Faculty Perceptions on the Goals and Achievements of Information Systems Executive Advisory Boards

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Abstract

Information Systems executive advisory boards have become an increasingly important way for faculty to draw upon the expertise and resources of industry members. This benefits students and faculty and ensures the relevance of information systems programs. This paper describes a study of faculty member's perspectives regarding the goals and achievements of their advisory boards. 194 faculty members responded to a survey about the extent to which faculty agree or disagree that ten specific items serve as major goals for their advisory boards. The respondents also provided perspectives on the success of their boards along those same dimensions as well as the overall perceived success of the board. The results of the study provide empirical data to guide current and prospective IS advisory boards and as a foundation for future research on academic-industry relationships.

1. INTRODUCTION

Information Systems (IS) advisory boards have begun to play an important role in many IS departments. These boards provide a formal structure for faculty and executives to work toward common goals for the benefit of students, faculty, and information systems practitioners. Although administrators at most accredited business schools meet regularly with a board of executive advisors (BEA), the prevalence of department level boards is not as common. Accreditation agencies have recognized the value of advisory boards and are starting to require institutions to have program specific advisory boards to ensure academic relevancy. These business advisory boards can help with the overall improvement of the undergraduate and graduate curricula and programs.

The exchange of emerging issues in the area of information technology between the IS faculty and the IS corporate board executives help build a valuable curriculum. This exchange fosters the development of state-of-the-art programs within the college itself to meet employee needs in the information systems industry. The resulting board activities broaden the fundamental mission of the department from the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, to presenting opportunities for research study (Deutsch, 1991) , and to providing a variety of resources, both financial and human to the students (Katz, 2009).

One of the motivators influencing individuals to engage in partnerships and collaborative relationships with institutions of higher learning is access to a prepared work force (Koong, 2003, National Science Board, 1996; Geisler, 1995; Frye, 1993; Deutch, 1991; Siegel, 2007). Koong (2003) asserts that availability of skilled labor in the information technology sector has played a key role in helping universities in their initial recruitment of advisory board members. Another motivator is the ability to network and share ideas with BEA members from industries other than their own. Staying connected is important for many executives and being part of a university keeps them stimulated and interested in continuing education as well as the board's interests. There needs to be more than just interest in recruiting and retaining members for an effective and lasting advisory board. The members must be interested in the advancement of the discipline and the mission of the institution and its students.

This paper focuses on faculty perceptions regarding the achievements and goals of IS advisory boards. The remainder of the study is organized as follows: in section two, we examine literature and background on advisory boards in academia; in section three, we examine the potential goals of IS advisory boards; in section four we state the research questions for the study and summarize the research methodology; in section five, we provide analysis and results followed by conclusions and implications for future research in section six.

2. Background for Advisory Boards

The importance of the university-industry relationship on knowledge dissemination has received considerable attention (Katz, 2009; Garcia and Smith, 2009; Olson, 2008; Blumenthal, et al. 1996; Dosi 2000; Pavitt 1997). There has been an increasing recognition of the fundamental role of university-initiated knowledge and innovation in fostering economic growth, technological performance, and international competitiveness in the technology industry.

For any advisory board the need to define the mission and goals of the group is the first fundamental task for the group (Koong, 2003.) These must to be clearly communicated and acknowledged by all the advisory board members. A clear set of By-Laws must be the basis of a BEA. A diverse advisory board can be helpful to the institution as well. Every committed board member, irrespective of industry sector, can bring something to the table.

There are different motives for universities and companies entering a BEA relationship (Plewa *et al.*, 2005). Universities benefit primarily in economic terms, including financial support for future research

(Harman, 2001; Wright, 2008), supplemented by benefits such as the application of research results to industry problems (Lee, 2000). Organizations acquire technology, knowledge and access to talent, when entering a research-oriented relationship (Cyert and Goodman, 1997). Administrators and faculty members need to view their relationship with the IS Advisory board as a process that requires vision, strategy, resources, excitement, assessment and of course cooperation.

3. Goals of IS Advisory Boards

Advisory boards have some basic goals which help guide and provide clarity for the group. These goals should be in a set of BEA By-Laws to insure that all members understand the goal of the board. Some fundamental goals to include would be:

- Increase the quality of the undergraduate and graduate students by provide internships, coops, mentorships; periodically review the curriculum for the programs; provide speakers for the various IS courses; and provide a conduit for students to meet with industry specialists engaging in real-world projects.
- Assist in the ongoing strategic planning and marketing process for the department in order to build the number of majors and minors in Information Systems.
- Corporate members will have access to the best students in the program for employment and internships.
- Faculty will gain practical experience of technology by participating in corporate activities. Corporate members provide tours of local facilities for faculty and students; involves faculty in their non-proprietary training of new technology.
- All members encourage and support entrepreneurial efforts of students.
- Identify areas of research and topics for case studies where the expertise of the faculty can be combined with the resources of the business community to study business problems which could lead to joint publications.
- Provide mechanisms for informing the public, professional and business

communities about the opportunities at the university and in particular the IS department.
- Corporate members will provide support for student recruiting efforts, faculty development, Distinguished Speaker Series, hardware and software. This can be in form of cash support or in-kind donations.

Information System administrators and faculty members need to view their relationship with the Executive Advisory board as a process that requires vision, strategy, resources, excitement, assessment and of course cooperation. This will increase the value of the program and the education of the students.

4. Research Questions and Methodology

As information systems departments increasing rely on executive advisory boards to advise or assist their faculty in a variety of endeavors, it is important for pedagogical researchers to empirically examine the practices of these academic-industry relationships. The central research question in this study is to explore faculty perceptions regarding the goals and achievements of information systems executive advisory boards. Specifically, this study has the following objectives:

- To explore faculty perceptions regarding various possible goals of their advisory boards.
- To explore faculty perceptions regarding the success of their advisory boards in assisting the faculty in achieving those goals.
- To explore faculty perceptions regarding the overall success of their advisory boards.
- To explore the correlation between the perceived goals measured in objective 1 and the overall success measured in objective 3.
- To explore the factors that may influence faculty perceptions of the overall success of their advisory boards.

In order to achieve the stated objectives of this study, an online survey was developed. As shown in Figure 1, the survey first measures perceptions of advisory board goals by asking faculty, on a five point Likert scale, the extent to which they agree or

disagree that ten specific items serve as major **goals**. The second section uses the same ten items asking faculty the extent to which they agree or disagree that the advisory board is **successful** in assisting the faculty in achieving those goals. In the third section, single (summary) item measures faculty perceptions regarding the overall success of their advisory board in helping the department achieve its goals. In the last section, the survey includes five questions related to the nature of the respondent and the respondent's program, and advisory board. These factors include the number of advisory board members, the number of annual meetings, the fee (if any) that advisory board members are charged, the degrees offered by the respondent's department, and the academic rank of the respondent.

The survey was sent to email addresses of faculty members who were registered in the Association of Information Systems faculty directory. The email addresses were filtered to include only members with an ".edu" email domain extension, which was intended to exclude international and industry members of the directory. Excluding addresses that were returned (due to deleted or outdated accounts), the survey request was sent to approximately 2500 faculty members listed in 865 unique domain names. The survey was completed by 194 faculty members. These replies came from 146 unique university domain names. Thus, there were 48 responses in which colleagues from the same university responded. The effective response rate from the study, based on percentage of university participation is approximately 17%. However, it is important to note that not every information systems department has formed an executive advisory board. As a result, the authors believe that the response rate, given the limitations of the topic, was very strong and represents an effective group of faculty to explore the current state of information systems advisory boards.

In the analyses in the next section of this study, computations were conducted using the entire data set. However, the same analyses were conducted using a dataset with only one entry per domain (by averaging any responses from multiple members from the same email domain).

None of the key findings of this study differed between the analyses of the two datasets. All mean values (for perceptions of goal and success) were within .07 on the five point scale.

5. Analysis and Results

Perceived Goals

As shown in Table 1, faculty perceptions regarding the various advisory board goals range from a high of 4.25 (on a five point scale) for assisting faculty in opportunities for student internships/coop positions to a low of 3.04 for consulting/executive education opportunities for faculty. In general, faculty tended to have stronger agreement on goals that pertained directly to students. In addition to internships/coop positions, items related to curricular guidance, jobs for graduating students, interaction with students (or faculty) to stay aware of trends, and speakers for classes or events were all close to or above the "agree" level of 4.0. With many IS programs facing challenges in student enrollment, respondents also tended to agree (3.78) that a goal of their advisory board includes assisting the department in the promotion or marketing efforts of the programs. Respondents were closer to the "neutral" rating on items related to fund raising, faculty research, technical expertise, and consulting opportunities.

Perceived Success

As shown in Table 2, the mean rating of the summary item that measures perceptions on the overall success of executive advisory boards in helping IS departments achieve its goals was 3.5, a rating at the midpoint between the "agree" and "neutral" ratings.

In examining the individual items, faculty felt their advisory boards were most successful in items related to curricular guidance, job and internship opportunities, and speakers for classes or events. Conversely, respondents felt advisory boards were less successful in fund raising and in supporting faculty research, and consulting opportunities.

Gaps between Perceived Goals and Success

Table 3 reveals the computed differences between the paired responses to the matching items related to perceived goals and success. The results of this table show the gaps between faculty perceptions of goals vs. success. Thus these results can help to identify areas where our collective industry alliances require the greatest improvements.

In examining the results in Table 3, it is noteworthy to point out all ten items show a significant difference between perceived goal and perceived success at a significance level of $p < .001$. In examining the magnitude of the differences in mean of the paired items, the lowest differences include items related to providing speakers for classes or events, and providing technical support or other computing resources. Compared to the other items, these goals may be relatively easy to achieve as information systems executives typically have colleagues or associates who can serve in these capacities. On the other end of the spectrum, the greatest differences in the paired items included items related to supporting faculty research and assisting in the promotion and marketing efforts to improve student enrollment. Clearly, there are many faculty members who value industry support of their research efforts. However, the rigorous methodologies of academic research, complex statistical analyses, and other factors can sometimes create a mismatch between academic and industry research projects. In terms of marketing and promotion, advisory board members are likely willing to assist by attending promotional events, or developing materials, however, to conduct an effective marketing campaign can require more diligent efforts than executives (or faculty members for that matter) are able to commit.

Correlation of Overall Success with Perceived Goals and Perceived Success

In order to explore the relationship between the perceived goals of information systems advisory boards and their overall success, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was computed for each of the ten goal items paired with the summary item. As shown in Table 4, four of the ten goal items correlate significantly, at a .05 significance level, with the summary item. The two items with the lowest correlation with overall success include assistance with fund raising and with jobs or guidance for graduating students. Perhaps one rationale for the lack of relationship could be the relative lack of faculty involvement in these efforts. It is common for students to work closely with career service centers and interview with potential employers without close oversight from faculty members or the executive advisory board. Fund raising can be a sensitive subject in academic-industry relationships. In fact, twenty two respondents chose to skip the demographic question (discussed in the next section) related to the annual fee (if any) that is charged to advisory board members. Since the annual fee, and other fund raising activities, may not be openly discussed during advisory board meetings with faculty, it is possible that survey respondents could not accurate link fund raising activities to the overall success of the board.

The strongest correlations include those involving advisory boards assisting faculty with curricular guidance, with technical expertise or computing resources, with speakers for classes or events, and support for faculty research. In each of these circumstances, it is likely that faculty have closer interaction with advisory board members (or their colleagues). In IS programs that seek industry assistance with technical expertise, the faculty is likely to work closely with their advisory board members. For example, an executive board member might ask a member of his or her staff to assist the department in installing a complex software system (e.g. Oracle databases or an ERP system). Similarly, when faculty set a goal to involve industry members as guest speakers in the courses, it is likely that the advisory board members will be able to help by speaking in classes or at events or asking colleagues or associates to provide that service. Thus, if gaining these insights is a major goal, it seems likely that the faculty will not face difficult obstacles in succeeding on this dimension. There is also a significant positive relationship between the goal of assisting in faculty research and the overall perceived success of the advisory board. In this case, the faculty respondents in the survey may have been the direct beneficiary of this

involvement and, in turn, have a more positive view of the achievements of the advisory board.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Tables 5.1 to 5.5 reveal five characteristics of the study's respondents (or the respondent's program and advisory board). The first section, shown in Table 5.1, reveals that less than twenty percent of respondents acknowledge that there is a fee for participating in their executive advisory boards. While some may scoff at the notion that executives who are already contributing their time and expertise should also be required to pay for the privilege of participating on the board, these fees can be an effective way to direct charitable donations toward departmental resources, such as faculty development funds or student scholarships. As noted previously, there were a number of respondents who left this response blank, indicating a lack of knowledge or an unwillingness to reveal this potentially sensitive data.

Tables 5.2 and 5.3 show that executive advisory boards tend to meet two times per year and that it is most common for the size of the boards to range from five to fourteen members. Among the pool of survey respondents, nearly a third offer doctoral programs in IS, nearly two thirds offer MBA courses, and over half offer MSIS programs. It is likely that these figures, shown in Table 5.4, reflect the potential finding that departments that offer advanced degree programs are probably more likely to have formed an executive advisory board and thus were able to respond to the survey request for this study.

Lastly, in Table 5.5, the academic titles of respondents reveal that fourteen percent of the survey subjects serve as department chairs and over half of the subjects are full professors. This suggests that the respondents, compared with all IS faculty, are likely skewed in favor of more experienced faculty members who likely have greater interest in or experience with executive advisory boards.

Impact of Demographic Characteristics on Perceived Success

Tables 6.1 to 6.5 reveal some insights into differences that exist among survey respondents that could impact their perspectives on the success of their information systems advisory boards. Each result in these tables can be compared with the overall mean on perceived success of 3.50, observed in Table 2. The first section, in Table 6.1 reveals that advisory boards in which members are asked to pay a fee does not seem to influence faculty perspectives on the success of the board.

In the next set of findings, shown in Table 6.2, respondents whose programs offer graduate courses are only slightly more likely to view their advisory board as successful. Respondents whose departments offer doctoral programs and those that offer MBA coursework had mean values of 3.52 and 3.56 respectively, only slightly higher than the mean across all respondents. Those whose programs offer MSIS (or related programs) had a somewhat higher mean of 3.61.

An interesting finding in the subsequent table reveals the difference in perspectives between department chairs and full professors (excluding those who serve as department chair).Department chairs "agreed" that their boards were successful with a mean of 4.0 while full professors rated their boards' success near the "neutral" rating with a mean of 3.07. Department chairs are likely to have a vested interest in the success of the advisory board as well as an enhanced understanding of the board's accomplishments. Full professors may be less open to the changes that advisory boards may initiate in IS programs.

Tables 6.4 and 6.5 show that larger boards (those which include 15 or more executive members) and boards that meet at least two times per year seem to be more likely to be viewed as successful by faculty members as compared with boards with 14 or fewer members and boards that meet one time or less frequently per year.

5. Conclusions

The analysis and results of the study reveal a number of insights into the practices of IS

advisory boards. Faculty agreed most strongly that their boards focus (in terms of both goals and perceptions of success) on student-centered activities such as assisting the department in the areas of student internships, jobs for graduating students, and curriculum design. However, the study also reveals that faculty believes that a significant gap exists between the goals set for advisory board and the perceived success in achieving those goals. These gaps are most pronounced in areas related to advisory board's roles in faculty research and marketing and promotion to encourage student enrollment. The results show that faculty members have a mixed overall view of their board's level of success, with the mean rating at the midpoint between a neutral view and agreement that the board is successful in helping the department achieve its goals. The study explores the factors that may influence perspectives on the success of the advisory board. The results found no link between boards that were charged a participation fee and perceptions of success. The study did find that larger boards and those that met more often were considered more successful. Lastly, perspectives regarding the success of an advisory board may depend on a faculty member's academic role as respondents who serve as department chairs conveyed a significantly more positive view of their board's success as compared with the views of full professors who did not serve as department chairs.

The results of this study serve a practical purpose for the academic community as well as a foundation for future research into academic-industry alliances. As many executive advisory boards have been formed in recent years, this study provides empirical benchmarks that faculty can use to compare with the goals and success level of their advisory boards. Similarly, the results of this study could be valuable to guide departments that are considering the formation of an executive advisory board by providing direction and factors to consider with their board members. The results of this study can also be used to guide similar studies in other disciplines (e.g., Accounting, Marketing, Economics, etc,) to examine the goals and success factors in their advisory boards.

Although this study was aimed at providing practical, somewhat basic insights, it could provide a basis for more rigorous academic studies dealing with this topic. Future studies could use these findings to form hypotheses, apply theoretic models, and re-examine the success factors of executive advisory boards using multivariate statistical analyses.

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Appendices

Figure 1: Survey Questions
1. Please state the extent to which you agree with the following as they pertain to GOALS of your information systems advisory board: A major GOAL of our Information Systems Advisory Board is to assist the department in the area of: (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)
    *   guidance for curriculum and course content
    *   opportunities for student internships/coop positions
    *   jobs or guidance for graduating students
    *   speakers for classes or events
    *   faculty research or grants/endowments
    *   consulting/executive education opportunities for faculty
    *   technical expertise, software, computing/network resources
    *   promotion or marketing to encourage student enrollment
    *   interaction with students/faculty to stay aware of trends
    *   fund raising (via annual fee or fund raising activities).
2. Please state the extent to which you agree with the following as they pertain to the SUCCESS of your information systems advisory board: Our Information Systems Advisory Board is SUCCESSFUL in assisting the department in the area of: (same scale and items as question 1).
3. Overall, I believe that our information systems advisory board is successful in helping the department achieve its goals (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree).
4. Demographic items:
    *   How many members (other than faculty) comprise your advisory board?
    *   What is the annual fee (or in kind donation) for participation in the advisory board? (no fee, $1 to $499, $500 to $999, $1000 to $1499, $1500 to $1999, $2000 to $2499)
    *   How many times per year does your advisory board meet? (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more)
    *   Which of the following degree programs does your department offer (Doctoral program in IS (or related field), MBA courses, Masters in IS (or related field), Undergraduate major in IS (or related field), Associate's degree program in IS (or related field), None of the above)
    *   Which of the following is your academic rank? (Administrator (dean, associate dean), Department chair, Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Instructor / Adjunct Professor).

Table 1: Perceived goals of information systems advisory boards

Item	Mean
opportunities for student internships/coop positions	4.25
guidance for curriculum and course content	4.20
jobs or guidance for graduating students	4.13
interaction with students/faculty to stay aware of trends	4.02
speakers for classes or events	3.99
promotion or marketing to encourage student enrollment	3.78
fund raising (via annual fee or fund raising activities)	3.19
faculty research or grants/endowments	3.14
technical expertise, software, computing/network resources	3.06
consulting/executive education opportunities for faculty	3.04

* *five point Likert-scale (5=strongly agree… 1=strongly disagree)*

Table 2: Perceived success of information systems advisory boards

Item	Mean
guidance for curriculum and course content	3.77
opportunities for student internships/coop positions	3.72
speakers for classes or events	3.70
jobs or guidance for graduating students	3.53
interaction with students/faculty to stay aware of trends	3.45
promotion or marketing to encourage student enrollment	3.16
technical expertise, software, computing/network resources	2.81
fund raising (via annual fee or fund raising activities)	2.70
faculty research or grants/endowments	2.49
consulting/executive education opportunities for faculty	2.42
Summary Item: Overall, advisory board is successful in helping the department achieve its goals	**3.50**

* *five point Likert-scale (5=strongly agree… 1=strongly disagree)*

Table 3: Paired samples Test: Perceived Goals versus Success of IS Advisory Boards

Paired Item	Mean Difference (Goals – Success)	t	Sig.
faculty research or grants/endowments	0.66	8.11	0.00
promotion or marketing to encourage student enrollment	0.61	7.44	0.00
jobs or guidance for graduating students	0.58	7.95	0.00
consulting/executive education opportunities for faculty	0.58	7.54	0.00
interaction with students/faculty to stay aware of trends	0.57	7.36	0.00
opportunities for student internships/coop positions	0.52	7.57	0.00
fund raising (via annual fee or fund raising activities)	0.46	5.75	0.00
guidance for curriculum and course content	0.43	6.02	0.00
speakers for classes or events	0.29	4.32	0.00
technical expertise, software, computing/network resources	0.25	3.69	0.00

Table 4: Correlation between Perceived Goals and Overall Success of IS Advisory Boards

Item	Correlation (r) with Overall Success	Sig.*
guidance for curriculum and course content	.18	.03
speakers for classes or events	.18	.04
technical expertise, software, computing/network resources	.17	.05
faculty research or grants/endowments	.17	.05
opportunities for student internships/coop positions	.16	.06
promotion or marketing to encourage student enrollment	.15	.07
consulting/executive education opportunities for faculty	.14	.11
interaction with students/faculty to stay aware of trends	.10	.26
jobs or guidance for graduating students	.08	.37
fund raising (via annual fee or fund raising activities)	.01	.87

* Pearson's (r) correlation (two tailed significance level)

Table 5: Demographic Results
Table 5.1 Annual Fee Charged to Advisory Board Members

Fee Charged	Percentage of Responses
no fee	80.7%
$1 to $499	3.5%
$500 to $999	3.5%
$1000 to $1499	4.7%
$1500 to $1999	0.6%
$2000 to $2499	0.0%
more than $2500	7.0%

* note: 23 of 194 respondents did not answer

Table 5.2 Number of Advisory Board Meetings Per Year

Number of Meetings	Percentage of Responses
no meetings	7.8%
1	19.4%
2	53.3%
3	10.0%
4	7.2%
5 or more	2.2%

Table 5.3 Size of Advisory Board (excluding faculty)

Number of Members	Percentage of Responses
Less than 5	9.8%
5 to 9	42.1%
10 to 14	24.0%
15 to 19	10.4%
20 to 24	8.7%
25 or more	4.9%

Table 5.4 Programs offered by Respondents

Program	Percentage of Responses
Doctoral program	32.6%
MBA courses	66.3%
MSIS (or similar)	54.4%
Undergraduate Major	90.2%
Associate's Degree	4.1%
None of the Above	0.5%

Table 5.5 Academic Title of Respondents

Program	Percentage of Responses
Administrator (dean, assoc. dean)	5.7%
Department Chair	14.0%
Professor	54.4%
Associate Professor	31.1%
Assistant Professor	33.2%
Instructor / Adjunct	5.2%

Table 6: Differences in Perceived Overall Success by Demographics
Table 6.1 Annual Fee Charged to Advisory Board Members

Fee Charged	Mean (Overall Success)
no fee (n=138)	3.46
Fee charged (n=33)	3.45

Table 6.2 Programs offered by Respondents

Program	Mean (overall Success)
Doctoral program (n=63)	3.52
MBA courses (n=126)	3.56
MSIS (or similar) (n=102)	3.61

Table 6.3 Academic Title of Respondents

Title	Mean (Overall Success)
Department Chair (n=26)	4.00
Professor (excluding department chairs) (n=42)	3.07

Table 6.4 Number of Advisory Board Meetings per Year

Number of Meetings	Mean (Overall Success)
0 or 1 (n=49)	3.18
2 or more (n=131)	3.60

Table 6.5 Number of Advisory Board Members

Number of Members	Mean (Overall Success)
0 to 14 (n=139)	3.35
15 or more (n=44)	4.00