

Review of the Business School's Cross-Disciplinary Areas

Submitted to the Executive Committee by the review committee, Adam Galinsky, Paul Glasserman (chair), Don Lehmann, and Andrea Prat

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To foster interdisciplinary collaboration, the school created two cross-disciplinary areas (CDAs) in 2009, one in Decision Making and Negotiation (DNA) and one in Strategy. In creating these new entities, the faculty also voted to require a review after three years. Our committee was appointed in March of this year to undertake this review.

Summary

Our committee affirms the value of cross-disciplinary research and teaching to the school. Problems in business rarely fit neatly into a single discipline, and collaboration across fields can generate novel directions for scholarship. The CDAs have made progress in cultivating cross-divisional linkages and creating new vehicles to foster communication across divisions among faculty with shared interests.

Cross-disciplinary work is not easy. A great deal of faculty effort has gone into CDA hiring and CDA events. This review is therefore also an opportunity to recognize our many colleagues who have put time into building the CDAs, particularly the CDA directors, Daniel Ames for DNA, and Wouter Dessein and Bruce Kogut for Strategy.

The CDAs are still works in progress. Our committee recommends that the school continue to invest in the CDAs. We also recommend that a follow-up review be conducted after another three years.

The rest of this report describes the committee's review process, summarizes accomplishments and the current state of the CDAs, and makes specific recommendations. The recommendations are primarily organized around research, recruiting, and teaching.

Review Process

The committee met with several faculty members and others to gather opinions:

- the CDA directors (Daniel Ames for DNA, Wouter Dessein and Bruce Kogut for Strategy)
- the divisional chairs
- the vice deans – Gita Johar, Amir Ziv, Assaf Zeevi, Mark Broadie

- individual faculty either hired through a CDA search or involved in a CDA search committee
- the junior faculty affiliated with the Strategy CDA (as a group)
- PhD students involved in DNA-related research (as a group)

In total, the committee met with approximately 20 people.

In order to give all faculty members the opportunity to contribute to this review, the committee sent a survey to the full faculty. The committee also invited the full faculty to provide comments by email or in person, although this did not produce any additional responses.

The survey was sent to the 145 recipients of the full-faculty email list, of whom 35 responded. The relatively low response rate is consistent with a broader observation that many (possibly most) faculty are either indifferent to the CDAs or uninformed about their activities.

Among those that responded, the comments made were mostly positive. The range of views expressed included disappointment and skepticism as well strong enthusiasm. The complete results of the survey are attached as an appendix to this report.

On several questions, the responses were more negative for Strategy than for DNA. It is important to highlight a significant difference between the two groups: Many of the faculty in the DNA CDA had shared intellectual ties before the creation of the CDA, and many share a disciplinary background in psychology, even if they sit in different divisions; the Strategy CDA spans a wider range of academic backgrounds, and the faculty in that group from different divisions have not traditionally had as much communication on research. Building an interdisciplinary group in strategy is inherently a more difficult undertaking, but the traditional boundaries make the effort to cross disciplines all the more important.

Activities, Accomplishments, and Recommendations

Each of the CDAs provided a report as input to our review that summarizes the CDA's activities and accomplishments. Rather than repeat the content of those reports, we will highlight a few key examples and make some related recommendations.

Research

- The CDAs are first and foremost research communities. There have been relatively few cross-divisional research collaborations within the CDAs, and it would be difficult to argue that even these few collaborations would not have taken place without a CDA. Nevertheless, the CDAs have expanded the opportunities for faculty to share research

ideas across divisional boundaries. Many faculty commented that they value these exchanges of ideas, even if they do not lead to research collaborations.

- The focal point of the DNA CDA's research activity is a regular seminar series. Participants were particularly positive about distinctive formats, such as having members of more than one division present perspectives on a common theme.

The Strategy CDA has chosen to hold an annual conference and an internal retreat rather than a separate seminar series. Both events are viewed as very successful at bringing together high-quality research from distinct disciplines.

The format chosen by each CDA appears to work well. Faculty in the CDAs express interest in greater interaction but add that competing demands (including other seminars) limit the time available for CDA activities.

- Opportunities for small research grants to support cross-divisional research projects have not attracted much interest and have not been effective.

Recommendations

1. The school should consider creating a research assistant or research coordinator position for each CDA to support cross-disciplinary research. These resources should be incremental and should not reduce research support available through other channels.
2. The Strategy CDA could also support research by working with External Relations to obtain data from alumni and firms that would lead to high-impact research.
3. To enhance an on-going sense of community, each CDA should host occasional lunches or other social events for its members.
4. To facilitate cross-divisional activities, the school should consider designating one week each semester in which regular seminar series are suspended to encourage broader attendance at special CDA seminars.

Recruiting

- The CDAs have had important successes in recruiting at both the junior and senior levels – Dan Bartels and Adam Galinsky in the DNA CDA, and Dan Wang in the Strategy CDA. Several other recent hires are active in the CDAs as well. CDA searches have identified candidates that would probably not have surfaced through divisional searches; Andrea Prat and Evan Rawley are active participants in the Strategy CDA who, although not hired through CDA searches, were originally identified by CDA search committees. The involvement of the CDA has been important to those faculty hired through CDA searches, though in some cases it has been a source of confusion.

- Views vary on the proper role of the CDAs in the hiring process. Some faculty like the idea of a school-wide opening to find the best candidate regardless of divisional affiliation; some prefer a cross-divisional search committee targeting a hire in a specific division; and some see no role for CDAs in hiring.
- At the junior level, differences in the recruiting calendar across divisions make it nearly impossible to hire without specifying a division. The timing of hiring at the senior level is more fluid. But even leaving aside logistical considerations, responsibility for hiring should ordinarily reside primarily within the divisions, with CDAs providing a supporting role.

Recommendation

A CDA search should have a target division. The role of members of other divisions on a CDA search committee is to help identify, screen, and attract a broader pool of candidates. No faculty member can be hired without a vote of the host division. The CDA itself has not and should not vote to approve hiring decisions.

Teaching and Curriculum

- The CDAs have had a limited role in teaching to date. The DNA CDA has helped coordinate materials for the Negotiations class across multiple divisions, and Daniel Ames has been working with the divisions to coordinate staffing for the course. Two other courses (Behavioral Economics and Decision Making, and The Psychology and Economics of Consumer Finance) are close to the interests of the DNA CDA. There are also potential opportunities for the DNA CDA to support the continued development of the Program on Social Intelligence.
- The Strategy CDA can serve an important role as a forum for faculty across divisions to discuss the many facets of the teaching of strategy. Several faculty involved in the CDA expressed enthusiasm for such exchanges, which could be encouraged through occasional lunch meetings. These exchanges could be broadened to include faculty teaching related courses but not currently involved in the CDA, particularly faculty teaching Operations Strategy and faculty in accounting teaching courses at the intersection of valuation and strategy.
- A more ambitious project would be to create a course that integrates managerial and economic perspectives on strategy. There are significant obstacles to running such a course and not much enthusiasm for the project among the faculty best qualified to teach it. Nevertheless, the committee believes such a course could make an important contribution to the business school and would be a worthwhile long-term objective.

- The CDAs can serve a useful role in advancing the curriculum. Staffing, however, is primarily a divisional responsibility.

Recommendations

1. The Strategy CDA should organize occasional meetings (approximately once per semester) for faculty from different divisions to discuss the content of their strategy-related courses.
2. The Strategy CDA should look for opportunities to integrate perspectives from different disciplines in the teaching of strategy and work towards creating an elective course that combines managerial and economic perspectives.
3. The cross-listing of courses between divisions and CDAs should be viewed as experimental. Follow-up is needed to ensure that cross-listing is helpful to students and does not create problems in staffing.

External Visibility

The 2009 report of the Intellectual Capital Committee (ICC) sought to have CDAs build the school's reputation. Generally speaking, the CDAs have done this only indirectly – through the hiring of faculty and through events. There appears to be little external awareness of the CDAs themselves. The CDAs are appropriately focused on research, recruiting, and, to a lesser extent, teaching; external visibility is likely to follow from success in these efforts. There are opportunities to enhance visibility by expanding the annual strategy conference and by branding cases and publications produced by CDA faculty. An expanded web presence would also help create visibility.

Further Recommendations

1. The 2009 ICC report calls for two-year terms for CDA directors. The school has been fortunate to have Daniel Ames, Wouter Dessein, and Bruce Kogut committed to defining and building these new entities within the school for roughly four years. Nevertheless, good governance requires a process that does not put the leadership burden entirely on a small group and that encourages other faculty to take turns at shouldering responsibilities. The dean's office should work with the current CDA directors to put such a process in place. The committee suggests a combination of a chair and a vice-chair from different divisions, where the vice-chair may be a junior faculty member.

2. The CDAs should refresh their membership by asking faculty to re-enlist every two years.
3. The CDAs are encouraged to make a greater effort to involve faculty from divisions not currently represented.
4. The school should outline a process by which a group of faculty can apply to create a CDA.
5. The existing CDAs are still works in progress. The school should undertake a further review in three years to assess their continued development.

Overall Conclusion

The committee recommends that the school continue to invest in the existing CDAs.