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# Coursework commentaries 2016–17

## C01108 Information systems: foundations of e-business – Coursework assignment 1

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### General remarks

This coursework assignment required students to address four specific questions about the exponential growth in the use of enterprise systems (ES) that has taken place in recent years.

Generally, the standard of submissions was good or very good (55 per cent), with a further 27 per cent graded as excellent. Sadly, nine per cent were reported for suspected plagiarism. It is important that your submitted assignment is your own individual work and, for the most part, is written in your own words. You must provide appropriate in-text citation for both paraphrasing and quotation, with a detailed reference section at the end of your assignment (this should not be included in the word count). Copying work of other students, plagiarism and unaccredited and wholesale reproduction of material from books or from any online source is unacceptable, and will be penalised (see 'How to avoid plagiarism').

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### Comments on specific questions

#### Question 1

**Identify and describe four business functions that may be integrated through the enterprise system.**

Good answers covered the following:

- Overall description of an enterprise system: a software system to support business processes, usually central, facilitating communication, information flow, data management and reporting.
- Four business functions:
  1. Human resources.
  2. Sales and marketing.
  3. Manufacturing and production.
  4. Finance and accounting.

Each function should be outlined in terms of functional scope. It is important to note the interdependence of the functions and hence the need for software commonality. The best answers also included contemporary examples.

#### Question 2

**For each of the business functions you identified in your answer to Question 1, discuss the benefits that they might achieve from the introduction of an enterprise system.**

Good answers included discussion of the following:

- Benefits from enterprise systems:
  1. Human resources: a central database of staff for training, motivation, administration, payroll, service records, leadership, and health and safety. Management of key company resources.

2. Sales and marketing: it is important to note that sales and marketing are likely to be separate functions. Sales focuses on sales force administration/control/reporting and account management. Marketing focuses on the management of marketing plans and, critically, the company's relationship with its customer base. Hence the vital ES contribution to managing and maximising the benefits of the customer database and the extraction of commercial value.
3. Manufacturing and production: all elements of the manufacturing and production processes and the relationship and management of the supply chain. Critical areas are schedules, just-in-time (JIT) inventory and shipping logistics. It feeds off sales and marketing and fulfils orders. Overall need for 'one' enterprise system. The overall objective is cost control.
4. Finance and accounting: an overall ES is needed to manage revenues and expenditures of the company through consolidated and standardised reporting. Fed sales and marketing income and manufacturing and production costs. The ES would effectively be the software support to traditional accountancy ledgers.

This question was generally well addressed. Strong answers recognised the greater utility of one overarching system providing management with total business transparency in real time. However, some students virtually repeated answer content from Question 1, having missed the need to 'discuss the benefits' of the identified enterprise systems.

### Question 3

**Identify four risks the organisation faces in the event of a catastrophic failure of the enterprise system.**

Good answers included the following:

- General description of what constitutes a 'catastrophic' failure – causes can include physical or natural disasters, result of software compromise, and so on.
- Four key risks relate to the four key areas above:
  1. Finance and accounting risk: loss of income or corporate information.
  2. Manufacturing and production risk – disruption of planning and inability to satisfy orders.
  3. Sales and marketing risk – loss of customer information/database compromises, lack of ability to brief requirements.
  4. Human resources risk: loss of confidential information or of staff control.

In addition to these individual risks, there is also overall reputational risk.

Answers to this question fell into two distinct categories: those with a balance of potential catastrophes and those that had a disproportionate focus on 'hacking'. Examiners allowed answers that over-emphasised 'hacking' some flexibility when marking.

**Question 4**

**Provide an example of an organisation that has successfully implemented an enterprise system.**

Good answers provided a brief overview of the chosen company, including the following:

- focus on the application of ES within the company
- when ES was implemented
- key benefits that have been observed
- identification of the ‘problem-solving’ nature of the implementation.

Students in general demonstrated sound understanding of implementation and benefits. However, the choice of companies was limited. Students are encouraged to undertake some independent research to shortlist a few potential organisations to discuss before making their selection. The Examiners noted that a large number of the answers were very similar (see ‘General remarks’ on plagiarism, above). Wider reading beyond the subject guide and textbook would provide a range of material to draw on in order to build a stronger answer.

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# Coursework commentaries 2016–17

## CO1108 Information systems: foundations of e-business – Coursework assignment 2

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### General remarks

This year, some students avoidably lost marks by failing to follow the guidance given in the coursework rubric or in previous years' coursework commentaries.

All references should be listed at the end of your work, and should be properly cited whenever you refer to them. The required referencing format is Harvard – there is guidance available on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Note, however, that any answers which consist entirely or mostly of quoted material are unlikely to get high marks even if they are properly cited and referenced, because you would not have demonstrated understanding of the issues.

Most students remembered to submit their work as a single PDF file as requested in the assignment instructions; failure to do so slows down the assessment process.

A pleasing number of submissions were very good indeed, and showed students working very hard to engage with the concepts.

There follow some remarks that will be relevant to future assessment.

- The questions must be read carefully. In some cases, answers were given to something that was not asked for, making it difficult to award marks.
- In a coursework situation, the word count and mark distribution are a good indicator of how much you need to write and the detail you need to go into (make sure that all content is **relevant**). In this coursework assignment, few submissions that were below 2,500 words got high marks.
- When writing coursework assignments, writing them as notes or as a simple list of points will not work well (although bullet points can be useful, they should be used selectively, such as for highlighting key points so that they are easy to identify prior to further discussion).
- A minority of students handed in work that was written in poor English. It is worth working on the standard of your English as it will help your studies. At this level of study you need to be able to handle the 'English for academic purposes' (EAP) content at Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) C1/Advanced level. Some freely available EAP resources can be found at [www.uefap.com/](http://www.uefap.com/) and a good text is De Chazal, E. and J Moore Oxford EAP: A Course in English for Academic Purposes (Advanced C1). (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) [ISBN 9780194001793].

The above points about referencing and good academic English apply to all your academic work, culminating in the extended report required as part of the final project for the programme. Getting on top of these issues now will be an excellent investment of your time.

In the assignment instructions, the context of the four questions was given: 'If Information systems are to be successful they should support the business processes. In some cases, processes need to be redesigned or improved.'

In the following specific comments, reference will be made to the four assessment criteria that were provided:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the opportunities associated with introducing information systems.
2. Apply appropriate frameworks and techniques learnt on the course.
3. Demonstrate your understanding of the impact of IT on organisational internal and external relationships.
4. Demonstrate your ability to undertake research to support your findings.

For each question, the characteristics of high-scoring answers will be given, as well as common errors.

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## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

**Discuss what is meant by Total Quality Management in the context of information systems.**

Assessment criteria 1, 3 and 4 are addressed by this question.

Good answers typically adopted the pattern of:

- clearly articulating what Total Quality Management (TQM) is and explaining its key principles
- making it clear what information systems (IS) means (this section does not have to be long)
- discussing how IS plays an important role in TQM (important).

Many students gave thoughtful answers which showed a good understanding of the issues, having found relevant supporting literature with which to build their discussion. Note again that correct citation and referencing is essential. Some strong answers also covered how TQM can enhance IS, again drawing on reading around the topic. Failing to address one or more of the points in the list above was the most common way marks were lost. Such answers were typically brief and/or unfocused with little discussion of key concepts.

### Question 2

**Discuss the advantages of conducting a Total Quality Management initiative for an organisation.**

Assessment criteria 1, 3 and 4 are addressed by this question.

Good answers typically adopted the pattern of listing TQM benefits and describing them in detail.

Very good answers illustrated these benefits by giving brief examples.

Most students gave thoughtful answers which showed a good understanding of the issues. Some answers also covered the success factors behind TQM implementation, and a few included a critical view of the risks of implementing TQM. These points added depth to the key points on the list above. Other answers were too brief and unfocused

with little discussion of key concepts. Again, failing to address one or more of the points on the list above was the most common way marks were lost. Such answers were typically brief and/or unfocused with little discussion of key concepts. A small number of students failed to attempt this question.

### Question 3

**Discuss an example of a successful Total Quality Management initiative.**

Assessment criteria 1, 2, 3 and 4 are addressed by this question.

Good answers typically adopted the pattern of:

- selecting an appropriate TQM case study
- describing how it was executed and what benefits were realised
- explicitly relating the above to TQM principles (thereby addressing assessment criterion 2).

Many students gave thoughtful answers which showed a good understanding of the issues, having found relevant supporting literature with which to build their discussion. Note again that correct citation and referencing is essential. Explicitly highlighting TQM principles when describing the case study addresses assessment criterion 2, highlighting the link between theory and practice. Failing to address one or more of the points on the list above was the most common way marks were lost. Such answers were typically brief and/or unfocused with little discussion of key concepts. A small number of students failed to attempt this question.

### Question 4

**Other than Total Quality Management, discuss other methods a manager might use to improve the way in which processes are conducted in an organisation. ]**

Assessment criteria 1, 2, 3 and 4 are addressed by this question.

Good answers typically adopted the pattern of:

- selecting 2–4 relevant alternative methods
- clearly explaining what they are and their key principles.

Many students gave thoughtful answers which showed a good understanding of the issues, having found relevant supporting literature with which to build their discussion. Some excellent answers went on to critically compare the selected methods with each other and with TQM.

A common error was to discuss generic management methods such as HR strategy, rather than those focused on process improvement such as business process re-engineering (BPR) and Six Sigma.

Again, other answers were too brief and/or unfocused, and a small number of students failed to attempt this question.