UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
University College

Learning Resource

Introduction to Information Systems in Organizations

As the course catalogue describes IFSM 300, this is an "overview of information systems, their role in organizations, and the relationship between information systems and the objectives and structure of an organization." Information systems collect, organize, process, and make available or distribute data. The systems involve people, technology, and processes. Students in this class come from a variety of different majors and disciplines; however, in today's business and personal world, each of us is impacted by information systems on a regular basis.

Many of you have been or will be involved in a project where processes are analyzed in anticipation of incorporating or revising an information technology solution to increase productivity and meet business needs. Even as a user within a functional department (human resources, marketing, finance, etc.), you may be asked to test systems to ensure they meet business requirements or otherwise be involved in technology implementation. There may be a specific role or position of business analyst that can exist in a functional department, or an Information Technology department, and is tasked with this type of work. In addition, you may be inputting data into an information system and receiving information from a system as part of your job responsibilities. Whatever your specific role is, understanding how businesses use information technology effectively is a critical skill in today's business world.

IT management must be sensitive to the business and its needs, rather than being in awe of or driven by technology. Conversely, business managers must be aware that systems can and should be used in the business to solve problems and improve the various functions, and that the advice of IT management is essential to the success of the business. This also implies that business managers should be conversant with IT terminology and its possible uses if they are going to achieve the maximum benefits of IT systems. It is in the best interests of the organization that both business managers and IT managers recognize each other's importance and strengths in maximizing systems' effectiveness in solving problems. This will ultimately lead to better business solutions enabled by IT that will lead to achievement of business goals and strategic objectives.

There is a clear relationship between information (derived from raw data), information technology (the computer-based tools used to work with information), and people (you). What is critical to keep in mind is that they all contribute (together) to supporting and improving business processes to achieve business success. Investments in technology and information systems are worthless if they do not support or contribute to the business's success. The processes are the business activities of the organization. In order for those processes to work, information is needed. Information, therefore, becomes the lifeblood of the organization. It is one of the most important assets in an organization, and the primary way that people get information is through information technology. Information technology in and of itself is not useful unless it delivers the right information to the right people at the right time. Since people, information, and information technology (in that order of priority) are inextricably linked, if one fails, they all fail.

So, we will begin our study of "Information Systems in Organizations" with developing an understanding of the business environment. We will use the term *business* to represent a variety of organizational types: government entities, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and general businesses, both large and small. The concepts apply in all of those environments. As you approach each week's work, you should read the assigned items in the order presented. They are grouped by topic to aid your understanding of the topic and to prepare you to demonstrate your learning when it comes time to complete the assignments.