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SBA business conference addressed timely issues, challenges

By Claudette Zolkowski

With a focus on the global business market from the perspective of lean thinking, information systems leadership and health care, the fall business conference hosted by Oakland University's School of Business Administration offered valuable information and insight to attendees.

The conference brought business practitioners and academic leaders from across the country together to collaboratively identify and answer questions challenging businesses today to advance business, research and education. In all, more than 30 academic and business leaders in various industries shared their insight and expertise with more than 150 attendees.

The multiple tracks available over the two-day conference allowed attendees to select from a variety of topics facing industry today.

A focus on lean

Titled "Lean Thinking: Change, Challenge and Contributions," the lean track launched with a keynote address by Dennis Pawley from OU's Pawley Institute and Chair of OU's Board of Trustees. Pawley shared thoughts on the importance of leadership in these times.

He shared his formula for change: The dissatisfaction with the status quo plus vision for future plus first steps must be greater than the resistance to change.

"The only value a CEO provides to a business is by creating change," he said. "They need to be the change agents and lead by example.

Teamwork also plays a critical role, he noted, comparing running a business with racing: "Races are not won on the track," he said. "They are won in the pits, through coordinated action, shared model and shared goals."

Other sessions in this track highlighted the advantages, processes and challenges of lean principles.

Health care management

The health care track brought together leaders from the health care field – from hospitals and medical centers to business professionals and academic leaders – to review and discuss critical issues, including health care costs, quality and technology.

Speakers from General Motors, University of Maryland, Right Management and St. Mary's of Michigan Medical Center discussed the importance of health policies – highlighting areas of conflict and opportunity, while leaders from Blue Cross Blue Shield, Molina Healthcare, William Beaumont Hospitals and Henry Ford Health Systems presented the case for change in health care costs. Attendees also could participate in a session on health care quality, led by representatives from St. John Health Systems, POH Regional Medical Center and Henry Ford Health Systems. Finally, experts from Blue Cross Blue Shield, Covisint, Crittenton Hospital Medical Center, Pennsylvania State University and William Beaumont Hospitals discussed the importance of technology in the field.

Paul Peabody, chief information officer, Beaumont Hospital, had this to say about the panel discussion on the viability of universal health care records, "The panel discussed improving access to patient records through the use of technology which will create opportunities to lower health care costs and improve quality in Southeast Michigan."

High school students from the International Academy in Bloomfield Hills presented a poster session as part of the health care forum under guidance of Dr. Yash Lakra, MD and general surgeon from Pontiac Oakwood Hospital. For the session, the students analyzed health care policies around the world on affordability, availability and quality. Eight students attended the conference to present the research and answer questions about their findings.

"The students presented an amazing array of results from their research into health care from 23 countries ranging from Andorra and Argentina to Spain and United Kingdom," said Mohan Tanniru, SBA dean. "They did an incredible job."

Leadership in information systems

The final track offered attendees the opportunity to participate in discussions that addressed the latest, and sometimes controversial, issues facing the information systems industry today.

During the surveillance session, Ari Schwartz, deputy director of the Center for Democracy and Technology in Washington D.C., spoke about emerging privacy issues, including the four myths of privacy: if you've done nothing wrong, you don't need to worry about privacy; privacy versus security, security versus convenience; that government is the real threat to privacy; and kids don't care about privacy.

He also highlighted five significant issues: data breaches, government records, behavioral targeting, government surveillance and border laptop searches. And defined leading privacy issues as: collection limitation, openness, consent, access, data quality, use limitation, security and accountability.

Attendees impressed with conference

"From the conference sessions, we can see that information technology implementations are focused on experience enablers and social networks that support ongoing relationships, connectivity and interactivity," said Terrie Rowe, OU's chief information officer. "I was impressed by the discussion about the impact that IT can have in this new world that goes beyond data records and data delivery."

"What a great value, I walked away with so many insights and useful tools," said Beth Benson (SBA, 81), conference attendee and SBA alum.

More SBA conferences coming

Mark your calendar for the next two SBA business conferences: one in June, 2009, focusing on globalization; and the second on October 9-10, 2009, focusing on organizational transformation. Check the SBA Web site and sign up for e-mail alerts from the SBA to get more information on the coming conferences. SBA alumni interested in participating in panel discussions during these forums are encouraged to contact Lisa Desmet (desmet@oakland.edu) or Lori Crose (llcrose@oakland.edu).

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