Examiners' commentaries 2015–16

CO1108 Information systems: foundations of e-business – Zone A

General remarks

The overall performance on this paper was satisfactory. There were a pleasing number of candidates who performed particularly well and obtained a distinction level grade. This commentary discusses what was required from candidates in answering the paper and also highlights some common areas for improvement. Candidates are reminded of the importance of ensuring that their scripts are legible and that their answers are clearly structured. Candidates are strongly urged to take care with their handwriting when writing under examination conditions.

In addition, it is important to read the examination paper carefully and to ensure that the correct number of questions are answered and that the answers provided contain the information which is asked for. Candidates should take care not to misread the questions on the examination paper.

The examiners would like to make the following observations which are of importance to future candidates.

- The paper consisted of **six** questions of which candidates were required to answer **four**.
- Read the questions carefully.
- Write clear and concise sentences.
- Make sure you answer all parts of the questions.
- Start the answer to a question, or part of a question on a fresh page.
- Write clear and concise sentences.

The remainder of this commentary provides a question-by-question discussion of aspects found by the examiners marking this paper.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1a.

This question required careful reading of the case study on Buzza. Good answers gave a definition of Entity Relationship Diagrams and also some discussion of their advantages. Most candidates were able to do this. The second part of the question was not as well answered. Candidates who graphically presented two Entity Relationship Diagrams and ensured that they related appropriately to the Buzza case study scored high marks.

Question 1b.

This was a straight forward question. Most candidates started out with clear definitions of what is meant by a Relational Database System, an Entity Diagram and the process of normalisation. In some cases, there was less clear discussion of the relationship between these entities. In particular, some candidates were hazy on what the process of normalisation entails. This question did not need to be related back to the case study of Buzza.

Question 2a.

Candidates were able to give a number of reasons as to why Circle Telephones Technical Support Services would use outsourcing to develop and manage their information systems. These reasons were wide ranging and variation in the reasons was acceptable. However, many candidates failed to address the second part of the question adequately which required them to give two real world examples of companies that outsource functions and where they outsourced them to.

Question 2b.

Similarly to answers to Question 2a, a wide range of disadvantages were suggested and were acceptable. This question carried fewer marks than Question 2a and candidates were not required to give examples. This highlights the need to read the questions carefully and to ensure that all parts are answered in full as required to score maximum marks.

Question 3a.

A surprising number of candidates had difficulty in answering this question. Although many answers defined what a Transaction Processing System is, not everybody was clear on the functions that are performed by a TPS and confused it with other types of office systems. Where candidates made up marks on this question was in the fact that they were able to distinguish between batch and processing modes and most candidates answered this part of the question very well.

Question 3b.

As in previous years, answers to this question were disappointing. This is a straightforward question and similar concepts have appeared in past examination papers. The difficulty that candidates experience is that they are not clear on what inertia means. They simply discuss it as a resistance to change. While this does allow for some marks to be earned, it is important for candidates to recognise that inertia is a particular form of resistance to change.

Question 4a.

Good answers provided a definition of what is meant by the term business process and then continued to discuss how such processes may be enhanced to provide value to the customer. Many candidates correctly identified that Michael Porter's value chain offers a good description of how value may be added at different stages of the process. High marks were awarded where candidates were then able to define for each step in the process how value could be added, offering examples particularly pertinent to a smartphone manufacturer.

Question 4b.

This was a difficult question. Most candidates were able to explain how the firm's supply chain is related to its supply value chain, but found it difficult to provide specific examples of how improving these chains might lead to competitive advantage. Good examples included discussion of issues such as communication and shared information as a source of competitive advantage, and some candidates scored additional marks here.

Question 5a.

This question was generally well answered. Most candidates gave a good definition of a legacy system. In some cases however, they failed to

develop the argument as to why these systems should always be considered when specifying new information systems architecture. Unsurprisingly, where candidates did not understand what the term legacy system meant they scored poorly on their answers to this question.

Question 5b.

Answers to this part of the question were generally disappointing. This was a straightforward question requiring candidates to describe the characteristics of user friendliness and user friendly software systems – high marks could be easily earned provided one knew what these characteristics are.

Question 6a.

This was a broad but straightforward question. Candidates identified and discussed a wide range of problems of using email and fax as methods of communication. Diversity of answers was expected and is acceptable. Candidates lost marks where they did not address both email and fax and provided a single answer for both technologies, with little explanation.

Question 6b.

Once again this was a straightforward question, and a wide range of answers were accepted. The examiners looked for some insight, along with common sense in answering this question. Where candidates gave a well-thought-through response their marks were awarded accordingly.