IMPLEMENTING ePORTFOLIOS INTO THE 11-MONTH MBA PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

**eLearning Change and Leadership Project:
Intervention Plan**
Policies and Planning for eLearning Programs
Information Learning Technologies
IT 5650

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Project Summary

In this project, I draw on existing research, trends, theories, and practical reasoning to analyze the feasibility and plan the development of a new ePortfolio initiative for the Professional and Career Development (PCD) curriculum offered through the 11-Month MBA Program at the Business School at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center.

Introduction

The PCD programming is offered exclusively through the 11-Month MBA, an accelerated, cohort graduate business school program at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences. While the 11-Month MBA academic program exists to provide a quality education, as a professional degree it also plays a role in helping students transition successfully from school to work. Seventy-five to eighty percent of the students coming to the 11-Month MBA program want to retool themselves quickly in order to make a significant career change. The professional goals students have for coming to the 11-Month MBA program include (in order of preference):

- establishing a new career (for the first time or in both a new field and industry)
- staying in their field, but doing it in a new industry (e.g. biotech, banking, etc)
- starting their own company
- continuing on their past path in the same field/industry in a new company
- staying in the same industry, but in a new field (e.g. HR, IT, Finance, etc)
- continuing on their past path in the same field/industry and the same company

By getting their MBA, students believe they will be more marketable and get a better job. With the targeted knowledge and support of the PCD program, many students experience a higher level of success at accomplishing their professional goals in the timeframes they expected.

Problem

One of the biggest problems students face in the 11-Month MBA program is trying to overcome the barriers presented by the fact they want to make big career transitions, often into areas where they have little or no demonstrated experience or proficiency. Students fall into the difficult position of being overqualified for entry level jobs but not having enough experience to get the mid-level jobs into the fields they are transitioning to. ePortfolios are a way for students to demonstrate their acumen and insights and record their accomplishments. It is a way for students to express their knowledge effectively and display their competency, complementing their transcripts and recommendations.

Intervention

The ePortfolio intervention will comprise the adoption of new practices with existing but under-utilized technologies. Under the auspices of the Professional Development Program, students will be recruited who would like to use an ePortfolio to highlight their work and achievements. The ePortfolios may include student resumes, multimedia introduction clips, samples of relevant work, and other transferable experience and activities that demonstrate specific skill sets and industry knowledge.

The program will offer students the training and tools they need to create an online portfolio, as well as individual counseling about what to include and how to focus the contents of the portfolio to meet individual professional goals. Additionally live, synchronous workshop time will be allocated to have students review and give feedback to one another on their portfolios. Students will also get professional feedback from Human Resources professionals.

The development steps in the intervention will include:

- Assess the ways ePortfolios could be helpful to the business community, working with Human Resource professionals to identify what should be included and how to best to capture their attention and add value to the students' overall "marketing package" (resumes, cover letters, etc.), particularly for students trying to make significant career changes.

- Decide on the role the institution will play in the ePortfolio initiative. Will the University host the ePortfolios, or simply provide the knowledge and cognitive framework for students to host their own? Who will be responsible for on-going maintenance, security, and cost? What, if any, costs are acceptable to the University?

- Decide where and how the ePortfolios will be hosted, and what kinds of software will be necessary. Procure the necessary resources and tools.

- Developing a template. Ideally we will involve the business community as well as students and faculty in identifying the most functional and valuable template form.

- Decide on the types of information to be included in the ePortfolios, both regarding content (e.g. demographic, academic, and career information) and media channels (text, audio, and video).

- Assess user needs and implement training to support students in developing the technical and content aspects of their portfolios.

- Secure faculty and administrative buy-in for the ePortfolios. Although the goal of this initiative is more learner-centered and focusing on showcasing their accomplishments, the linkages to academic outcomes and the academic institution must be considered. Ideally at some point this initiative could be integrated with the University's Outcomes Assessment initiative, providing both institutional and learner value.

- Educate students on the value of ePortfolios and motivate them to participate. If this is an initiative that can be implemented as a combined professional development and assessment tool, then the motivation issue might be addressed through providing academic credit for participation.

This intervention is consistent with the 11-Month MBA's mission of creating reflective business practitioners and facilitating the students' career transitions. Insofar as the Business School values academic excellence, innovative quality and real world practicality (Business School, 2006), this initiative will further distinguish our students and the school. There are only a few business schools nationally that have implemented ePortfolios (Eportfolios: Examples, 2006), so it is a way of staying on the cutting edge and demonstrating the quality, innovation and excellence at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center.

At the same time, it is a departure from the past practices of the Business School; the Business School does not require any type of final exam, thesis or culminating project. All student completing the required core classes and the total number of credit hours successfully receive an MBA. Outcomes assessment evaluations are done on a course-by-course basis, not at the overall program level (although program reports are written incorporating the stand-alone course data). The school does have a capstone course, Strategic Management, which requires the application of multi-disciplinary learning, but it is run as a stand-alone course. If the portfolios were to be used in the outcomes assessment process, it would actually support the mission and goals of the Outcomes Assessment program by providing feedback on how individuals were able to incorporate and apply their business educations. The current process looks more at course effectiveness rather than evaluating single students holistically. Even if the portfolios were exclusively used to promote students and support them in achieving their professional goals, it

would serve the purpose of having students reflect back on their educational achievements and draw together their individual classes into a coherent body of knowledge.

Support for Change

Necessary Changes

Students in the 11-Month MBA program are already inundated with academic work, and implementing this ePortfolio program would add to their workload. While they would have the artifacts of their academic work, they would need to produce reflective statements, gather and organize their academic work, potentially learn new technical skills, and develop their online portfolios.

This initiative requires faculty and staff to adopt an open and supportive attitude; students will look to them for validation and consultation in developing their portfolios. At this point the actual level of engagement required on the part of faculty and staff is unclear, but because of their influence on class culture, and the potential that the portfolios could be used in the outcomes assessment process, they are a crucial part of its success.

In addition to changes required of stakeholders, the initiative leader will also have to change, reallocating time and resources to launching the ePortfolio initiative and becoming a local subject matter expert. As a FTE with a full complement of responsibilities already, this will require some adjustment as resources are taken from another part of the Professional Development Program. Ideally none of the other components of the PDP will be shut down; rather they will need to be run more efficiently with fewer resources and direct oversight.

Anticipated Problems and Concerns

Students may be wary of investing additional time in an activity whose immediate value is in its reflective practice, which may or may not gain them any external rewards. Although it

will undoubtedly lead to them being able to better articulate and demonstrate their skills, this type of an activity is really a precursor to success. Students with limited time and energy often look for activities that have more direct payoffs than those that develop "scaffolding". Time and additional effort are definitely concerns in an accelerated program as our extra-academic initiatives are secondary to the academic demands of the program.

Faculty and staff may have trouble adopting open and supportive attitudes towards the initiative as they may not value it and may be suspicious of it being more technology-oriented than learner-oriented. Additionally they may not see the need or value for such an initiative, invoking the "don't fix it if it isn't broken" rule of thumb. Higher education, though at the cutting edge of research, is often very reticent about change.

At this point it is unclear how the initiative leader will procure the resources to support this initiative. Although there are some efficiencies to be had at the margins in other components of the Professional Development which have been operational for a few years allowing some resources to be freed up, the initial amount time and resources that will be needed during the development phase of the ePortfolio program will be considerable.

Change Supports and Implementation

An important change support will be to involve knowledgeable practitioners who will be able to help us realize our technical goals and advise us on how best to proceed. These people may include staff from the campus IT group and online learning group. They will help us identify the existing resources we can draw on and the potential challenges we hadn't anticipated.

To ensure the practical value of this initiative, human resource professionals will need to be involved to advise us on how best to meet their needs. They will help us identify the necessary content and address end-user technical requirement issues.

Students, faculty and staff may be more open to the idea of ePortfolios if they are exposed to samples from other Universities and testimonials from the business community. It will be important to collect such external validators both to help stimulate learner creativity and to demonstrate the value of this activity. It will also aid us in developing a united vision of what purpose the ePortfolios will serve and what they will look like.

Developing a roll out plan, with immediate goals clearly identified and a longer term strategic plan, will help us meet our goals and milestones. We will need to develop goals as they relate to the student work but also identify and agree on our institutional goals. This is not a venture that is likely to directly impact the program's revenue stream, though it may well cost the program financially. While the program is committed to providing rich learning experiences for the students, attempting to sell the ePortfolio initiative on that basis alone may not be sufficient to gain institutional support and resources. The initiative may well lead to innovative Outcomes Assessment procedures and be used as a marketing tool to benefit the University. This may well be a more compelling value proposition and help to gain internal support. Identifying how the initiative can support institutional needs and goals as well as student needs and goals will be an important collaborative endeavor that will set the tone and pace for implementation. Once our goals are established, we can work on our tactics.

Identifying ways to implement this initiative that will be time efficient and will allow for variable engagement (based on level of interest) for students, faculty and staff will help in the initial roll-out. While most of the work will fall to the students, they may seek the advice and

mentorship of faculty and staff as they develop their portfolios. Depending on the level of institutional engagement, faculty and staff may be drawn in if it is used in part or in whole as an assessment tool.

The initiative leader may need to draw on new resources to support this initiative, including reallocating support staff time and having support staff take on a higher level of responsibility than they are currently taking on. An analysis of current initiatives and their relative value to stakeholders, including students and the institution, will help identify other potential areas where a reallocation of resources would be possible without too much disruption.

Leadership Role

I will lead this initiative for my program, developing the concept, designing the project and making the major decisions during implementation, and following up to evaluate the success of this initiative as well as improving it in future iterations. I will be responsible for getting buy-in from students, faculty, and staff, as well as drawing in business professionals and practitioners to advise us as we roll out the project.

I will use the Outcomes Assessment team at the Business School and their influence, connection and interest to leverage this initiative. While ePortfolios are not currently being used in the Busienss School, there is interest on the part of the faculty liaisons to the University Outcomes Assessment team.

Evaluation

Data will be collected on the following aspects of this initiative throughout the development and implementation cycle:

- Number of students participating in the initiative

- Feedback from both participating and non-participating students to evaluate their reasons for their level of engagement and what they feel would add to the ePortfolio experience. Collect feedback both via anonymous surveys and focus group.

- Feedback from faculty and staff on their attitudes towards ePortfolios and their level of engagement.

- Feedback from Human Resources professionals about how we can improve the ePortfolios to better meet their needs and make these into useful promotional tools for the students.

- Identify the strongest components of different ePortfolios and create a subset of high quality ePortfolios to use in subsequent iterations as samples.

Based on the feedback received from these evaluative methods, adjustments will be made to the process, training, public relations and outreach, templates, and consultations. The Professional Development Program embraces the philosophy of being a learning organization (Senge, 2000) and as such is committed to constant improvement and organizational excellence.

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