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Innovation in Information Systems Education-III Sourcing Management - A Course in the Information Systems Curriculum

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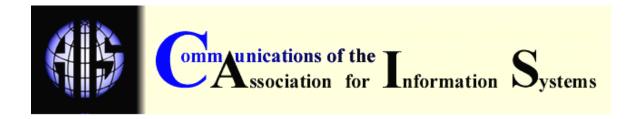
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ABSTRACT

The growth in information technology (IT) outsourcing and offshoring redefined the role of the IT manager. The IT professional today is expected to possess many skills besides technical expertise; the IT management job now includes administering contracts and managing relationships across cultures. This article describes a graduate course that was developed to help the IT professional achieve the required knowledge and skills to perform in these new roles.   The course addresses various aspects of IT sourcing including sourcing strategies, sourcing options, contract types, stakeholder perceptions, and the sourcing life cycle.

Keywords: sourcing, it management, outsourcing, offshoring

I. INTRODUCTION

Information systems sourcing can be defined as the

> *"organizational arrangement instituted for obtaining IT products and services and the management of resources and activities required for producing these services"* [Dibbern et al, 2004].

It is also an activity of vital importance to the organization for two reasons:

1. IT is strategic and inter-related with almost all activities in the organization,

2. The spending associated with the acquisition of IT products and services is a major part of any organization's capital investment.

While some IT solutions may be developed in-house, organizations are increasingly turning to "outsourcing" and "offshore outsourcing" as a means of obtaining IT products and services. Statistics from research organizations vouch for the popularity of outsourcing and offshore outsourcing. In 2003., Gartner Group estimated that outsourcing and offshore outsourcing have been discussed in more than 80% of the boardrooms across America [Pastore,2003], while in

2004 Meta Group, predicted that eighty percent of all organizations will outsource at least one IT function by 2005 [McCue, 2004].

II. NEEDED SKILLS FOR SOURCING MANAGEMENT

The shift in sourcing practices brings additional pressures to the professionals responsible for managing IT. The IT professional of today should not only be able understand and provide the technical capabilities required by the organization, but also negotiate and manage inter-organizational relationships. It is no surprise that Luftman and McLean's [2004] survey of IT executives identified 'the need to train IT staff in 'outsourcing management' as a top executive concern. As Luftman and McLean comment, such training is indeed a necessity if organizations have to be able to prepare their organizations to meet the challenges of globalization and an ever-changing environment.

Sourcing Interest Group [2000] identifies the knowledge and skills desirable in sourcing professionals as:

- Sourcing methodology/process
- Strategy development
- Project management
- Risk management
- Contract law
- Financial analysis and TCO analysis
- Supplier selection & certification
- Relationship development

Tiura [2004] reiterates this list and recommends that sourcing professionals learn to use the new tools available for sourcing management. The skills identified by Sourcing Interest Group include creative thinking, skills for negotiation and teamwork, data analysis, business writing, and presentation. Thus, the goal of a course in Sourcing Management is two-fold: it should develop these required skills in students and provide them with an understanding of the sourcing management knowledge areas..

III. ROLE OF THE COURSE

The course on Sourcing Management offers an opportunity to supplement and complement the graduate IS curriculum by providing students with an in-depth look at the issues associated with IT sourcing. In this course, students will learn to

- Identify the appropriate sourcing option to provide the technology needed to support the different business processes in an organization,
- Determine the business model for outsourcing and offshore outsourcing initiatives,
- Manage the various processes in the different stages of the outsourcing life cycle such as the vendor selection process, transition processes, and relationship management,
- Recognize the importance of inter-organizational relationship management in outsourcing,
- Understand the additional challenges involved in offshore outsourcing,
- Be sensitive to social issues of customers and stakeholders, and
- Consider consequences of outsourcing such as job displacement.

III. COURSE CONTENT

An understanding of IT management issues such as the goals and outcomes of the different sourcing options available to an organization comes only with an appreciation of IT strategic planning. Therefore, a discussion of IT strategy is the starting point for this course. The classes on IT planning and spending and strategic alignment set the stage for discussion of sourcing

options.   In the furor over outsourcing, the role of the in-house function is often overlooked. Before diving deep into outsourcing, we spend time looking at the challenges involved in marketing the IT function within the parent organization. This discussion also provides a good opportunity to compare the insourcing and outsourcing options and study the determinants of sourcing.

With the goal of providing students with an overview of the extensive responsibilities of the IT department in any organization and the extent of the current IT products and services market, in the initial sessions, we read and discuss four of the Standard & Poor's Industry Surveys: 1, Computers: Hardware; 2, Computers: Software; 3, Communications Equipment, and 4, Computers: Commercial Services.   These give a brief but in-depth look at the current market, with a balanced discussion of the factors affecting each industry.   These readings and discussions provide students who do not have a background in IT a basic understanding of the components of IT.

While outsourcing appears to be an attractive option because of the cost-cutting potential, it will return maximum benefits to an organization only when applied with enough forethought and planning.   Therefore, in the following classes we step through the various stages of the outsourcing life-cycle: selecting the vendor, developing the contract and associated documents, outsourcing management, and termination. While a bulk of the material is presented from the client perspective, we also study vendor organizations and the challenges they face. External consultants and experts play a role in this market, and we discuss their contributions to the management of outsourcing.   Additional topics that are discussed include security, new legal requirements, certifications (like CMM and ISO17779), and the enabling role of information and communication technologies in outsourcing.

Coming back full circle, we take another look at where outsourcing should fit in the organization's sourcing strategy, this time using ideas from portfolio management. This is complemented by a discussion on ensuring the credibility of the IT function and value from IT while outsourcing. Outsourcing is sometimes seen as a reaction to the negative evaluation of the internal IT function by the organizational management. However, each sourcing option has its place; students will learn that outsourcing does not negate the worth of the IT function to the organization but reaffirms the importance of the IT function to the organization.

The last class is devoted to examining the current sourcing market and discussing current issues. Based on the material we discussed so far, we try to project future developments in sourcing. It is hoped that the students will leave the class with an understanding not only of the outsourcing lifecycle and the associated management issues, but also of the place of outsourcing in the organization's IT sourcing strategy.

The list of topics and associated readings scheduled for this class appear in Appendix 1.   The assigned reading material for the course came from a variety of sources: books on sourcing, academic journals, industry sources, and websites dealing with sourcing.   Most of the articles and reports on topics to be discussed in the course were made available electronically via Blackboard. Material that could not be distributed electronically was made available at the library.

IV. COURSE FORMAT

CLASS SESSIONS

The usual format for the class sessions was lectures interspersed with class discussions. Students were expected to prepare for class sessions by reading the assigned material and preparing thought papers on the reading material. Guest lectures were used to supplement the class discussions. Guests included a lawyer on legal issues associated with outsourcing, a presentation by an IT manager on his experience with a sourcing project, a discussion on

backsourcing by a researcher, and another discussion on the effect of mergers on sourcing decisions.

I taught this class twice – once in the Fall of 2003, and again in 2004. In both semesters, I found that a good number of the students in the class had some experience with sourcing; their experiences enriched the class discussions. Students see this course as timely and reflective of the experiences their organizations will face or are going through. The students also enjoy and appreciate the additional knowledge brought in to the class by guest lecturers; if it were not for the time limitations, it would certainly have been beneficial to include more outside collaboration.

ASSIGNMENTS

The assignments for this course include a field project, case studies, daily thought papers, and a debate on offshoring. Information on these assignments are presented in the last three appendices.

For the project, the student examines a real-world sourcing (not necessarily outsourcing) situation and applies the material that has been discussed in the class to identify merits and demerits in the sourcing decision and implementation process. The sharing of sourcing stories from various organizations also gives the students a chance to see how others apply different lenses to the same topic. The project provides the students with a good understanding of the various issues associated with sourcing decisions. Students' feedback reflects satisfaction with this assignment; many students commented that the analysis required for this project helped them not only to grasp sourcing issues, but also to obtain a deeper understanding of IT management.

Three case studies – one dealing with IT strategy issues of a multinational organization, a second presenting the case of a client presented with various web-enabled outsourcing options, and the third providing a view from the vendor side – were discussed in the class. As expected, the cases provide an opportunity for creative thinking and application of the class material to business situations. The students enjoyed all three cases, but reflecting the mood of the day, the third case dealing with an offshore provider stimulated the most discussion.

To encourage students to think critically and go beyond just reading and receiving the material in the assigned readings, the students were required to produce 'thought papers' that commented on any section of their daily reading material. These papers could not be summaries, but were to be based on a critical examination of the ideas presented in the reading material. For example, they could write about why they agreed or disagreed with these ideas or how these ideas could be applied in their work or in an organization.

Pushing the students to think about outsourcing in terms of the global and national economy, another class assignment requires the students to debate the current hot topic of "offshore outsourcing". The students were divided into groups and were assigned to the "for offshoring" or "against offshoring" groups. Discussion forums were set up on Blackboard for each group. These forums were used to guide the students to look beyond the arguments in the popular media and examine each option thoroughly. Many of the students were not comfortable arguing for a pure 'for' or 'against' stance. However, they were satisfied once they realized that the goal of the assignment was not to declare one position as better than the other, but to identify the merits and demerits of each option.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the class discussions and assignments provide the students a look at sourcing from various perspectives and broaden their understanding of IT and business issues faced by organizations today. In examining the various sourcing options and discussing the issues associated with each option, the students will be able to appreciate the value of each option to the organization. Though time limitations did not permit looking in detail at newer areas of outsourcing such as business process outsourcing, the study of IT outsourcing will show how and

why outsourcing is evolving to include other business functions and why offshore outsourcing is becoming so prominent.

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APPENDIX I. TOPICS, DELIVERABLES, AND READING LIST

Class	Topics	Deliverables	Reading list
1	• *Discuss context of course and objectives*		

	• *Discuss project - (student assignment – individual – field study of a sourcing decisio* • Component categories of IS in the organization • IS budgets and trends in spending		
2	• Value of IT to the organization • Costs • A metric – Total Cost of Ownership • *Discuss debate on offshore outsourcing (student assignment - group)*		• Carr, Nicholas G. (2003) "IT Doesn't Matter". Harvard Business Review. pp 41-49. • Luftman, J and McLean, E. R. (2004) "Key Issues for IT Executives," MISQ Executive, 3:2, June, pp.89-104. • Industry Survey 1 – Standard & Poor's Industry Survey "Computers: Hardware", published by Standard & Poor's Corporation, New York, NY.
3	• The Information S function • Strategic Alignment of IS with business & IT planning • *Discuss writing and presentation issues (for project and debate position paper)*		• Gotlieb, Leo. (1995) "The Evolution of The Information Systems Function". CMA Magazine, 69:9, November, p23, 4p • Luftman, Jerry and Brier, Tom. (1999) "Achieving and Sustaining Business-IT Alignment" California Management Review, 42:1, p109, 14p. • Industry Survey 2 – Standard & Poor's Industry Survey "Computers: Software", published by Standard & Poor's Corporation, New York, NY.
4	• Sourcing - options • Sourcing decision determinants • Marketing the internal IT organization as a sourcing vendor; credibility • • *Discuss interviewing (for project)*	• *Project plan due*	• Clark, T. D. J., Zmud, R. W. and McCray, G. E. (1995) "The outsourcing of information services: transforming the nature of business in the information industry", Journal of Information Technology, Vol 10, pp221-237. • Quinn, James Brian, "Outsourcing innovation: The new engine of growth," Sloan Management Review, Summer 2000; Vol. 41, Iss. 4; pg. 13-29 • Trumbly, J. E., and Arnold, D. R. "Internal Marketing of A Management Information System," Journal of Systems Management (40:6), June 1989, 26-30. • Industry Survey 3 – Standard & Poor's Industry Survey "Communication Equipment", published by Standard & Poor's Corporation, New York, NY.
5	• Outsourcing history • Different models of outsourcing • Outsourcing life cycle • *Discuss case analysis*	• *Position paper due*	• Kaiser, K., and Hawk, S., "Evolution of Offshore Software Development: From Outsourcing to Co-Sourcing," MIS Quarterly Executive, Vol. 3, 2, June 2004, pp. 69-81. • Lacity, Mary C. and Willcocks, Leslie P. (2000) "Relationships in IT Outsourcing: A Stakeholder Perspective." In Zmud, R.W. (ed) Framing the Domains of IT Management, Pinnaflex Educational Resources, Inc. • Rappa, M.A. (2004) "The utility business model and the future of computing services", IBM Systems Journal, (43)1, pp.32-42. • Industry Survey 4 – Standard & Poor's Industry Survey "Computers: Commercial Services", published by Standard & Poor's

			Corporation, New York, NY.
6	• Client and vendor organizations • Selecting vendors • Transition issues in outsourcing • *Outsourcing/Offshoring Debate*		• Levina, N., and Ross, J., "From the Vendor's Perspective: Exploring the Value Proposition in Information Technology Outsourcing," MIS Quarterly, Vol. 27, 3, September 2003, pp. 331-364. • Chapter 5: The fifth building block: commercial mating and Chapter 6: The sixth building block: the starting gate from Cullen, Sara and Leslie Willcocks, (2003) Intelligent IT Outsourcing: Eight Building Blocks to Success. • Feeny, Lacity and Willcocks. "12 Capabilities to evaluate in your BPO vendor." Forthcoming in Sloan Management Review
7	• Offshore, near-shore, right-shore outsourcing • Security issues • Certifications –CMM, ISO17779…		• Offshoring guide from http://www.cio.com/archive/071504/guide.html • neoIT.com: "Mapping Offshore Markets Update 2004." Available from neoIT website • Carmel, E., and Agarwal, R., "The Maturation of Offshore Sourcing of Information Technology Work," MIS Quarterly Executive, Vol. 1, 2, June, 2002, pp. 65-78. • Rottman, J. and Lacity, M. (2004) "Offshore Sourcing: Twenty Practices for Swift Learning, Risk Mitigation, Supplier Management, Cost Control, and Quality Assurance", MISQ Executive, 3:3, September, pp.117-130. • Mark C Paulk (SEI). January 1995. "How ISO 9001 compares with the CMM." IEE Software, pp. 74-83
8	• Contractual issues • Other legal issues related to outsourcing: SOX, IP • Termination of outsourcing – backsourcing	• *Interview questions for project and Project progress report due*	• Mathew Lee (1996) "IT Outsourcing Contracts: Practical Issues for Management." Industrial Management & Data Systems, pp.15-20. • Volonino, Linda , Guy H. Gessner and George F. Kermis. (2004) "Holistic Compliance with Sarbanes-Oxley" Communications of the AIS, Volume 14
9	• The role of external consultants • Service level agreements • Metrics	• *Case 1*	• Chapter 4: "Outside Advisers" from Greaver, Maurice F. (1999) "Strategic Outsourcing: A Structured Approach to Outsourcing Decisions and Initiatives", New York, NY: American Management Association. • Chapter 12: "Defining Service Level Agreements" from Rob Aalders (2001) "The IT Outsourcing Guide", New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
10	• Communication in outsourcing; technologies • *Project workshop*	• *Case 2*	• Alborz, Seddon & Scheepers, "Impact of Configuration on Outsourcing Relationships," Proceedings of 10th American Conference on IS, 2004
11	• Project Management • Outsourcing relationship management (ORM) • ORM tools	• *Case 3*	• Barthelemy, Jerome and Adsit, Dennis. "The seven deadly sins of outsourcing". Academy of Management Executive; May2003, Vol. 17 Issue 2, p87, 14p

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			• Kern, Thomas, and Willcocks, L., "The Winner's Course in IT Outsourcing: To Avoid Extreme Relational Trauma," California Management Review, 2002.
12	• Financial analysis (Accounting faculty lecture) • Portfolio management: Where does/should outsourcing fit in? • Ensuring credibility of the IT function and value from IT (while outsourcing)		• Jeffery, Mark and and Ingmar Leliveld (2004) "Best Practices in IT Portfolio Management" Sloan Management Review, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 41–49. • Linder, Jane (2004) "Transformational Outsourcing," Sloan Management Review, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 52–58
13	• *Student presentations (project)*		
14	• A look at the market: identifying the major vendors, examining recent outsourcing agreements, discussing current issues and possible future developments. • Mergers and outsourcing • How does outsourcing affect you? As part of a client organization? As part of a vendor organization?	• *Project write-up*	• Latest issues from various websites dealing with outsourcing such as http://www.cio.com/research/outsourcing/ http://www.outsourcing-center.com/ http://www.outsourcing.com/ http://www.outsourcinglaw.com/

APPENDIX II. INSTRUCTIONS FOR PROJECT

This project involves visiting a firm and finding out about the sourcing options they considered for an information technology product or service that is being implemented or has been implemented recently. The goal is to study this sourcing decision and the process through which the decision was made. Additional issues to be discussed in the paper include the progress of the outsourcing project, problems that were faced and solutions that were applied. The student's discussion of these issues should draw on the course materials and class discussion.

To complete this project: You will produce a paper that explains how the organization is dealing with the issues that we will discuss in this class; this paper is due the last day of class.   You will also present your findings to the class in the previous class session.   This will give you a chance to incorporate the suggestions from the class in your write-up.

FINDING AN ORGANIZATION

Start early!

In the past semester, the students did not have much trouble identifying organizations and finding the right person to speak to. The 'right' person should be involved in the day-to-day management of the sourcing decision.

The organization can be: for-profit or not, small, medium or large, any industry. The IT product or service must however be non-trivial.

In your initial contact, please assure anonymity of the interviewee and the organization. This may be important to some organizations. You will need at least an hour of interview time to get enough info for the project.

If you are having any trouble, please let me know without waiting too long.

You have to turn in a project plan to me by Class 4, which should provide the name of the organization you will visit and the title of the person you plan to interview. You will also give me a schedule for the whole project.

THE QUESTIONS

You have to create a list of questions before you go for the interview. You will turn in the list of questions to me by Class 8. I will comment on the questions and we will work together to make as complete a list of questions as we can. If you need to visit the company before Class 8, please let me know.

THE INTERVIEW

Check if you can record the interview or not. It is difficult to take complete notes while you are interviewing.

Once you are done with the interview, transcribe the recording and your notes.

ANALYSIS

You will recreate the 'story' of the sourcing decision in your organization.

Look for:

- A cause-effect sequence
- Tracing processes
- Identifying the forces at play

WRITE-UP

- Format: MLA
- Maximum length of body of paper: 20 pages
- Organization: (The items below are not section-titles, but an indication of the content)
    o Introduction
        ▪ Organizational background
        ▪ IS function
        ▪ Product or service – when, where, why?
    o Sourcing decision
        ▪ Who?
        ▪ How? (Describe processes, documents)
        ▪ What are the expectations? Plans?
    o Outcomes
        ▪ Your determination
        ▪ Their experience – Users, IS department, Vendors,…
    o Analysis
        ▪ Integration of course material
        ▪ What did they do right? Why do you think so?
        ▪ What did they do that they should have done differently? Why do you think so?
    o Conclusions
    o Appendix

▪   List of questions
▪   Any documents you collected from organization

PRESENTATION

Present your story and analysis to the class.

DELIVERABLES

- Project plan & schedule : class 4 - name of firm, title of interviewee, is product or service, schedule

- Progress report: class 8 – interview questions, updated schedule

- Presentation: class 13; minimum time – 15 minutes; maximum – 20 minutes

- Write-up: class 14

APPENDIX III. HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL CASES[1]

CASE 1. UCB: MANAGING INFORMATION FOR GLOBALIZATION AND INNOVATION (A) (ABRIDGED)
Publication Date: Mar 24, 2004
Author(s): F. Warren McFarlan , Brian J. DeLacey
Product Number: 9-304-096
Description: Looks at the total information strategy issues facing a medium-size European manufacturer of pharmaceuticals and chemicals. Focuses on the issues of coordinating international IT activities and day-to-day operations as well as balancing the company's IT applications portfolio. Permits discussion of the appropriate role and background of a CIO.

CASE 2. JAMCRACKER
Publication Date: Oct 16, 2003
Author(s): Robert D. Austin
Product Number: 9-604-052
Description: A medium-size company considers entering into a high-tech "over-the-Net" outsourcing arrangement that hinges on buying an integration platform from Jamcracker. Introduces students to the many options available in modern IT outsourcing and challenges them to develop a framework for deciding what to outsource and how to do it.

CASE 3: TRACMAIL
Publication Date: Feb 16, 2001
Author(s): Paul W. Marshall , Carin-Isabel Knoop , Suma Raju
Product Number: 9-801-037
Description: Tracmail, an online customer service company based in India, is trying to handle support services (e-mail and chat) for companies worldwide. In its quest to break into global markets, Tracmail is contemplating a joint venture with a U.S. call center. Tracmail is also grappling with issues such as setting up a U.S. sales force (when the majority of the company's workforce is based in India) as well as convincing American companies to entrust their entire customer service department to a foreign company.

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[1] Source: 'Harvard Business Online' website - http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu/

APPENDIX IV. INSTRUCTIONS FOR OFFSHORING POSITION PAPER AND DEBATE

This assignment will require you to take a position in the current debate about offshore outsourcing in the U.S.

Arguments for and against offshore outsourcing have appeared in the popular media in the U.S. Research organizations have also discussed the issue at length. The proponents and the opponents have presented anecdotes and statistics to present their arguments. Some of these individuals and groups have not been clear about the distinction between offshore outsourcing and all offshoring. In your arguments, be clear on this distinction.

This is a group project. As a group, your job is to sort and think through the arguments that support or do not support outsourcing. (The groups will be assigned in class)

To complete this assignment, you are required to do two tasks:

1. As a group, complete a paper outlining your arguments. The main text of the paper may be a maximum of 15 pages, 12 point Times New Roman font, 1 inch margins on all sides, double-spaced on letter-size paper. Figures, tables/charts, title page, etc. can be added as extra pages. Please remember to include a list of references. It is not necessary to write an abstract or summary. Include names of group members in the header and page numbers in the footer. The paper will be worth 60% of the grade for this project. This paper is due in class before the end of class session 5.
2. The presentation will be in class during our sixth class session. Please prepare your initial presentation of arguments to be around 10 minutes, not less than 8 minutes and not more than 13 minutes. Please be prepared to take notes during the initial presentation of your opponents. We will take a ten minute break after the first round of presentation so that you may discuss your rebuttal. You will have around 8 minutes to rebut your opponent's arguments, not less than 5 minutes, not greater than 10 minutes. The presentation and debate will be worth the remaining 40% of the grade.

You may use PowerPoint to assist you in your presentation if you wish, but it is not mandatory. If you use PowerPoint, please follow the conventions for creating good slides. Every group member is not required to present.

The paper, presentation and debate will be judged for logical sequencing and organization, clarity of arguments, and strength of evidence presented. Good argumentative style and speaking always improves a debate, but the primary focus here will be on the content of the arguments.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Beena George is a visiting professor in the Department of Management Information Systems at the Cameron School of Business of the University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas. Her research interests include outsourcing, management of IS, and technology acceptance and usage. She is working on her Ph.D. at the University of Houston and earned her graduate degree in Business Administration from the Indian Institute of Management in Kolkata, India.