

A Look at the Implementation of Certification for Courses in the  
Information Systems Area

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Abstract

This paper will examine the process of implementing a curriculum change utilizing Kotter's Eight-step change process. Faculty will be asked to identify, in their courses, areas that cover certification and what areas are not covered by the present courses. Further, Faculty will be asked to identify areas necessary to cover in order to provide certification. A number of current courses are in the topic areas of certification but the ability of those courses to prepare students for certification exams has not been addressed.

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*It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system. For the initiator has the animosity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institution and merely lukewarm defenders in those who would gain by the new. (Machiavelli, The Prince, 1513)*

While Machiavelli has a point, the implementations of change by his methods are currently not acceptable in most higher education institutions. This paper proposes to suggest a method for change, not as drastic as Machiavelli's, and modified by the necessity to preserve academic quality to the courses being examined.

Certification has gained recent attention as a way to show a worker's knowledge of a particular subject. The certifications are popular among corporate recruiters and may be a way for Universities to show accountability for instruction in light of assessment procedures required of some accrediting agencies or state legislators. Students having certification may gain advantage in interviewing and obtaining positions and may receive greater salary.

The certification option in the area of Networking has given the Computer Information System Program an increased visibility. The certification has provided students with a way to demonstrate their knowledge in a particular area. With the apparent success of the Networking Certification it may be worthy to examine the suitability of offering certification in other areas. A preliminary examination of the current courses offered in the IS program area lend themselves well to also providing an avenue for students desiring certification without sacrificing the quality of the course as a whole.

Many areas have competition from the proprietary schools providing certification programs. They provide students with the option of completing the topics necessary to sit for the exam. One problem with proprietary programs is courses often cover only the exam material and rarely go beyond that material. It is important to train students not only for today's work but for the future as well. As competition increases for the top positions for our graduates, we must remain competitive. Students need all the advantages we can give them and having certification is perhaps a large advantage.

While there have been many works of putting curriculum changes into place, this paper works with a specific topic (certification) and uses methods from the business literature to implement those changes. This paper will develop a process using Kotter's eight-step scheme to implement a report covering the areas of certification. Courses will be identified as 1. Covering the material necessary for certification, 2. A course that needs

some revisions to cover certification material and 3. A course that needs major revision to cover material required for certification. Faculty will be asked to indicate what topics in their course are not presented for certification. A preliminary analysis shows the current courses parallel many certification programs. Faculty will be asked to examine their courses to see what the effort would be to cover the topics for certification.

Kotter (1995) has proposed an Eight Stage process for creating change in an organization. His article in Harvard Business Review has sold over 20 million reprints in the business area.

Kotter Eight Steps are:  
Establishing a Sense of Urgency  
Creating a Guiding Coalition  
Developing a Vision and Strategy  
Communicating the Change Vision  
Empowering Broad-Based Action  
Generating Short Term Wins  
Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change  
Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture (Kotter 1995)

These eight steps will be used to implement change in those areas where certification can be included. While this paper does not look at the values of certification interfering with other topics of academic importance, that topic is left for faculty to decide and for others to research and is not included in this paper. Here, it will suffice to point out there is an important danger in teaching for only certification and providing students who are prepared for today's work place but are not ready for next year's or even next weeks problems.

### Summary

This paper proposed one method to examine courses offered for certification and to look at one method to implement change in an academic setting. These highly recognized certifications might be included or added on to current courses. The object is not to change what we do now, but to see what options are available to provide, at the same time, provide a path to certification for students who wish to complete certification.

### Further Research

There are many questioned unanswered in the area of certification. Do students gain an advantage if certified? Is there a loss of academic quality in certification programs? Should Certification in Academic Programs be optional or mandatory? What is the value of Vendor Certification vs. Non-vendor Certification? And, Should Professional Associations or Private Corporations provide Certification?

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