

WANTED: AN MBA SKILLS GUARANTEE

Amir Muradali hopes his new accreditation system will give employers and grads a better way to pair MBA talent with the jobs they're trained for

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Photograph by Ania & Tyler Stalman

When Amir Muradali got his master of engineering degree, he knew the credential would give potential employers a clear sense of his skills and expertise, thanks to his professional organization, the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta, setting out unequivocal standards for all the province's engineers. Could he perform a technical assessment on a pump? Check. What about analyzing material stresses on a boiler? That too. And design a reliability-based maintenance program? He'd been tested on that, so of course he could.

But when he graduated from Queen's School of Business with his MBA, it was a different story. There was no professional association vouching for what management skills he possessed, and given that every MBA program seems to offer varying specializations and classroom experiences, it would be difficult for an employer to tell how adept Muradali might be at, say, leading a team of 30 or finding inefficiencies within a complex supply chain.

He ended up getting a job with IBM, consulting in the energy industry, but he suspects the offer had more to do with his eight years of engineering experience in oil and gas than with his degree. "With MBAs, things can be very intangible," says Muradali, the Calgary-based president of the Association of MBAs in Canada (AMBAC). "It's difficult for us to differentiate ourselves or find a way to

stand out." Given today's challenging job market, many grads accept positions that fill a short-term need for a specific skill set and then find themselves pigeonholed in that limited role instead of using all the experience they acquired in school.

Now he's hoping to change that. Through AMBAC, which he formed last year, Muradali is working to create an accreditation system designed to give employers and grads a tool to assess business talent. MBAs can progress up a "career ladder," establishing their work-based accomplishments through a combination of self-reporting and third-party verification. Attaining AMBAC's Level 3A Leader certification, for example, would confirm to employers that a candidate has led groups of more than 50.

Muradali is currently working on a two-year pilot program to test the various steps in the ladder, as well as the verification system it relies on to vouch for individual achievements. It's too early to say how the proposed system could change the MBA landscape, but corporate recruiters who participated in *Canadian Business's* annual MBA survey said they would welcome a new tool that could assist them in getting a handle on an MBA's skills. Muradali is convinced the initiative will help grads stand out in a crowded market. "Once this takes hold," he says, "I think it's going to lead to a significant shift." ▶

