Executive MBA students’ information skills and knowledge: Discovering the difference between work and academics

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Background

Abstract:
Our research study explores the information seeking skills and knowledge of working professionals enrolled in an Executive MBA (EMBA) program at UNM. The interviews explored their information literacy skills and behaviors for work and academics and the barriers they faced. Finally, we discuss the challenges they have in transferring their information seeking skills and knowledge from work to academics and back.

Literature Review:
• Few info lit studies on students enrolled in professional graduate programs
• Most workplace information literacy research is from outside of the US
• Information skills highly desired by employers

Problem Statement & Research Questions

Identify the information skills and knowledge of professional graduate students enrolled in the Executive MBA program.

How do EMBA students find information in their professional and academic environments?

Is there a transfer of knowledge from one location to another?

What skill set may the library faculty create to meet the information literacy needs of professional graduate students in these environments?

Methods

Qualitative Research:
• 12 Semi-structured interviews
  • In-person & via telephone, with email follow-up
  • 30-75 minutes each
• Sample Interview Questions
  • What types of information do you use in the workplace for your current position?
  • Please describe the last time you had to find information to solve a problem, make a decision or complete a project at work?
  • Please describe the ideal way that you learn a new tool or database system?
  • How has the EMBA program helped you find information in your workplace?

Analysis Tool:
• Interviews were “coded” - an analytical process in which data are categorized to facilitate analysis
• Used Atlas.Ti - a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software program

UNM’s EMBA Program

EMBA Students

Program Requirements:
• Two-years of continuous coursework
• At least five years of meaningful work experience, preferably in a managerial or supervisory role
• Cohort model
• Group Work Intensive - Assigned teams for duration of program
• Multidisciplinary - Bachelor’s degree in any field required

Demographics of Participants:
• Age: 30-60 years old
• Gender: Seven males and five females
• Work experience: average 18 years in industry; 5 years in current position
• Positions: Director/Associate Director, Manager, Dean, Engineer, Consultant
• Industries: High Tech, Higher Ed, Medical/Health, Utilities, Telecom, Non-profit

Conclusions

EMBA students need assistance in transferring their information literacy skills between work and academics.

Emerging Themes:
• Knowledgeable in their specific industry’s information
• Severe time limitations
• Difficulty in transferring ability
• Return to known sources
• Lack of knowledge that other sources exist

Information literacy instruction should incorporate adult learning theory, whether in person or online.

Apply Adult Learning Theory to Instruction:
• Acknowledge & identify students’ experiences
• Build on their existing knowledge
• Help the students transfer information literacy skills
• Develop information literacy workflow