upper management; program administration; business consulting; financial analysis; entrepreneurship; and the like. These very different positions require unique skill sets that are not adequately covered in normative MBA programs. Moreover, during the past couple of decades schools have inserted additional core courses into their programs, such as ethics, globalization, and management information systems (MIS). Because so many topics were being squeezed into the core, MBA students were learning a little bit about a lot

of topics without learning any in depth. Therefore, rather than preparing students for all of these positions, normative MBA programs were preparing them for none.

### THE SECOND DEGREE: THE REACTIVE MISSION-BASED MBA

The second approach to curriculum development, called the reactive mission-based approach, resulted from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB; 1991) accreditation standards in the 1990s. The aim of these new standards was to encourage business schools to become more focused in their curriculum development efforts, rather than trying to be all things to all people. Schools now had to specify the outcomes that their MBA programs were trying to achieve and then focus their energies on achieving them. These standards recognized that business schools differ from one another in their missions and that a single idealized set of KSAs across all schools is inappropriate. Each school then had to create a curriculum that was linked to its unique mission.

Since the introduction of these new standards, schools have been wrestling with the issue of how to transform their MBA programs from normative to mission based. The AACSB (1991) prescribes a proactive, systematic approach in which schools first clearly specify their missions and then identify courses that will best lead to mission accomplishment. However, from what we have observed and read, few schools have approached this task proactively. Instead, most have opted for one of two approaches, neither of which is proactive.

In one approach, schools developed or revised their missions without significantly changing their curricula. Courses from each functional business area remained in the program's core. However, the instructors of these courses were now expected to gear their teaching to their schools' missions. For instance, if the program's mission were to prepare students for management jobs, accounting instructors were expected to focus their courses on those aspects of accounting that practicing managers needed to understand.

There are two problems with this approach. First, schools are not selecting core courses based on the program's mission. Rather, they are routinely assuming that courses such as management, accounting, finance, marketing, MIS, and business law should be placed in the core to expose students to the full range of business operations and functions. However, many students enter MBA programs with undergraduate business degrees and have thus already been grounded in the various business disciplines. Moreover, it may be that only a subset of the topics covered in these courses directly relates to the program's mission. If schools were to remove the nonessential topics, there would be more room in the core to add other, truly mission-related courses.

The second problem with this approach concerns the expectation that instructors who teach core courses should emphasize topics that are most relevant to the target jobs (i.e., the types of jobs that the students are being prepared to enter). This requirement puts a misplaced responsibility on these instructors, who may not be sufficiently familiar with these particular jobs to discern which topics to emphasize. Many instructors or programs respond to this dilemma by offering a basic introductory course in their disciplines. To achieve the appropriate level of difficulty for a graduate course, some instructors emphasize the more technical aspects of their subjects. The consequence is the often-heard complaint among MBA students that their courses go into too much technical detail. Students remark,

As future managers we will be relying on specialists to help us deal with MIS, finance, law, marketing and accounting issues. Instead of learning how to understand and apply this information, we are learning how to do the specialists' work.

Other schools have taken a very different approach to transforming their MBA programs from normative to mission based. These schools have embraced the freedom granted by the new AACSB standards and have used this freedom to completely renovate their normative programs. These renovations, however, have not been systematically performed as many schools are allowing external stakeholders—primarily students—to dictate the content of their curricula. Others have delegated the responsibility to individual faculty without appropriate management systems in place that would ensure proper implementation.

Why are they doing this? Trank and Rynes (2003, p. 193) blamed the media rankings. Graduate business programs highly covet these rankings and believe that they can improve them by pleasing students and recruiters whose views drive the rankings. Schools are caving in to this pressure despite their knowledge that media rankings are, at best, imperfect measures of school quality (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 11).

How are these pressures manifesting themselves? According to Trank and Rynes (2003), corporations have shifted toward a short-term focus on immediate financial performance. Recruiters thus want schools to produce graduates with “a narrow focus on the immediate skills needed for first jobs” (p. 193). Students are aware of this trend and, to enhance their marketability, seek programs that have a short-term focus (Middleton, 2004; Trank & Rynes, 2003). Thus, recruiters and students are pushing schools to offer courses that are directly and immediately relevant to the students' first or current jobs (Trank & Rynes, 2003, p. 195).

A number of schools have succumbed to this influence. For example, Indiana University's Kelly School of Business, ranked 18th in the nation by *Business Week*, starts the specialization immediately; students apply to one

of 11 academies that provide a specialized program in a particular industry. In other schools, the core curricula have been squeezed down to a single semester to allow more room for courses that external stakeholders believe will prepare graduates for their first jobs (Middleton, 2004, p. 92).

The problem with this approach to curriculum development is that it is reactive, rather than proactive; that is, rather than systematically identifying courses needed to achieve their missions, schools are selecting courses based on student and recruiter preferences.

This approach raises the following questions and concerns: (a) When squeezing the core down to a single semester, what criteria do schools use to determine whether to include or eliminate existing courses? Our concern is that schools are not considering their missions when making these decisions and may be eliminating mission-related courses. (b) Do schools carefully scrutinize the courses suggested by external stakeholders to determine their relevance to their programs' missions? We are concerned that many schools are not doing this; rather, they are simply choosing the latest "flavor of the month" to please vocal groups. (c) Are there any additional courses that would contribute to their programs' missions that external stakeholders have not championed? We are concerned that external stakeholders fail to advocate some courses because they do not appreciate their value. For example, external stakeholders seldom, if ever, include a statistics course on their wish list. However, knowledge of statistics may be essential for some missions.

### THE THIRD DEGREE: THE PROACTIVE MISSION-BASED MBA

What is needed is an approach to curriculum development in which core MBA courses are systematically identified by individuals who understand the program's mission and are able to ascertain the KSAs needed to achieve it. The proactive mission-based approach attempts to meet this need by advocating a more methodical approach to curriculum development, one that utilizes the collective knowledge of all relevant stakeholders, not just a narrow few.

This approach is adapted from a method that human resource development professionals routinely use to determine the learning needs of their companies' employees. It consists of the following phases (Noe, 2002, pp. 90-93):

1. prepare for resistance to change;
2. devise a clear mission statement;
3. develop a list of mission-related tasks that graduates are likely to be required to perform;
4. identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that graduates must acquire to perform the mission-related tasks;
5. create a set of courses that collectively teach the most important KSAs; and
6. evaluate the success of the new program, making modifications suggested by the evaluation results.

Because of our previously noted concerns, we believe that this undertaking should not be delegated exclusively to either faculty members or external stakeholders (business executives and alumni). Both groups have their limitations. Faculty members may not be sufficiently familiar with the types of jobs for which their students are being prepared and the skills needed to perform them. Moreover, some may be highly motivated to protect their own turf, regardless of mission relevance. External stakeholders tend to suggest courses without knowing the program's mission and may not appreciate the importance of certain topics. However, collectively these groups bring much expertise to the table. Faculty members are experts in the fields in which they teach; alumni have perspective on the ultimate usefulness of the various subjects that had been covered in their graduate programs; and business managers have a good understanding of the types of tasks that graduates perform and the skills needed to perform them.

We propose that these groups work collaboratively in the curriculum development process. We are not advocating that external stakeholders contribute to the process by merely serving as advisers. Rather, they should work side by side with faculty as equal partners in the process. With this approach, external stakeholders will be able to assist faculty in their efforts to determine the KSAs that should be taught in the MBA's core without unduly influencing the outcome.

## **Developing a Proactive Mission-Based MBA Program**

We now offer a step-by-step guide for developing proactive mission-based MBA programs. We have assisted a number of schools in this process and will occasionally refer to this work to illustrate certain points. When doing so, we will collectively refer to such schools as "School A."

### **PHASE 1: PREPARE FOR RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

Any process that leads to major changes will meet resistance, especially from individuals who perceive that they may be negatively affected by it (Dirks, Cummings, & Pierce, 1996)—in this case, the faculty. Thus, before embarking on this change process, schools should attempt to ensure faculty buy-in. To accomplish this aim, they must identify factors that will influence buy-in, building on those forces that support it, while eliminating or reducing the restraining forces (Lewin, 1951; Schwering, 2003).

One restraining force is the faculty's satisfaction with the status quo. The new program's core may be quite different from that of the normative MBA as many existing courses are likely to be modified, condensed, or eliminated. Faculty may be resistant because such changes can disrupt power relationships

within and between departments. And of course, there is the ubiquitous fear of change. Even desired change can cause apprehension.

Another restraining force is the threatening nature of this change. During the change process, current practices will be closely scrutinized. As Stenhouse (1975) noted, "the close examination of one's professional performance is personally threatening; and the social climate in which teachers work generally offers little support to those who might be disposed to that threat" (p. 159). Faculty members may feel further threatened by a perceived loss of job security (Harvey & Brown, 1996). They may believe that their chances of earning tenure or promotions will be jeopardized if forced to teach the new courses that will emerge from this process. It takes time to perfect a course. If the initial offerings of their new courses do not go smoothly, the performance evaluations of these faculty members will suffer (Porras & Hoffer, 1986). In addition, those who have been pioneers in applying new methods might fear losing their identity as groundbreakers and "cool" teachers.

What can schools do to mitigate the effects of these restraining forces? According to the organizational development literature, the two most important determinants of successful change processes are top management support and employee participation. The commitment of top management has overwhelming influence on the success of program implementation (see Rodgers, Hunter, & Rogers, 1993). In fact, Boss and Golembiewski (1995) argued that few factors are more important to this process than the support and commitment of the chief executive officer. The use of employee participation is also a key determinant of successful change efforts (Dunphy & Stace, 1988). Faculty members must be made aware of the need for change, understand the positive impact that it will have, and play a key role in the implementation (Connor, 1992). Involving faculty members in all aspects of the change process will create a sense of ownership and thus enhance the likelihood that faculty members will support the change effort (Dirks et al., 1996).

We now offer the following suggestions on how these principles can be applied to this change process:

1. Get the support of the business school's dean and higher administration.
2. Ask the dean to appoint a blue-ribbon panel to lead the change process. The panel should consist of influential and enthusiastic faculty members who represent the various business disciplines and who recognize the need for change and would be willing to champion the impending process. The dean should pledge full support.
3. The panel should meet with the dean to develop a plan for laying the groundwork that will help ensure the success of this change effort. The plan should identify changes needed in the school's support system and how to deal with faculty members whose courses will be eliminated or comprehensively changed and those who remain overtly or passively obstructive. Possible interventions include covering new courses with tenured professors; giving reduced teaching loads to faculty members teaching new courses; rewarding

course development activities with perks, such as additional travel monies; and offering a grace period for instructors to fine-tune their new courses (e.g., withholding course evaluation results from the department chair and dean when a new course is first taught).

4. The dean should convene a full faculty meeting in which the panel members present the plan to their colleagues. The presentation should delineate the reasons for the change, describe the new support system, and outline the steps that will be followed in the curriculum development process. The panel should make it clear that when in place, the new program will be evaluated and any necessary changes will be subsequently made. The audience members should then be given an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns. The meeting should conclude with a vote on whether to proceed with this process. Faculty should be informed that a yes vote simply means that the panel will proceed to the next step. They should be assured that the panel will keep them informed of its progress each step of the way and that their input will be welcomed throughout. The panel should inform the faculty that they will have the opportunity to vote on whether to implement the new curriculum prior to its implementation.

Expect some dissenters, even under the best of circumstances. However, schools should not proceed with this process unless a clear majority (e.g., 75%) of its faculty votes yes. Without such a mandate, the new program is doomed to fail.

#### **PHASE 2: DEVISE A CLEAR MISSION STATEMENT**

When the faculty has pledged its support to the process, the panel should produce a clear statement of the MBA program's mission. This step is obviously a key element to the success of a proactive mission-based program. The mission statement is the driving force behind the process; when articulated, all other activities are tied to it.

When creating the mission statement, the panel should take a long, hard look at what the program is trying to accomplish. In doing so, panel members should examine the mission statements of their university and college and consider the types of students their MBA program attracts, the types it would like to attract, and the types of jobs that most of their MBA graduates seek.

The resulting mission statement should be written as clearly as possible. At School A, the panel noted that its college's mission stated, "The MBA program aims to enhance the performance and career potential of working professionals." Because the clear majority of its MBA students were current or aspiring managers, the panel modified this statement to read, "The MBA program's mission is to prepare students for success in entry and middle-management positions."

When crafted, the mission statement should be communicated to the full faculty for their comments and suggestions. The panel should then make any necessary modifications based on this input. The full faculty should

then be given the opportunity to vote on the final draft. If a clear majority of the faculty approves the mission statement, the panel should proceed to Phase 3; if not, the panel should further revise the mission statement to incorporate reasonable faculty suggestions.

**PHASE 3: DEVELOP A LIST OF MISSION-RELATED TASKS THAT GRADUATES ARE LIKELY TO BE REQUIRED TO PERFORM**

When a school articulates a clear mission for its MBA program, it must identify the tasks that it expects its students to be able to perform on graduation. As noted previously, faculty members are often unable to accurately gauge this need. We suggest that a panel of external stakeholders be assembled to work with the faculty panel at this point and continue this role throughout the remainder of the process. This panel should consist of alumni and business managers. The alumni should be good students who recently graduated from the program and are now working in one of the targeted jobs. The business managers should be managers of people holding the targeted jobs. These individuals should work for companies with progressive management systems and be able to demonstrate that they have kept their business knowledge up-to-date by attending seminars, conferences, and other relevant educational opportunities.

The two panels should first identify the types of jobs that graduates typically enter and then derive task statements depicting the major responsibilities of these jobs. At School A, the two panels derived the following list of tasks conducted by graduates who are employed in the targeted jobs (i.e., entry- and mid-level management):

1. Help organizations meet their strategic planning goals.
2. Use decision-making tools to solve problems faced by entry- and middle-level managers.
3. Monitor and evaluate a work unit's financial performance.
4. Build and sustain an efficient and motivated workforce.
5. Perform their jobs in a professional, effective, ethical, and socially responsible manner.

When the tasks have been identified, the list should be communicated to the full faculty for their comments and suggestions. The panels should not proceed to Phase 4 until the clear majority of the faculty approves this list.

**PHASE 4: IDENTIFY THE KSAs THAT GRADUATES MUST ACQUIRE TO PERFORM THE MISSION-RELATED TASKS.**

The heart of the curriculum development process is determining the course content. Schools make this determination by analyzing each of the tasks that

was identified in Phase 3 to ascertain the KSAs that students must learn to effectively perform them. We suggest a four-step process: (a) An initial list of KSAs is developed separately by each panel, (b) these two lists are then collated, (c) the two panels separately review the collated list and evaluate the importance of each KSA, and (d) the two panels then meet to discuss areas of disagreement and arrive at consensus.

During this phase, the faculty and external stakeholders are likely to disagree because these two groups perceive the issue of KSAs from different perspectives, as noted earlier. We, therefore, suggest that schools engage the services of a facilitator to help resolve these disagreements. This individual should be a business faculty member from another institution who has industrial experience and who, therefore, would be able to understand the viewpoints of both parties. The facilitator's role is "to encourage members . . . to argue without destroying their ability to work together" (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, & Bourgeois, 1997, p. 78).

In Step (a), each faculty panel member confers with his or her department colleagues to identify the KSAs from their discipline that students need to learn to perform each of the tasks. This approach gives the full faculty an opportunity to provide input into the process, thus enhancing buy-in. The external stakeholder panel members do the same, that is, derive a KSA list by conferring with people currently holding positions in which these tasks are performed. The panels should be instructed to write the KSAs in a standard format, beginning with an action verb that indicates the needed competency level, such as *understands*, *recognizes*, *applies*, *conducts*, *analyzes*, and so on.

In Step (b), the facilitator collates the two lists, eliminating any duplication, and then prepares a master list delineating each task and the KSAs from all disciplines that are needed to perform it. A copy of the master list produced at School A is shown in Appendix A.

In Step (c), the two panels separately review the master list and evaluate the importance of each KSA. School A used the following 3-point rating scale:

1. **Essential:** As future managers, graduates will not be able to succeed at this task without first acquiring this KSA. The MBA program must teach this KSA.
2. **Desirable:** Although this KSA is not essential for successful task performance, students would benefit from its coverage. The MBA program should teach this KSA if there is room for it in the curriculum.
3. **Little value:** The successful task performance of the MBA graduate will not be enhanced by this KSA. The MBA program should not bother teaching this KSA.

Individual panel members are instructed to complete the ratings independently and then discuss these ratings until the panel reaches consensus on each KSA.

In Step (d) the two panels meet with the facilitator to discuss the KSAs for which different consensus ratings were derived by each panel. With each group bringing its unique perspective to the discussion, talks should continue until

consensus is reached on the importance rating of each KSA. The facilitator's role is to guide these discussions and help the groups reach consensus.

**PHASE 5: CREATE A SET OF COURSES THAT COLLECTIVELY TEACH THE MOST IMPORTANT KSAs**

This phase should be completed by the faculty panel who, as educational experts, must decide how the most important KSAs can be organized into courses or modules. At this step in the process, schools have the opportunity to build interdisciplinary courses if they wish to integrate their curricula and to incorporate other creative options for delivery.

They can accomplish this aim by building courses that teach each task. For example, School A could design a course that would teach students how to use decision-making tools (Task 2 of Appendix A). Such a course would incorporate KSAs from accounting, MIS, business law, marketing, and quantitative analysis. If only a small number of KSAs within some disciplines are found to be essential, the panel should develop modules or mini-courses (1 or 2 credits) or courses that combine these disciplines (if such combinations make sense). Completion of this phase requires four steps.

In Step 1, the panel prepares a document that lists the title of each course, a brief course description, and the topics (i.e., essential KSAs) that will be covered. Appendix B contains the document prepared by School A. This document should then be communicated to the full faculty for their comments and suggestions. Remind the faculty how this document was created and inform them that any suggested changes should be mission based; that is, faculty members should be prepared to demonstrate how their suggested changes would enhance achievement of the program's mission. At this point, following any possible modifications, the faculty again votes.

In Step 2, the school establishes separate committees to develop each course, comprising faculty with the appropriate subject-matter expertise. The use of such committees enhances buy-in by involving as many faculty members as possible in the course development process. Each committee should determine which, if any, of the desirable, but nonessential KSAs will be added to the course.

In Step 3, the committees specify learning objectives for each KSA. For example, listed below are possible learning objectives for the KSA, "Communicating with employees in a supportive manner, giving timely, appropriate, and effective feedback:"

- Understand the importance of effective communication.
- Be able to communicate accurately and honestly without jeopardizing interpersonal relationships.
- Be able to effectively use feedback to reward positive performance and correct problem behaviors or attitudes.
- Be able to conduct a personal management interview to provide subordinates with developmental and feedback opportunities. (Whetten & Cameron, 2002)

The specification of learning objectives helps operationally define the KSAs so that all parties have a common understanding of what must be learned. If necessary, committee members should be trained on how to develop these objectives.

In Step 4, each committee prepares a course syllabus. The syllabus should be distributed to members of the external stakeholder panel for their comments and suggestions. After any possible modifications, the syllabus should then be submitted through the appropriate college and university course approval processes.

**PHASE 6: EVALUATE THE SUCCESS OF THE NEW PROGRAM,  
MAKING MODIFICATIONS SUGGESTED  
BY THE EVALUATION RESULTS**

The last step of the process is to develop an assessment plan to determine whether the new MBA program is successfully preparing its graduates for the types of careers envisioned by the school's mission statement. The assessment should seek to determine two things: (a) the extent to which students have mastered the essential KSAs covered in the program and (b) whether the possession of these KSAs has enhanced their job success. Outcomes assessment goes beyond the rudimentary program evaluation of the past that focused on inputs and institutional resources (Henniger, 1994) and seeks to measure what students are actually learning (McMurtrie, 2000). For an assessment process to be truly effective, there must be a feedback loop that ensures that the information gathered is used to monitor progress toward the intended educational goals. Schools should use this information as a basis for making changes that will improve the students' educational experiences.

The AACSB places the responsibility for outcomes assessment in the hands of each institution. The *Eligibility Procedures and Standards for Business Accreditation* (AACSB, 2003), which must be adopted by 2007, require that evidence of student learning become an integral part of the curriculum assessment. Unfortunately, there are no tools or formats specifically prescribed for the assessment process. Recommendations abound, such as those from the American Association for Higher Education ([www.aah.org/principal.htm](http://www.aah.org/principal.htm)), which should serve as a foundation for any assessment program (Grandzol, Kass, Grandzol, & Amin, 2004). These include understanding that (a) learning is integrated and multidimensional, (b) assessment should be an ongoing process, and (c) assessment efforts are more likely to succeed when using representatives from across the educational community. Schools with colleges of education and with faculty development centers will find expertise in such entities to assist with this task.

Measures can be developed that will provide meaningful information about how well the outcomes have been achieved and where changes are needed to improve the curriculum. The use of multiple methods allows for

a triangulation of perspectives from the students, faculty, and relevant external stakeholders. These methods should include direct and indirect measures of learning. Direct measures provide evidence of what students have learned and whether they have gained a command of the subject areas (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2003, p. 30). Indirect methods assess mediators of learning, such as satisfaction with the program and instructors and the suitability of classroom conditions. We suggest the following list of outcome assessment measures:

- The committee designing each course should agree on the best method(s) to assess learning for each particular KSA.
- Students should be asked to complete an end-of-course questionnaire in which they rate their satisfaction with the manner in which the course was taught and offer suggestions for improvements.
- Business professionals should review samples of student projects, papers, and presentations.
- Recruiters who have interviewed and/or hired many of the graduates should be asked to evaluate the real-world readiness of these individuals.
- Employers of the program's graduates should be asked assess the quality of their work using a 360-degree feedback system in which subordinates, superiors, colleagues, and clients and/or customers evaluate their performance on each job task specified in Step 3.
- Program graduates should be periodically surveyed to determine their perceptions of how well their education prepared them for performing their job tasks.

## Obstacles and Problems

Even under the best conditions, schools are likely to hit a few bumps in the road during this process. Here are some of the problems that we encountered, along with suggestions on how to mitigate them:

1. Faculty members who were asked to serve on the panel resisted because they feared this would be a meaningless exercise.  
Have the dean assure them that he or she is behind this effort and will support it every step of the way. The dean can demonstrate support by agreeing to offer payment and other perks (e.g., reduced course loads) to those who contribute to the new program. Putting financial resources behind words of support can be a powerful and effective tool.
2. When the panel members derived the KSAs for each task, many insisted that their areas of expertise be fairly represented on the list. Unfortunately, many of these individuals judge fairness on the basis of quantity. For instance, one professor noted, "It is unfair that management has more KSAs on the list than marketing!"  
Remind the panel members that this process is mission driven. For example, if the mission of the program is to prepare graduates for management jobs, it makes sense that most of the KSAs would be management related.  
Alternatively, the panel could impose a cap on the number of KSAs from each subdiscipline (e.g., financial accounting and managerial accounting) so

that no single discipline monopolizes the list. We took this approach at School A, imposing a cap of 10 KSAs. It is not surprising to note, each department submitted a list containing exactly 10 KSAs for each of its sub-disciplines. Although the panel members were satisfied with this outcome, there is an obvious flaw in the process: Some departments may pad their lists with unimportant KSAs to ensure that their disciplines are equally represented. Such KSAs, however, are likely to be eliminated when the external stakeholders provide their input.

3. Some faculty members resisted the new program when they learned that certain traditional MBA courses were eliminated or modified. For instance, at School A, several faculty members balked at the fact that the proposed program did not include a course on research methods.

When problems such as this arise, ask these individuals to provide a rationale for their suggestion and to specify the mission-linked task(s) that graduates could better perform if provided with such a course. Conduct a vote of the full faculty on the issue; reinstate the course if the majority of the faculty members agree that such a move would enhance mission accomplishment.

4. The curriculum development process resulted in the creation of a course that none of the faculty was qualified to teach. The faculty, therefore, sought to exclude this course from the curriculum. At School A, the proposed curriculum included a course titled *Managerial Communication Skills* (see Appendix B). Both panels recognized the importance of the KSAs taught in this course. However, when the proposed slate of courses was shown to the full faculty, the organizational behavior (OB) professors balked at its inclusion; none felt competent to teach it and feared that their attempts to do so would jeopardize their careers. These faculty members conceded that there was a professor in the Mass Communications program who could teach this course; however, for political reasons, the faculty members did not want any "outsiders" involved in the program.

When problems of this nature arise, the panel must turn to the dean for support. The dean would have a number of options in the instant case, such as overruling the objection about excluding outsiders, hiring an adjunct to teach the course, or providing incentive to faculty members to take classes and/or attend conferences to become sufficiently proficient to teach the course. The dean should assure them that taking such a risk will not hurt their careers; in fact, they would earn extra credit in their performance reviews for accepting this challenge.

5. Despite our best efforts, a small number of faculty members served as obstructionists, voicing their stern opposition throughout the process.

As previously discussed, individuals are likely to resist any change process that directly affects them (e.g., Dirks et al., 1996), especially if the change interferes with individual agendas. Such resistance ties up time, diverts resources, and misplaces attention. We believe that conducting a participative process that the dean strongly supports can be very effective at overcoming such resistance and minimizing the number of obstructionists (Dunphy & Stace, 1988). Each step of the process outlined in this article is supported by a vote of the clear majority of faculty creating a democratic mandate to go forward. In such circumstances, many obstructionists may come to realize that their efforts to impede the process will be futile and eventually relent. If necessary, the dean could use his or her legitimate authority to control obstructionist behavior that is clearly inappropriate.

Although less than an ideal solution to obstruction, such action is sometimes necessary to bring about successful change (see Dunphy & Stace, 1988).

## Conclusions

We believe that schools must significantly improve their MBA curricula if these programs are to once again thrive. To achieve that end, we propose that business schools take a proactive mission-based approach. Despite the fact that such an approach leads to the creation of relevant curricula, many faculty members may resist this effort. However, by allowing their resistance to influence curricular decisions, schools ensure that business education will continue to face a growing gap between the KSAs taught in MBA programs and those needed for job success. Obviously, the manner in which this process is carried out will influence the amount of such resistance. We believe that it can be reduced significantly if the dean visibly supports the process, faculty members are given a strong voice during each step, and appropriate systemic management tools, such as reward systems, are incorporated in the process.

Perhaps an even bigger obstacle to curriculum improvement is the tendency of many business schools to be satisfied with the status quo (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). As Friga, Bettis, and Sullivan (2003) noted, graduate management education has failed to make long-needed changes in its value structure. Although many schools recognize the need for the type of changes that we have suggested (Fuchsberg, 1990), few schools have actually made them (Boyatzis, Cowen, & Kolb, 1995; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002). Because of this tendency to resist change, business schools have been wrestling with the same problems and criticisms for decades. In the words of Edward Deming, "If you do what you always did, you will get what you always got."

## Appendix A Ratings Instructions

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These program goals are listed again on the following pages. Below each is a list of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that may be needed to achieve the goals, KSAs that students should acquire in the MBA program. Please rate each KSA using the following scale:

1. **Essential:** As future managers, graduates will not be able to succeed at this task without first acquiring this KSA. The MBA program must teach this KSA.
2. **Desirable:** Although this KSA is not essential for successful task performance, students would benefit from its coverage. The MBA program should teach this KSA if there is room for it in the curriculum.

3. **Little value:** The successful task performance of the MBA graduate will not be enhanced by this KSA. The MBA program should not bother teaching this KSA.

1. **Help organizations meet their strategic planning goals**

**Rating Scale:**

1. Essential
2. Desirable
3. Little value

**KSAs:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand, in general terms, how businesses operate and the roles played by the various functional areas in helping a business achieve success.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the purpose of a strategic plan and how entry- and middle-level managers can contribute to the plan's success.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the influence of environmental and global forces on the formation and implementation of a firm's strategic plan.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand why and how human resource planning activities are conducted.
  5. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand how information systems are used in the planning process.
  6. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to use strategic information systems and decision models in the planning process.
  7. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand how national cultures and political economies influence the strategic planning process.
  8. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a firm.
  9. \_\_\_\_\_ Know the state and federal legal regulations of business.
  10. \_\_\_\_\_ Know the nature, types, benefits, and liabilities of the various forms of business organizations.
  11. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to formulate appropriate marketing strategies and policies.
  12. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to select target markets and position the organization favorably relative to its competition.
  13. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand marketing's impact on individual consumers, other business entities, and society as a whole.
  14. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand and apply various systematic operations strategies.
  15. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to evaluate the usefulness of a corporate strategy.
  16. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the domestic and international economic factors and financial market conditions that affect the ability of the firm to finance operations.
  17. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the workings of the International Trade System, including exporting, joint venturing, and foreign direct investment.
  18. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the organization's microenvironment, including suppliers, distributors, customers, competitors, and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., the community).
  19. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to articulate a vision and set goals.
2. **Use decision-making tools to solve problems faced by entry- and middle-level managers**

**Rating Scale:**

1. Essential
2. Desirable
3. Little value

**KSAs:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to make decisions based on managerial accounting techniques.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand how information technology can be best used for decision making.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to design and use information systems for quality management and continuous improvement.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to access sources of and changes in legal regulations using Internet and print resources.
  5. \_\_\_\_\_ Know the rights and remedies resulting from business contracts, including common law and Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) elements of a contract, third party rights, and enforcement issues.
  6. \_\_\_\_\_ Recognize sources of tort liability in the workplace under the common law (negligence, international torts, and strict liability) and under federal and state statutes and regulations (product liability and employment regulation).
  7. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand what acts may constitute crimes in the conduct of business in the areas of safety of workers, the environment, securities, fraud, bankruptcy, and Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO).
  8. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to make ethical marketing decisions.
  9. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to analyze the changing external environment and the dynamics of the organization as a context for decision making.
  10. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand and utilize marketing information systems.
  11. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand and apply quality management paradigms to solve business problems.
  12. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to interpret the results of business research.
  13. \_\_\_\_\_ Design and execute research studies.
  14. \_\_\_\_\_ Apply key quantitative models and interpret their results accurately.
  15. \_\_\_\_\_ Apply probability and statistics to transform data into management information.
  16. \_\_\_\_\_ Apply data-based managerial decision-making and problem-solving tools.
  17. \_\_\_\_\_ Present data, results, and recommendations.
  18. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the purpose, value, and methods of descriptive statistics.
  19. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand key concepts of probability theory.
  20. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the purpose, value, and methods of inferential statistics.
  21. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to use information technology to solve business problems.
3. Monitor and evaluate work unit's financial performance
1. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to prepare, read, and interpret financial statements.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to read and interpret managerial accounting reports.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the budgeting process and how to prepare a simple budget.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand product costing and the various techniques used to allocate overhead to production.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Analyze the impact of financial transactions on organizations.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand various types of accounts (assets, liabilities, equities) and how to apply them.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the financial accounting cycle.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the value and limitations of financial accounting.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the significance of internal controls.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to perform cost-volume-profit analysis.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand various management accounting control techniques.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand and perform time value of money analysis.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand and compute performance evaluation measures (like return on investment [ROI]).
14. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand financial techniques involving time value of money.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand financial statement analysis, financial ratio analysis, the economic value added concept, and audit of capital budgeting project results.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand management information system (MIS) that are used to monitor and statistically represent operational data.

4. Build and sustain an efficient and motivated workforce

Rating Scale:

1. Essential
2. Desirable
3. Little value

KSAs:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to make correct employment decisions (e.g., hiring, promotion, discipline, discharge) that comply with the various employment laws (Civil Rights Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, etc.).
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the role of employee performance appraisals and how managers should conduct them.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to recruit and select applicants.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to coach and mentor employees.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to conduct conferences with employees with regard to discipline and performance problems.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to create a legally compliant workplace with regard to such issues as sexual harassment and discrimination.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to prevent and/or handle employee grievances.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand how to manage in a union environment.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Recognize the importance of employee safety and health and understand the manager's role in ensuring these outcomes.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand resistance to change and how to lead employees through the change effort.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to communicate with employees in a supportive manner.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to give timely, appropriate, and effective feedback to employees.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the positive and negative aspects of conflict and how to manage it.

14. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to effectively deal with difficult employees.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to effectively deal with people from different cultures/subcultures.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to build and lead a team.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to appropriately utilize motivational theories in various workplace situations.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ Practice the appropriate use of power, politics, and influence.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to delegate authority effectively.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to conduct effective meetings.

5. Act in a professional, effective, ethical, and socially responsible manner

Rating Scale:

1. Essential
2. Desirable
3. Little value

KSAs:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Be willing to apply ethical principles as a leader, modeling trust and integrity.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to manage one's own time effectively.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand ethical considerations for financial decision making.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand ethical issues involved with such employment decisions as employment, promotion, pay, and fair day-to-day treatment of employees.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand professional or corporate codes of ethics and sanctions for noncompliance.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the theories of moral decision making and the process of ethical reasoning.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the leader's impact on organizational culture and work climate.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to manage one's own stress effectively.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Be able to give effective formal presentations.

## Appendix B Core Course Descriptions

### Accounting Tools for Managers

#### Course Description

This course provides students with knowledge of the financial side of business. Students will gain an understanding of accepted accounting tools for measuring and reporting financial information (balance sheet, income statement, and statement of cash flows). The manner in which accounting information is used for such purposes as decision making, planning, and control of business operations is also covered.

**Topics:**

- Making decisions based on managerial accounting techniques.
- Reading and interpreting financial statements and managerial accounting reports.
- Understanding the budgeting process and how to prepare a simple budget.
- Understanding product costing and the various techniques used to allocate overhead to production.
- Understanding the impact of financial events on organizations.
- Understanding various types of accounts (assets, liabilities, and equities).
- Understanding the significance of internal controls.
- Analyzing cost-volume-profit data.

**Technology and Information Systems****Course Description**

This course focuses on how managers can use technology and information systems for decision making and problem solving. Topics include integrating and using technology and information systems as a strategic resource for planning, continuous quality improvement, and communication.

**Topics:**

- Understanding management information systems and how they are used in the planning process.
- Integrating and using technology as a strategic resource.
- Understanding how information technology can be best used for decision making and solving business problems.
- Using information systems for quality management and continuous improvement.
- Applying data-based managerial decision-making and problem-solving tools.
- Using Excel, Word, and PowerPoint.

**Leadership****Course Description**

This course focuses on theories, concepts, and tools that enable business leaders to succeed by making sound decisions, motivating employees, and acting in an ethical and professional manner. Students acquire an understanding of the manager's leadership role in an organization and how leaders can successfully solve problems and lead employees through change.

**Topics:**

- How the concepts and theories of leadership are applied to business practice.
- Articulating a vision and setting goals for one's work unit.
- Motivating employees to achieve unit goals.
- Understanding the leader's impact on organizational culture and the work climate.
- Using one's influence and power appropriately.

- Building and leading a team.
- Delegating authority.
- Recognizing, defining, and solving problems.
- Understanding the need to make decisions with incomplete data.
- Understanding resistance to change and how to lead employees through the change effort.
- Applying ethical principles as a leader, modeling trust and integrity.
- Understanding the ethical dimensions of business decisions.

## Managerial Communication Skills

### Course Description

The goal of this course is to help students develop the skills that a manager needs to effectively communicate with various stakeholders and build and sustain a productive workforce. The students learn how to communicate in a supportive and persuasive manner, manage conflict, build and lead a team, and produce effective presentations and written reports.

### Topics:

- Communicating with employees in a supportive manner, giving timely, appropriate, and effective feedback.
- Conducting conferences with employees with regard to discipline and performance problems.
- Preventing and/or handling employee grievances.
- Understanding the positive and negative aspects of conflict and how to manage it.
- Dealing with difficult employees.
- Conducting meetings.
- Communicating persuasively.
- Giving formal presentations.
- Writing business reports
- Presenting data, results, and recommendations.

## Human Resource Skills

### Course Description

This course covers the skills managers need to effectively implement human resource practices to gain competitive advantage. Students learn how to select and train employees, provide and communicate job performance ratings, and carry out disciplinary procedures all within the context of prevailing ethical and legal standards.

### Topics:

- Complying with the various human resource laws to support a legally compliant workplace with regard to such issues as sexual harassment and discrimination.
- Participating effectively in the employee selection process.
- Training and mentoring employees.

- Understanding the role of performance appraisals and how managers should conduct them.
- Disciplining and terminating employees for misconduct and poor performance.

## Strategic Management

### Course Description

The course provides an overview of corporate strategy designed to introduce the student to strategic thinking and competitive advantage. As a capstone course, Strategic Management integrates the students' existing knowledge of the functional areas of business into an overall view of the firm to better understand how strategy is formulated in the context of a changing environment.

### Topics:

- Understanding competitive strategies and how to establish competitive advantage.
- Understanding the purpose of a strategic plan and how entry- and middle-level managers can contribute to the plan's success.
- Understanding the organization's micro-environment, including suppliers, distributors, customers, competitors, and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., the community).
- Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a firm.
- Analyzing the changing external environment and the dynamics of the organization as a context for decision making.
- Applying strategic planning techniques, such as brainstorming.

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