Coursework commentaries 2016–17

CO3353 Software engineering project management – Coursework assignments 1

General remarks

Overall, the standard on this coursework was satisfactory. The coursework consisted of four separate questions. Students are reminded that although there may be a common theme to the questions, they should be answered as separate entities. This is particularly important in the presentation of your work. Your answers to each question should be clearly headed at the start of the section, with the number of the question you are addressing.

Many candidates were penalised because they did not include citations within the text of their answers, but simply added a reference list or bibliography at the end of their answer. You are reminded that you must acknowledge sources within the text itself, and should re-read the 'How to avoid plagiarism' guide under Study Support on the VLE for advice on what is required.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question accounted for just five marks and was an easy 'win' for students. Many answers received the full quota of marks. The question required that students not only give a definition of project management from a textbook, but also that they demonstrated that they understood that project management is a creative process and not simply a case of adhering to a formalised set of rules and procedures.

Question 2

In general, students scored well on answering this question. However, too many submissions showed a tendency to regurgitate material from a single textbook as to why managing a software engineering project is different from managing other projects. Students scored highly where they had synthesised material from a range of sources, and marks were also given for examples drawn from personal experience.

Question 3

Once again good answers to this question considered a wide range of sources other than just the basic information given in the core textbooks. They also demonstrated an understanding of both the technical knowledge required by a software engineering project manager, as well as some of the more generalist skills required such as good communication and organisational skills. Some excellent answers also highlighted the changing nature of the requirements for a competent project manager in the current commercial environment, such as being able to demonstrate an understanding of the global as well as the local context in which they are operating.

Question 4

This question resulted in the greatest variation of marks awarded. In some instances students gave examples of projects that they had been involved in,

and others cited cases from the literature. Both types of answer were equally acceptable. The important issue was to demonstrate clearly how project management techniques had contributed to the success or failure of the project. Broad, high-level descriptions of projects with insufficient detail of the actual project management methods applied did not score well.

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General remarks

Students should consider how best to present their work. An assignment composed of three questions, each with its own mark marks, should be answered in three separate sections. Please head each section with the question being addressed (e.g. Question 2).

Again, some candidates were penalised because they did not include citations within the text of their answers, but simply added a reference list or bibliography at the end of their answer. You must acknowledge sources within the text itself, and should re-read the 'How to avoid plagiarism guide' under Study Support on the VLE for further advice.

Question 1

Good answers to this question started with a definition of what is meant by a risk management plan, and pointed out that risk may be either positive or negative. Thereafter there was no one set answer as to what should be contained in this plan. Different authors discuss different issues, and students could choose what to include. However, it was important to state which issues they had chosen, acknowledging sources within the text and explaining why they felt these issues were the most relevant. Some excellent answers also provided examples of the types of risks which might be associated with each of the issues in the plan.

Question 2

Many students found this question difficult. Again, there was more than one way of approaching the question. Different authors provide different discussions on the phases of project risk management. Some students chose to discuss Leveson's (1995) account of different types of risks that might occur during three phases: preliminary risk analysis, life-cycle risk analysis and operational risk analysis. This was not however the only approach that could be taken. Some students started their answer by clarifying what they understood by the term 'phase', having consulted various sources. This is a good idea when you are unsure of the meaning of any concepts in a question.

Question 3

This part of the assignment was well answered. A wide range of suitable techniques for identifying risk were chosen. Some students discussed brainstorming whilst others discussed the potential in undertaking a SWOT analysis. Other techniques were also discussed, and some interesting and novel examples were given. In discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each method, some answers provided only a partial analysis.