

Chapter IV

Enterprise Systems Software in the Business Curriculum: Aligning Curriculum with Industry Requirements

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ABSTRACT

An integrated view of business and multidisciplinary perspectives are considered essential for business graduates in today's workplace. Recognising the increasing importance of enterprise systems (ES) in business and the pedagogical value in imparting the above, several universities have incorporated ES software solutions into their business school curricula. This chapter presents a review of literature on the inadequacies of business education, the pedagogical value of incorporating ES in the curricula, and an analysis of the effectiveness of curriculum design and delivery. Expansion and regular updating of the curriculum, more interaction with industry practitioners, more case studies that deal with post-implementation issues, better alignment with other prerequisite courses, and improvement in the knowledge of academic staff are some of the challenges faced. Varying student mix, significantly higher cost of providing access to software, difficulty in obtaining a sustainable industry support and involvement, inadequate administrative support in schools, limited interest by academic staff and the lack of perceived career benefits, however, are found to be problematic. Appropriate administrative policies, top management commitment and encouragement to align curriculum with industry requirements and industry support are essential for the successful integration of ES software solutions in the business curricula.

INTRODUCTION

The environment in which business organisations operate today is changing very rapidly. Universities are generally criticised for lagging behind businesses in the adoption of new technologies and systems in general and information technologies (IT) in particular. With this gap between theory and practise, university graduates are considered not suitable and not adaptable to the modern workplace. Because of this functionally oriented focus in business education, with a reliance on traditional and reactive systems of curriculum design and delivery and ever increasing content in each of the disciplines, the gap between what industry wants and what business schools can provide has widened. With their relatively higher emphasis on research at the expense of innovation in teaching and learning and increased competition for scarce funding and students, business schools are not able to dynamically change and align their business curriculum with the rapidly changing needs of business.

Do universities prepare graduates with the necessary integrated view of business? Do they offer a multidisciplinary perspective? These are both critical for the success of students in modern business organisations today. Are they preparing graduates who are ready for the new workplace that is process-oriented and requires an integrated view of business rather than functional compartmentalised orientation? With business process orientation and cross-functional integration embedded in software, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, also increasingly known as enterprise systems (ES), are one of the major technologies in recent times to have made a significant impact on organisational structure, systems, decision making, controls, and people. This chapter analyses business and information systems education and the role of ES in university education in general, and their ability to impart an integrated view of business, in particular. It discusses various approaches to integrating ES into the university

curricula and analyses how it assists in enhancing the multidisciplinary perspective and integrated view of business to students.

BUSINESS EDUCATION: INADEQUACIES AND INDUSTRY NEEDS

Business education has been subjected to major reviews worldwide. Several reviews of higher education by practitioners as well as experts have pointed out the lack of a multidisciplinary view in business graduates and strongly recommended incorporating cross-functional integration in business curricula (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business [AACSB], 1998; Boston Consulting Group [BCG], 2001; Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2002; Ethie, 2003; Harvard Business Review [HBR], 1992; Karpin, 1995; Michaelsen, 1999; Trites, 2004). These reports consistently criticised business education for producing graduates who generally lack cross-functional and multidisciplinary perspectives (AC Nielsen, 1998; Barker, Gilbreath, & Stone, 1998; Evangelauf, 1989; Karpin, 1995; Stover, Morris, Pharr, Reyes, & Byers, 1997).

For example, Karpin (1995) pointed out that universities in Australia, though successful in providing functional skills have precluded the development of integrative skills critical in a business environment. The report argued that over emphasis on functional skills, such as accounting and marketing, creates a barrier to building better teamwork skills and an integrated approach to business management. Subsequent, reports by industry organisations, professional bodies, and research experts consistently pointed out the inadequacies of business education (BCG, 2001; Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2002). Some of the major factors contributing to these inadequacies and a summary are presented in Table 1.

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