MBA knowledge management course: is there an impact after graduation?

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first is to present the structure of a course entitled ‘Strategic Knowledge Management’ taught at the MBA level at the DeGroote School of Business, McMaster University, Canada. The second goal is to report on the survey of 43 course alumni and offer insights for other instructors interested in the development of the KM-related curriculum. The survey results are encouraging since there seems to be very little if any deterioration in the learning value of this course over time. In explaining the positive results of this study, four main reasons why the learning impact of this course sustains itself for years after graduation are suggested: 1) cross-disciplinary perspective, 2) variety of pedagogical techniques, 3) practical industry exposure and 4) exposure to best practices. Overall, this paper may be of interest to academics who are involved in the development of graduate level courses in Knowledge Management (KM).

Keywords: Knowledge Management (KM); course; curriculum; education; alumni survey.

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1 Introduction

During the past decade, the topic of Knowledge Management (KM) has generated considerable interest in both private and public sectors. For the past several years, the number of academic and practitioner-oriented articles in this area has been dramatically growing, and it is predicted to exceed 100,000 individual publications by the year 2010 (Serenko and Bontis, 2004). The ability to manage knowledge assets effectively has become one of the major competitive advantages of firms (Edvinsson, 2002). However, despite a vast adoption of KM principles by various types of organisations related to building intellectual capital (Stewart, 2001), reducing turnover (Stovel and Bontis, 2002), implementing groupware technology (Chauhan and Bontis, 2004), accelerating collaboration (McKnight and Bontis, 2002), and improving e-mail management (Bontis et al., 2003), the university community has been relatively slow in developing courses to prepare students for future careers in this field (Ruth et al., 1999). For example, only a handful of Canadian and US universities currently offer graduate courses in KM (McMaster, Queen’s, George Washington, George Mason).

Instructors who need to develop KM curriculum for their business or engineering programmes face several teaching challenges. First, although a growing body of literature, such as books, articles and cases, addresses the area of KM, there is a lack of educational resources. For instance, compared with other disciplines, in KM, there are