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## **Information Literacy and the McKinsey Model:**

### **The McKinsey Strategic Problem-Solving Model Adapted to Teach Information Literacy to Graduate Business Students**

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#### **Introduction**

Graduate students are expected to be information literate and able to conduct library research. Unfortunately, many graduate students do not have the required skills and knowledge to do the research required at a graduate level. With more and more information available, students are easily overloaded with data and information. To make sure that our students succeed, in graduate school and in the workplace, we must make sure they have the knowledge to survive in today's business world. The key is creating an information literacy program that will teach our graduate students these skills.

This paper proposes a program that uses the McKinsey strategic problem-solving model for teaching information literacy to MBA students. Collaboration between the business faculty members and university librarians is a key to the success of this program. The goals for information literacy are usually held in common by administrators, teaching faculty, and librarians; but there has been disagreement on campuses about how to accomplish these goals. Using the McKinsey model, an integrated information literacy program for graduate business students can be created.

#### **Background**

According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), "the information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the extent of the information needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally

Information literacy and critical thinking skills should be taught before the graduate level, but many graduate students have skills that are insufficient for the level of academic research required of them. Studies conducted on graduate students' information literacy skills show that students who receive information literacy instruction find it very useful. Two teaching faculty members and a reference librarian at the University of Arkansas collaborated in developing an information literacy program for graduate students. During this process they "identified ten significant concepts that students need to learn in order to master information literacy" (Murray, p. 115-6):

#### Ten Skills Needed by Graduate Students Conducting Research in the Information Age

- Focus the topic (narrow the topic / broaden the scope).
- Work in reverse chronological order, searching the newest information first.
- Understand the significance of terminology and determine correct subject headings.
- Vary the sources (use books, periodicals, Internet sites, etc.).
- Use Boolean strategies (and, or, not) in computer searches.
- Multiply sources by three (identify three times as many references as needed for the research).
- Evaluate critically the material retrieved; be especially suspicious of sources from the Web.
- Assimilate the information; don't plagiarize. Incorporate your own ideas based on the research topic.
- Cite all sources.

The success of the program showed that a collaborative effort to teach information literacy skills to graduate students does indeed work. With so much information so readily available, the difficulty lies in finding the information that is useful. Today's workplace calls for a new type of employee. According to the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills report by the Secretary of Labor or SCANS report, "a high-performance workplace requires workers who have a solid foundation in the basic literacy and computational skills, in the thinking skills necessary to put knowledge to work, and in the personal qualities that make workers dedicated and trustworthy." Netzley(1999) states, "to succeed in this knowledge-intensive environment, graduates will have to work cooperatively, generate and archive knowledge, and communicate effectively on demand."

In order to develop a program for graduate business students that addresses all of these requirements, we need to understand the elements of an academic information literacy program. These elements include program development, characteristics of information literacy, instructional strategies, assessment, and the model for teaching information literacy. We have touched on the skills and knowledge needed to be information literate. In the following sections, we will look at program development, instructional strategies, assessment, and using the McKinsey model for teaching information literacy.

## **Program Development**

The key to developing a program where graduate business students learn information literacy skills is the collaboration between the business school faculty and the academic librarians at the school. As we have seen in the University of Arkansas case, it is possible for teaching faculty and librarians to collaborate successfully. Both can teach students the basic elements of critical thinking. Critical thinking can be broken down into its basic elements:

- Audience and Purpose Content (Relevance to the Topic) and Accuracy
- Relative Value (As Compared to Other Information Sources)
- Sponsorship / Authorship, Authority, and Bias Recency (Grassian, p. 115)

Critical thinking is an essential part of any information literacy program. Librarians bring to this collaboration skills and knowledge about the types and locations of resources of information needed for business students to conduct their research. Teaching faculty bring their specialized knowledge of different fields of business. Librarians often know of new tools or sources of information in these specialties, so communication between these groups is essential. Teaching faculty and librarians must work together to develop a program that enhances the research abilities of the students.

## **Instructional Strategies**

This collaboration is part of the instructional strategy for teaching information literacy. The program can be centered around one of the introductory graduate business courses or a library workshop for incoming graduate students.

Taking learning styles into consideration is important in developing integrated programs. Integrated programs are those programs that integrate different strategies for learning through the use of visual tools, listening, locating and identifying sources of information, organizing and using information effectively, and working collaboratively.

## **Assessment**

In assessing this information literacy program, ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education was used. To correspond with the standards listed before, ACRL also outlines performance indicators and outcomes of these standards. These can be viewed at [www.ala.org/acrl/ilstandardlo.html](http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilstandardlo.html).

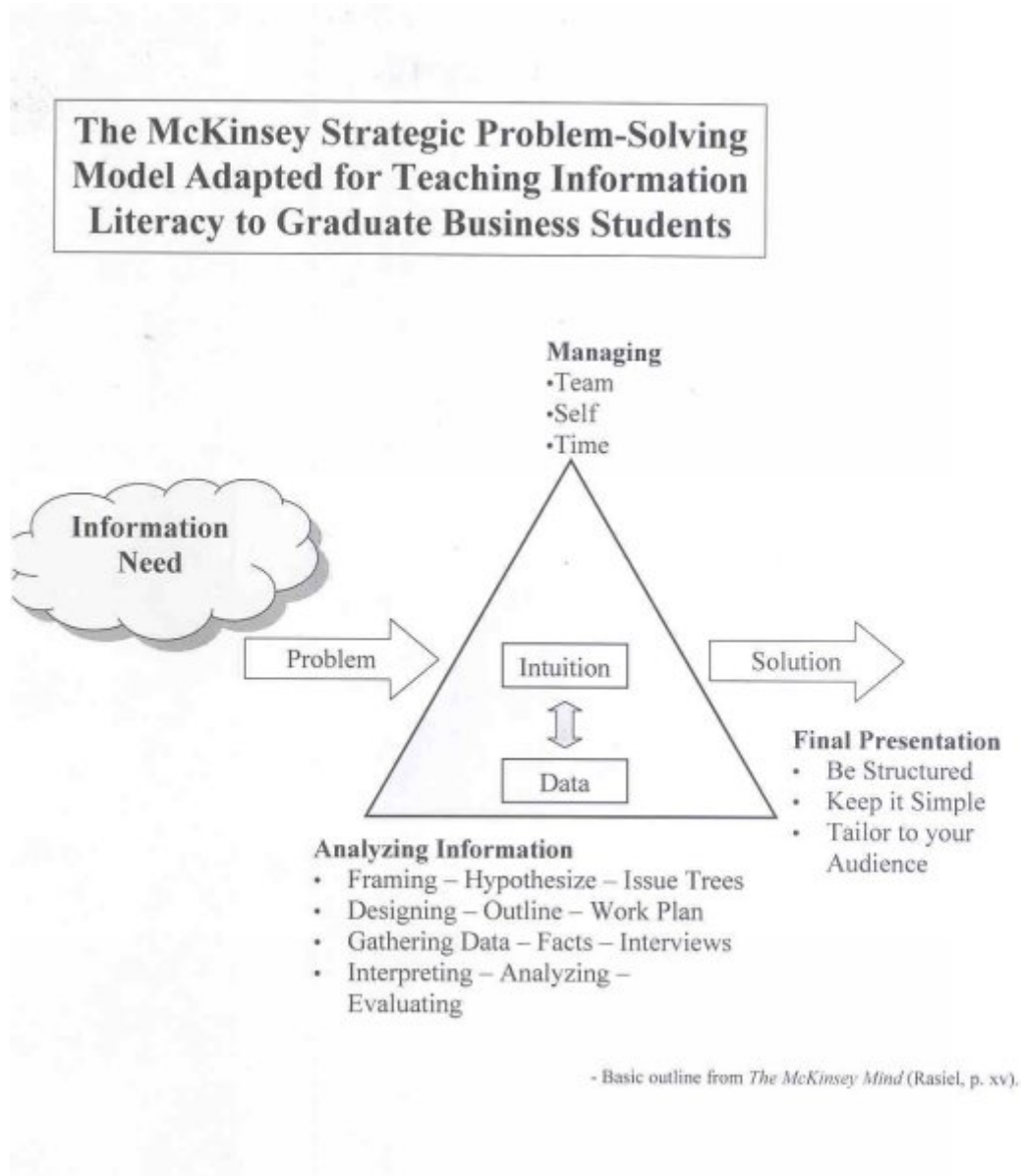
Assessment of this program is important so that the impact of the program on students can be measured, including the quality of student research produced before and after the program. A baseline measurement, showing what students know when they enter graduate school, is important. One way to do this is to conduct a survey when students are accepted into the business school or before the beginning of the information literacy program. Once students have completed the program, they can be surveyed again. Teaching faculty input on students' progress can also be gathered.

## **Using the McKinsey Model for Teaching Information Literacy**

McKinsey & Company is one of the most successful strategic consulting firms in the world. They are consultants to many of the world's largest companies, as well as government agencies in the United States and around the world. McKinsey alumni hold many top positions around the world and include Lou Gerstner, CEO of IBM, and Lowell Bryan, who advised the Senate Banking Committee during the savings and loan crisis. McKinsey is a well-known brand and an icon of the business world.

Rasiel and Friga present the McKinsey Strategic Problem-Solving Model for use in information literacy programs for graduate business students. This model should work well for graduate business students because it is already tailored for the business workplace. Using this model to teach information literacy and critical thinking also gives the students the edge of knowing one of the most innovative business methodologies of this decade.

McKinsey model:



The McKinsey model begins with a business need, but as adapted for information literacy, it begins with an information need. This need comes from a business problem, or, in this case, a research problem, case study, or class assignment.

Once the problem has been identified, the next step is analyzing the problem. McKinsey calls this step "framing the problem" or "defining the boundaries of the problem and breaking it down into its component elements" in order to "come up with an initial hypothesis as to the solution" (p. xvi). Not only is a hypothesis developed at this

point, visual tools such as issue trees or mind maps are also used to further break down our ideas into manageable parts.

Designing the analysis is the next step in the model. At this point the student must "determine the analysis that must be done to prove the hypothesis" (p. xvi). Students learn to develop an outline of what they know and what they need to know, as well as where they might find the information they need. This step also includes developing work plans for group study efforts.

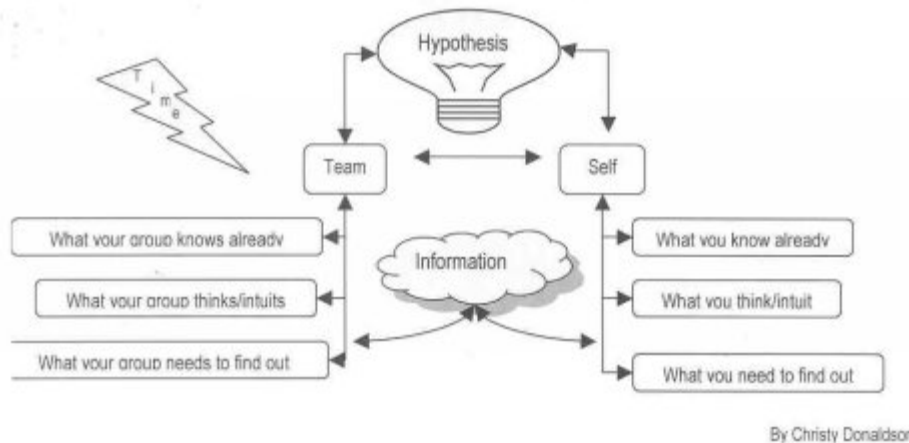
Next is gathering the data. It is at this stage that the librarian can talk about specific sources and tools that can be used when gathering data. McKinsey emphasizes the use of fact finding and interviewing as a source of information gathering.

Students must understand the importance of time management. There is never enough time to get all possible data. It is up to the student to find the most pertinent data in the least amount of time. Using people who have expert knowledge is a great tool. Students should remember some simple principles from the McKinsey model:

- Facts are friendly
- Don't accept "I have no idea"
- Don't reinvent the wheel
- Acquire external knowledge
- Control the quality of your input: garbage in, garbage out
- Research tips – start with the annual report, look for outliers, and look for best practices

Interpreting the results is the final step--analyzing and evaluating to test the hypothesis. Collaboration between teaching faculty and librarians is crucial at this point, because teaching faculty have subject knowledge to see whether the hypothesis has been proved. From this point, students can develop a course of action to take.

### Example of a Logic Tree for Analyzing Information



The final part of the McKinsey model is creating the final presentation. Many graduate business programs do not instruct students on presentation methods. This is a very important step because it is what the client, employer, or professor sees. Librarians can help students develop the technical skills to develop their final presentations, and teaching faculty can help students streamline their interpretations for the audience.

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