Examiners' commentaries 2015–16

CO3318 Information systems management – Zone A

General remarks

Overall, performance on this paper was once again an improvement on previous years. Candidates wrote more focused answers and related them directly to the material covered in the subject guide and course materials. They demonstrated an ability to apply the tools and techniques covered appropriately to the scenarios outlined in the examination paper. Answers were generally of a high standard, with only a handful of answers requiring considerable improvement. However, there are two issues to which you should pay greater attention.

Firstly, due to the types of answers this paper requires, it is helpful to start each new question, or sub-part of a question, on a new page: you should not let answers flow into each other.

Secondly, you are reminded about the importance handwriting. The legibility of some scripts was again below standard this year. We understand you are under time pressure, but please pay attention to the readability of your answer script.

Comments on specific questions

The paper consisted of five questions and candidates were required to answer any three out of these five. Comments on each specific question are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Question 1a.

Good answers started by defining or describing inventory management. They then went on to discuss the criteria by which an inventory management process could be considered successful (that is, by holding the correct amount of inventory). However, the question asked for a critical assessment, and therefore required a discussion of the difficulties organisations face as a result of holding too much or too little inventory. Candidates who discussed how information systems might help with this difficulty scored high marks.

Question 1b.

Some candidates correctly defined the balanced scorecard at the outset and then continued to explain that it is part of a business intelligence system. The remainder of the question was straightforward and required a detailed description of the components and functions of the balanced scorecard. Marks were also awarded where candidates discussed the advantages of using the balanced scorecard.

Question 2a.

This was a popular question and was generally well-answered. Many candidates gave a definition and explanation of both top-down and bottom-up planning methods. Some students lost marks where they did not include any critical assessment of these methods. Marks were awarded

where both the advantages and shortcomings of each method were discussed, together with the circumstances under which they would best be used.

Question 2b.

This question was straightforward. Good answers identified a variety of different supply chains (for example, internal, upstream, downstream and overall supply chain). They then discussed particular information systems that support each of the different supply chains, such as supplier portals for upstream supply chains.

Question 3a.

Many candidates selected this question, which had a wide range of acceptable solutions. One approach was to consider the introduction of the system as a project which needs to be scoped and managed in the same way as any other project (that is, using appropriate project management techniques, determining responsibilities, getting support, building coalitions, etc.). Marks were awarded where students also discussed issues such as ergonomics.

Question 3b.

Candidates were required to give examples of external control procedures that are beyond the control of organisations (for example, those imposed by governments, such as data protection acts, etc.). In contrast, internal controls are those designed to ensure reliable internal financial reporting. Marks were awarded where students discussed the role of information systems in supporting these activities.

Question 4a.

Many students chose this question, and answered it well. One approach was to use the structure suggested in the subject guide, which discusses how changes in the business environment affect business at the global, industrial, organisational, interorganisational, individual and interpersonal level. The best answers also provided realistic examples for each of these levels.

Question 4b.

Good answers started by defining core competencies or describing them as activities for which a firm is a world-class leader. They then outlined that a competitive advantage may be gained by using information systems to enhance these core competencies, such as being able to share knowledge across business boundaries.

Question 5a.

The key requirement was for candidates to describe objectives of the IS defence strategy, rather than describe the strategy itself. It was therefore acceptable to discuss issues such as:

- Prevention and deterrence
- Detection
- Limitation of damage
- Recovery
- Correction
- Awareness and compliance.

However, other suitable objectives were also acceptable.

Question 5b.

Unfortunately, many candidates misread this question. The question specifically asked for a discussion of technology advances. These included advances related to Moore's law, networking and storage capabilities, etc.

Please ensure that you understand what the question is asking, and if in doubt, re-read it. If still unsure, choose another question to answer.