

FACULTY EDUCATION: THE KEY TO GAINING ACCEPTANCE OF CROSS-FUNCTIONAL BUSINESS PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Heightening corporate demand for employees equipped to effectively compete in cross-functional business environments has fostered growth in functionally integrated curricula throughout higher education. Business schools in particular are reengineering their programs to better reflect the environment in which graduates will work. But the implementation and garnering of faculty buy-in of the dramatic change initiatives involved in a cross-functional curriculum can be daunting to even the most progressive universities. This study examines faculty perceptions of a cross-functional program that has been in place seven years. Results show greater support for the cross-functional curriculum than for the pedagogy of this particular program. To assist in the development and implementation of such a program it is recommended that institutions of higher education consider an educational program that also educates the faculty, and solicits their input on how to design, implement, and modify the program.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate demand for functionally integrated college curricula continues to grow as firms increase their reliance upon cross-functional teams. Previous research investigating a wide variety of cross-functional programs has uncovered numerous issues that academicians must consider when debating a cross-functional endeavor, including: (1) general leadership issues, (2) college administration issues, (3) faculty concerns, (4) student concerns, and (5) issues with general university strategies (Aurand, DeMoranville, and Gordon 2001a). Of these areas, faculty concerns may be the most critical for it is the faculty who are directly responsible for the development of the course and its implementation, and who must often undergo a total

change in pedagogical mindset. Therefore, preparing faculty for a cross-functional program, keeping them abreast of any changes to the curriculum, and providing the faculty with an opportunity to offer their opinions of the program is a critical element of any cross-functional initiative. In other words, *educating* the faculty on how cross-functional *education* is taking place may prove to be the vital element to a program's success.

The following study analyzes faculty opinions of a cross-functional business course that has been operational since 1994. The findings indicate that while the vast majority of faculty members agree upon key elements of the program, there is not a consensus regarding several pedagogical issues. Many of the differences of

opinion can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the program and the enhancements made to it. By implementing a faculty education program that informs faculty and solicits their opinions and recommendations about the curriculum a university may significantly enhance a program's overall effectiveness.

BACKGROUND

It can be a daunting task to dramatically change a functional-based business school's curriculum that has been in place for decades. In many situations, change can even be perceived as a threat to a well-established pedagogy. For some faculty members, a significant change dictated by college administrators is perceived as a threat to their academic freedom. Due in part to this tendency to resist change, such initiatives in higher education environments face a 70 percent chance of failure (Beer and Nohria 2000). It is only after the education community successfully addresses the unwillingness of many of its members to embrace change, especially dramatic change, that it can hope to successfully implement change.

Ironically, in order to successfully change the manner in which an educational community functions, it may be necessary to use education itself as a change initiative. Education has been used successfully by many businesses to both support, and spearhead their change initiatives. For example, when executives at the Ford Motor Company realized it was time for fundamental changes within the company, CEO Jacques Nasser turned to education for implementation. Ford now relies upon educational principles to drive change initiatives and in so doing, focuses on the company as a whole and not simply a group of top level executives (Wetlaufer 1999).

As Ford has found, education can be an invaluable tool when convincing stakeholders to accept radical change initiatives. In order to ease the process of acceptance, it is important to communicate with the stakeholders using every possible channel, continue to work on the change

initiative even after small victories have been achieved, and to let the stakeholders see how the change has improved the situation (Kotter 1995). If the stakeholders do not accept the proposed change initiatives, the programs are almost certainly doomed to failure.

The business sector provides numerous examples of change initiatives that have failed due to lack of stakeholder support. For example, Phillips Electronics was unable to initiate changes during the late 1980's because the firm's employees did not buy into the new change vision (Strebel 1996). In 1993, Chevron's problems with implementing their reengineering program were traced back to a lack of communication with the employees and inadequate training (Mullin 1994). Simply put, the education of stakeholders is essential if an organization, business or educational institutions, hopes to be successful with nearly any initiative that involves radical change (Hammer and Champy 1993).

It is also essential that those leading the charge continue educating stakeholders even after short-term goals have been achieved. Radical change involves an on-going evolution of business processes where structures that are introduced today can be reused as the company grows. As one problem is solved through a change initiative, another one is often introduced (Greiner 1998). Feedback from those involved in the changes will help the company to monitor their change initiatives as they evolve and address any issues that arise.

Recently, numerous educational institutions have addressed corporate needs by radically changing from traditional business school curriculums to cross-functionally integrated programs. Due to the strong similarities between cross-functional education and reengineering, it has been suggested that a reengineering model might improve the chances of successfully implementing a cross-functional course (Aurand, DeMoranville, and Gordon 2001b). A key characteristic of reengineering is radical change (Hammer and Champy 1993). For most schools, devel-

oping a cross-functional business curriculum is a very radical change from current pedagogy, and one that cannot be avoided.

Despite the apparent difficulties associated with changing to a cross-functional curriculum, it has become an essential element for many of America's business schools. The demand for graduates who can think cross-functionally is constantly growing in today's business community. Inside business organizations, cross-functional teams are favored over traditional teams because of their adaptability, speed, and ability to provide better customer service (Proehl 1996). Cross-functional teams do everything from reengineering order entry processes to developing new products. Even in the recent past employees may have been able to successfully contribute by working within a single discipline. Today, however, one must be able to draw from a variety of disciplines in order to solve complex, global problems that the business community faces on a daily basis (O'Reilly 1994).

Cross-functional education is therefore being called upon to better prepare students for careers in business (Heckman 1999). Many marketing majors, for instance, often go on to work as part of cross-functional teams created around key products or customers. Unfortunately, graduates are frequently uncomfortable when asked to solve complex problems involving various functional areas and they often neglect the "big picture" in favor of focusing on their area of study (Van Over and Stover 1994).

The demand for graduates with the ability to think cross-functionally is nothing new. More than a decade ago, Porter and McKibbin highlighted six areas for the country's business schools to focus on, one of which was cross-functional integration (Wheeler 1998). Also, the AACSB Standards for Business Accreditation encourages business schools to include cross-functional elements in their curricula (Bishop et al. 1998). Unfortunately, business curricula at far too many universities continue to be very functional in nature as was learned in a polling of undergradu-

ate business programs accredited by the AACSB in which it was found that less than five percent of the schools had formally addressed the need for cross-functional education in their curricula (Aurand, DeMoranville, and Gordon 2001b).

However, a number of well-respected business schools have developed cross-functional programs, particularly at the graduate level including the University of Tennessee, the University of Pennsylvania, Indiana University's Kelly School of Business, the University of Denver, the University of Dayton, Babson College, the University of Oklahoma, and Boston University (Aurand, DeMoranville, and Gordon 2001a). At the undergraduate level universities such as Northern Illinois University, Indiana University, and Illinois Wesleyan University have also seen the value of cross-functional programs and have radically changed the manner in which they teach their capstone, and principles classes. An exploration of these programs identifies a great deal of diversity not only in the levels at which integration of functional material is attempted, but the basic goals, functional areas integrated, and pedagogical models implemented as well.

Varying Goals

The goals for a cross-functional program can vary as dramatically as the manner in which such a program can be presented. At Northern Illinois University an undergraduate cross-functional program addresses the focus of companies on cross-functional teams, the need for majors to have a basic understanding of all business functional areas to effectively apply their major concepts, the use of cross-functional teams to better serve customers, and the advantage graduates of cross-functional programs have over graduates of traditional business programs (DeMoranville, Aurand, and Gordon 2000). At the University of Dayton business faculty attempt to: (1) Give students the opportunity to study financial concepts and techniques and apply these tools to the assessment of marketing opportunities. (2) Give students the opportunity to study the thought and theory of marketing strategy development and to

assess the viability of marketing strategies in light of financial considerations, and (3) Give students the opportunity to build confidence in their ability to assess marketing strategies and use financial analysis through the process of developing a complete financial assessment of a business opportunity (DeConinck and Steiner 1999). The University of Tulsa strives to: (1) Encourage communication and understanding among the students (2) Understand the important contribution of each discipline to the innovation process, and (3) Reinforce the concept that, in product development, all disciplines are working toward the same objective (Lunsford and Henshaw 1992). In any case, it is essential that colleges and universities have a firm understanding of their specific goals and objectives prior to the development, and subsequent implementation of any cross-functional program.

Variety in Courses Integrated

In order to address a variety of goals and objectives, different universities have chosen to integrate an interesting array of courses. The following list of universities and courses that they integrate is by no means all inclusive, but illustrates the variety found in colleges of business today:

- ◆ The University of Dayton and the University of Tennessee Knoxville – Marketing and Finance.
- ◆ The University of Tulsa – Marketing Research and Engineering Design.
- ◆ The University of Oklahoma – Production and Finance.
- ◆ Illinois Wesleyan University – Marketing, Management, and Finance.
- ◆ Northern Illinois University – Marketing, Management, Operations, and Finance.
- ◆ The University of Idaho – Finance, Human Resources Management, Information Sys-

tems, Marketing, and Operations Management.

- ◆ Boston University – Organization Behavior, Management Strategy, and Management Information Systems (Aurand, DeMoranville, and Gordon 2001b).

Different Models Implemented

Due to differing goals, objectives, and courses being integrated, one can also understand the implementation of different pedagogical models in cross-functional courses. For example, Pharr et al. (1997) identify five integration models incorporated by ten different institutions: Comprehensive curriculum blocks, limited curriculum blocks, a coordinated curriculum, a coordinated case curriculum, and an integrated project curriculum can all be considered as well as other customized approaches. Mullins and Fukami (1996) discuss transdisciplinary team teaching at the University of Denver and recommend a low interdependent team model with tools courses while more advanced coursework inherently lends itself to a greater degree of integration.

Similar Issues Addressed

But in spite of the variety in goals sought and pedagogy implemented similar issues can be found when universities attempt to dramatically change the manner in which they teach business. Research by Aurand, DeMoranville, and Gordon (2001b) identifies five areas of cross-functional program considerations common among schools that have integrated their business programs. These considerations include: (1) Strategic concerns (program goals, degree of integration, functional areas to integrate, program assessment), (2) Leadership issues (academic administrator, cross-functional team leader), (3) Administrative issues (faculty workload recruitment, rotation, workload, evaluation, and compensation, budgeting and support), (4) Faculty issues (academic freedom, workload, teaching materials, exams, and grading), and (5) Student issues (integration expectations, workload fairness).

While not every issue arises at every university that has attempted to integrate its curricula, aspects of each issue can generally be found when reviewing published works from those universities in which cross-functional programs have been implemented.

Due to the radical change inherent in the development and implementation of a cross-functional business program, the following study was conducted to identify faculty opinions regarding one program, its objectives, and general pedagogy to better understand the need for an educational program to assist in the change initiative. The particular program that was examined consisted of a lecture based cross-functional principles class (CFPC) and a cross-functional applications class (CFAC). All business students take these courses in the beginning of their junior year, prior to taking upper level courses in their major.

STUDY

The purpose of the study was to identify business faculty perceptions of the CFPC class and to learn how the faculty have accepted the major change initiatives associated with the CFPC class over a period of seven years. The CFPC course is a nine-credit hour class and is taken by all first semester juniors in the College of Business. The CFAC class, the three-hour applications class that can be taken during either semester of the junior year, was not the focus of this study. Findings are limited to the nine-hour CFPC lecture class.

Interviews with a faculty member from each of the five business departments were conducted to discover relevant issues and develop items for a questionnaire which was then administered to the business faculty. The interviewed faculty included two who were involved in the development of, and had taught in, the CFPC class. The other three were not actively involved with the class at the time of the study. The interviewees included faculty with both positive and negative opinions of the class.

The interview data were used to develop a one-page questionnaire which included both closed and open-ended items. Eight of the questions were Likert scale items (1= Strongly Agree, 5 = Strongly Disagree) focusing on faculty perceptions of cross-functional education in general, familiarity with the objectives of the CFPC class, the success of the class in integrating business disciplines and preparing students for upper level courses, and the class format. Participants were also asked to list the objectives of the course and for suggestions for the course and its format. The questionnaire included two items asking for the participant's department and length of time teaching at the college. No other identifying questions were asked because the questionnaire was designed to be anonymous.

Questionnaires were distributed to all faculty in the five departments except those currently teaching the course and those who had been interviewed. A total of 78 questionnaires were distributed; 40 were returned, for a response rate of 51 percent. A chi-square test indicated that the distribution of departments in the sample was representative of that of the college. Table 1 shows the distribution of responses to the Likert scaled items on the questionnaire. Those responses are discussed below.

FINDINGS

Faculty were somewhat mixed about the value of cross-functional education. Just less than half (49%) strongly or moderately agreed that cross-functional education was the best way to teach business principles. However, two-thirds (67%) strongly or moderately agreed that the business community viewed a cross-functional course such as the CFPC as superior to the traditional format. Overall, the respondents felt that a cross-functional focus was an important aspect of what the business community was looking for in an employee's education, although they themselves may not be convinced of the importance of cross-functional education.

TABLE 1
RESPONSES TO LIKERT-SCALED ITEMS

ITEM	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree*
Cross-functional is best method for teaching business principles.	19%	30%	16%	22%	13%
Business community values cross-functional education.	37%	30%	19%	7%	7%
Familiarity with course objectives.	18%	65%	13%	3%	3%
Effectively integrates business principles.	8%	27%	16%	24%	24%
Adequately prepares students for upper-level business classes.	18%	36%	15%	2%	8%
Other faculty think class adequately prepares students for upper-level business classes.	4%	30%	26%	22%	19%
Cross-functional classes can be taught in mass lecture format.	3%	26%	17%	26%	29%
Current format does not need changing.	6%	12%	21%	30%	30%

*Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Several items were asked to assess respondents' familiarity with the CFPC course objectives. Most (83%) strongly or moderately agreed that they were familiar with the objectives of the course. This high level of familiarity was confirmed by subsequent open-ended questions which

asked the respondent to list the course objectives. Providing students with an overall business foundation was listed by 81 percent and integration of the four business disciplines was listed by 78 percent. Other objectives listed by the respondents included providing students with the ability

to solve cross-functional problems and providing a foundation for future business classes. These results indicate that respondents' are quite accurate in their self-assessment of familiarity with the two primary course objectives.

Three questions asked about the success of the CFPC course in integrating business topics and preparing students for upper level classes. Only 35 percent strongly or moderately agreed that the class effectively integrated the four business disciplines (finance, management, marketing, operations). Lack of integration was a common criticism of the course in its early years. In spite of substantial efforts to functionally integrate the class in recent years, it appears that many faculty are either unaware of those efforts or consider them inadequate.

While preparing students for upper level business classes is not the only objective of the CFPC class, it was identified as a major concern in the faculty interviews. The CFPC class has been in place long enough for faculty members to observe changes in students' level of preparation. For faculty members with experience teaching students who take the cross-functional course and those who didn't, a viable basis for comparison is present. A majority (54%) strongly or moderately agreed that the class effectively prepares students for upper-level business classes. Interestingly, when asked if other professors thought the class effectively prepared students for upper level classes, far fewer (33%) strongly or moderately agreed. It appears that by a small margin, most are personally satisfied with students' preparation, but are more aware of negative perceptions of other faculty than they are of others' positive perceptions. It is possible that strong negative opinions of the course expressed by a few may be familiar to most faculty, but are not the generally held opinion.

In spite of general agreement about the value of cross-functional education and effective preparation of students, most faculty were critical of the method by which this particular course is taught. Only 29 percent strongly or moderately

agreed that the course can be effectively taught in a mass lecture format (its current format) and even fewer (18%) strongly or moderately agreed that the current format does not need changing. It is interesting to note that while the majority of faculty thinks the current format is ineffective (61%), the majority also agrees that the course effectively prepares students for upper level courses (54%). The respondents were also asked to indicate what the best format for the class would be. They were given three pre-selected options or could write in something if they chose. Nearly half (46%) selected a single course, which is the current format. It appears from these responses, as well as additional comments on the questionnaires, that what faculty object to is the mass lecture, not the cross-functional approach. The second most frequent response to this question was four individual courses taken at the same time (30%).

Two analyses were run to determine whether department affiliation and length of time at the college affected perceptions of the CFPC. Departmental differences were examined using ANOVA with the mean level of agreement on the Likert scale as the dependent variable. Teaching experience differences were examined using correlation. There were significant differences between some departments for six of the eight Likert scale items; the value of cross-functional education, business community perceptions of cross-functional education, effective integration of business principles, preparation for upper-level business courses, perceptions of other professors' views on preparation for upper-level courses, and the effectiveness of the current format. While there were a number of differences, they tended to concentrate within two departments; one (Department A) which generally had lower opinions of the course, and another (Department B) which generally had higher opinions of the course. Those differences are noted in Table 2. There were no differences between departments for their familiarity with course objectives or for whether a mass lecture format was effective for teaching cross-functional courses.

TABLE 2
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN DEPARTMENT PERCEPTIONS

ITEM	ANOVA F-value (p-value)	DEPT. A	DEPT. B	DEPT. C	DEPT. D	DEPT. E
Cross-functional is best method for teaching business principles.	4.75 (.004)		*	*	*&	#&
Business community values cross-functional education.	6.39 (.001)		*	*	*	*
Effectively integrates business principles.	5.62 (.002)	#		#	*	#
Adequately prepares students for upper-level business classes.	7.64 (<.0005)		*	*	*	*
Other faculty think class adequately prepares students for upper-level business classes.	4.77 (.006)		*	*	*	#
Current format does not need changing.	5.30 (.003)	#		#	*	#

* Significantly different from Dept. A.

Significantly different from Dept. B.

& Other significant difference.

Correlations of length of time a faculty member had been at the college and the eight Likert-scales rating items are shown in Table 3. The Likert scale for these items was a five-point agreement scale where five was “Strongly Disagree.” Therefore, a positive correlation indicates that faculty who have been at the college longer are less favorable toward the course. Five of the eight items had significant bivariate correlations with the length of time faculty had been teaching at the college. Those items were: famil-

ilarity with course objectives ($r = -.46$), value of cross-functional education ($r = .33$), perceptions of what other faculty think about the course ($r = .46$), perceptions of effective integration ($r = .28$), and the effectiveness the current format ($r = .48$). As expected, faculty who had been at the college longer agreed more strongly that they were familiar with the course objectives ($r = -.46$). The other four significant correlations were positive, indicating that the faculty who had been at the college longer tended to rate cross-

**TABLE 3
CORRELATIONS OF LIKERT-SCALED ITEMS WITH LENGTH
OF TIME TEACHING AT COLLEGE**

ITEM	BIVARIATE CORRELATION WITH LENGTH OF TIME TEACHING	SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL
Cross-functional is best method for teaching business principles.	.33	.001
Business community values cross-functional education.	.14	.239
Familiarity with course objectives.	-.46	.001
Effectively integrates business principles.	.28	.047
Adequately prepares students for upper-level business classes.	.24	.075
Other faculty think class adequately prepares students for upper-level business classes.	.46	.008
Cross-functional classes can be taught in mass lecture format.	.14	.220
Current format does not need changing.	.48	.002

function education, course integration, and format effectiveness lower. It is interesting to note that while length of time at the college did not influence one's own perception of upper level course preparation, it did influence one's perception of what others thought about such preparation. The longer one is with the college, the more likely they feel that others think upper-level preparation is inadequate ($r = .46$).

An ANOVA indicated that there were some significant differences in the mean length of time at the college for the five departments. Therefore, it was unclear whether the departmental differences in perceptions for the four items that had significant correlations with length of time at the college were a function of experience or true departmental differences. A General Linear Model (GLM) was run for each of the four items using length of time at the college as a covariate and departmental affiliation as the independent factor. Departmental affiliation was still significant for each of these items: value of cross-functional education ($F = 3.3, p = .02$), perceptions of other professors' opinions of the CFPC ($F = 2.8, p = .05$), effective integration ($F = 4.4, p = .01$), and effectiveness of current format ($F = 3.1, p = .03$). Thus, even after accounting for differences in perceptions as a result of length of time at the college, Department A was still generally less favorable toward the CFPC course, and Department B was still generally more favorable toward it.

In summary, this study finds that the faculty appear to agree with the basic premise of cross-functional education and support its cause. Most (83%) are at least somewhat familiar with this program's objectives, two thirds (67%) believe the business community supports such educational efforts, and nearly half (49%) are in favor of teaching business principles cross-functionally. However, there is less agreement among the faculty regarding pedagogical issues and course outcomes. For example, a majority (54%) believes the program effectively prepares students for upper level business courses, but the same percentage questions the format in which the

class is taught. There are also varying opinions of what the best format for the class is.

Some of these differences in perceptions are a function of departmental affiliation and/or length of time at the college. However, it is unclear whether departmental perceptions differ because the CFPC is not meeting the needs for a specific department or because of the influence of some well-voiced negative opinions of a few departmental members. Well-voiced negative opinions may contribute to the difference between the respondents' own perceptions about the adequacy of student preparation for upper level business courses and their perceptions of what other faculty members think about that preparation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Any curriculum change as dramatic as cross-functional integration requires a significant mind shift among those either directly or indirectly related to it. In a situation where the majority of faculty members support the basic premise upon which the course is founded, one may conclude that the first steps have already been taken. But significant disagreements among faculty members regarding more tactical pedagogical concerns and program outcomes foster the need for a structured faculty-education program. The purpose of such a program would be to make the faculty not only aware of the on-going changes to the cross-functional program and the results brought about by these changes, but to allow for a forum in which faculty could feel free to offer their opinions and recommendations. It is vitally important to allow positive opinions to be voiced, as these may help gain acceptance of radical curricula changes. In fact, this study shows faculty thought perceptions of the program were slightly more negative than they actually were.

Institutions of higher education considering a cross-functionally integrated business curriculum should, therefore, prepare themselves for not only a significant curriculum reengineering effort, but for significant modifications to existing faculty development programs. The radical

changes involved in a cross-functional program will require major internal education programs that will prepare faculty members for a revolutionary paradigm shift and keep them abreast of on-going modifications to the program.

In order to solicit support from faculty members for such fundamental curriculum change, faculty education will need to go beyond the provision of basic information. For example, with this study, even though initial business school communications succeeded in increasing awareness of the cross-functional program and its objectives, these efforts did not fully address many of the concerns held by the faculty.

Because a cross-functional course is multidisciplinary by design, it is essential that all departments within a college be aware of the program's objectives and be granted the opportunity for input regarding course objectives, design, implementation, and progress. Colleges and universities should consider such things as town hall meetings, "brown bag lunches" with

individual departments, website and chat room opportunities, and periodic house organ articles as means to keep the faculty abreast of the program and its progress. Future research should examine whether the perceptions of the faculty in this study are similar to those at other schools that have implemented cross-function curricula. Those studies should also investigate the effectiveness of marketing and educational efforts on faculty perceptions and acceptance of cross-functional programs.

As with any major change initiative, not all stakeholders will share the same views of the change. Some faculty will embrace it, and others resist it. Some departments may be more favorable to change than others. But resistance based upon limited or inaccurate data can be addressed. Schools planning, or currently implementing, a cross-functional program should therefore prepare for both a radical change in not only how they teach their students, but also, how they teach their own faculty.

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