

**Module
Introduction**

Systems and Activities

For most students, this will be the second of the IAM Certificate modules. Good luck with this module!

Lesson Structure

1. Business and Organisation
2. Using Systems
Tutor-marked Assignment D
3. Planning and Control
4. Quality
Tutor-marked Assignment E
5. Change
Tutor-marked Assignment F

Systems and Activities

What comes first - the systems and activities which make an organisation a success or the culture and quality ethos? Yes, you have guessed correctly: the culture and quality ethos which make an organisation successful.

This provides us with a classic example of the perennial '**chicken and egg**' conundrum. If the desired successful organisation is to be achieved, what is the answer? What should we do first?

As is often the case in management, there is no easy or single answer. We therefore need to put our problem solving skills to work and can use the syllabus for the module '**Systems & Activities**' to help us. The syllabus in fact begins with a less contentious issue in looking at the setting up of an organisation. The point is made that you need to have some recognised organisational framework before being able to consider whether it is effective in its operations.

Commencing study of the module from this point will also offer some help in resolving our conundrum. I will consider the syllabus section by section to determine what assistance can be derived.

Business and Organisations

The initial section of the syllabus acts as a **'scene setter'**. The first lesson seeks to guide our thoughts on how an organisation can operate in the most effective way.

The principles of good organisation are explored and linked to the importance of having a **'customer focus'**. The point is made that if you don't know where you are going, or have no clearly articulated reason for the **'journey'** it is very difficult to arrive. Can an organisation hope to survive and go on to be successful if it lacks a vision and a clear destination stated in terms of achievable objectives?

The analogy of an organisation setting out on a journey needing signposts, milestones and a recognisable point of arrival can be a very helpful one. Not least because it reminds us of the help to be gained from guidance and using the experience of others.

Remember Peter Drucker's comment:

"Efficiency is doing the thing right, effectiveness is doing the right thing."

Administering an organisation needs clear guidelines and the establishment of mechanisms to help the organisation to stay on track. It is most important to appreciate that any action has to be justified and that actions will be subject to scrutiny. To achieve satisfactory levels of output both the will to succeed and the capability must be evident, along with a clear statement of how outputs will be produced.

This lesson seeks to introduce some of the building blocks from which an organisation can be developed. It also reminds us of some of the constraints that need to be considered. These include legislation and statutory requirements. The key issue of customer satisfaction is also introduced.

Using Systems

Successful organisations can be viewed as a collection of collaborative processes. Systems need to be developed using an **'holistic'** or **'big picture'**.

The parts that make up an organisation must not only work as independent sub-systems, but these parts must also fit together so as to achieve a successful whole. It is important as we consider this view to remind ourselves why organisations exist. Peter Senge suggests that a company:

“exists in part to provide a stable and rewarding livelihood for the key members of the company”

but goes on to point out the

“danger of relational blindness”

i.e. the inability to see ourselves, as an organisation, as others see us.

This raises a very important issue. While systems have to satisfy the needs of internal customers and operational necessities, they must also reflect the needs of external customers and the commercial realities of the global business environment.

This part of the syllabus seeks to place emphasis on the importance of working with our systems and within those systems capabilities. We often hear of the manager expecting too much of his/her staff, sometimes we also expect too much of the systems we have developed.

The syllabus seeks to guide thinking on developing systems in a practical way. Looking at real systems is a **‘must do’** activity. This helps to establish the importance of first developing, and then maintaining, the kind of systems which organisations really need.

Remember that systems give an organisation its operational structure. The systems are the **‘engines’** which drive activities and make possible on-going control.

Questions relating to this part of the syllabus seek to tease out an examination candidate’s capability for both understanding of underpinning principles and application of the principles to real world situations. Both the thinking behind **‘the systems approach’** and examples of this approach being applied must be explored.

Planning & Control

If an organisation wishes to achieve objectives and goals, it must first clearly articulate what those objectives and goals are. The **‘where do we want to be/where do we need to be’** approach provides us with a first stage in pursuing the activities which make up planning and control.

Whether we consider an organisation’s mission statement, or we look at a precisely stated operational task, the starting point for success is always to plan ahead.

No plan effectively means that an organisation has no clear purpose. If there is no purpose how can the required tasks be identified? In

turn what instruction and guidance can be given to staff? There will be nothing to communicate to staff, no goals and targets to meet.

An analysis of the need for planning also brings into focus the importance of the concept of control. Mullins says that

“Control is an integral part of the process of management. It is a general concept which is applied to individual behaviour and organisational performance.”

It is essential that the study of this part of the syllabus embraces the key role that control plays in any organisation.

A satisfactory view of control will be one that adopts the need for an approach which employs the principle of **‘requisite variety’**. This establishes the necessity of matching the complexity control to the variety of people, systems actions which will need to be controlled.

It is also important to recognise that while it is both feasible, and necessary, to use the broad principles embodied in the control cycle, there must be recognition that control will take a wide variety of forms and classifications. It is essential to accept that difficulty will always be experienced in achieving a balance between order and flexibility. It will be very helpful to consider how organisations achieve this balance, and how successful they are in doing so. The better the balance that is achieved, the more likely it is that both people and organisational needs, are being best served.

A key aim in this part of the syllabus is to stress the need to establish a framework that can be operationally successful. Questions will seek to explore the theory and practice of control. This will require consideration of real world examples and the assistance that can be gained from theory. It is essential that control is seen as a working entity which must be established, and monitored, against realistic and accepted standards. Control can only work if it is understood and accepted, with monitoring and audit viewed as essential supportive elements.

Quality

The importance of quality to an organisation can never be overstated. A key issue for this part of the syllabus is therefore to explain and reinforce this view.

Quality grows from sound principles, awareness and culture. Without the necessary supportive culture and **‘mind sets’** or attitudes it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to, **‘grow’** a culture that is right for a given organisation.

Quality must be embraced as a natural and integral part of an organisation’s activities. This takes time and a lot of effort. The

success is often determined by the attention to detail and the patience in seeking approaches that work.

Once a '**quality systems framework**' has been established this must be maintained. This requires a supporting network of monitoring, audit and review activities.

The starting point is often establishing quality benchmarks. These may be provided by external bodies or customers, and enhanced by internal '**fine tuning**'. Examples of these, in the UK, which can be investigated include Investors in People (IIP) and the Scottish Quality Management System (SQMS).

If bodies such as IIP and SQMS provide us with helpful frameworks, they also provide a very necessary mechanism for external review. This does not lessen the importance of internal audit and monitoring, but provides a second independent view. This may identify something which would otherwise be overlooked or not recognised in terms of its relative importance.

The message has to be very much one of achieving quality through partnership and maintaining quality by the correct mix of external and self evaluation.

This part of the syllabus seeks to encourage consideration both of the necessary thinking behind quality and achieving a quality culture, and the practical realities of operating systems.

It is essential that as with quality in practice, a study of this lesson is pursued with much on-going reference to the real world. Look at how organisations achieve and maintain quality. Look also at the benefits of getting quality right. Which organisations are getting it right and which are not?

Change

Before you consider how change might be achieved it is essential to consider why, and if, change is actually required. Change is often deemed to be inevitable and perhaps it is. This does not mean, however, that change has to be automatic process, which is given little or no thought. Perhaps you have heard the phrase when something new has been introduced of throwing the baby out with the bath water? Too often organisations are guilty of change for the sake of change and getting rid of not only the less effective parts of an activity but the good parts as well.

Any study of change should take account of real needs and any constraints that might impede or render ineffective the planned changes.

Peter Senge suggests that

“To change organisations for the better you must give people the opportunity to change the way that they think and act.”

This is a very refreshing and positive way to view change. Keep this in mind as you work through the syllabus. Look at actual situations. Consider how things might have been done better. Think about what you would have done and what you will do in the future.

Change is very strongly tied to the preceding lessons of the syllabus. It must relate to objectives, it must be planned, it must employ systems and it must embrace quality.

Currently a key issue when considering change management is the importance of developing a learning organisation. This stresses the importance of getting the thinking right. If you do not have people behind the change it will be more difficult to implement and the benefits could be diminished. You, and your organisation, have to be ready for change. If not what do you need to do to be ready?

Don't look at change as something that happens to other people. Change is affecting you even as you read this. Pursue your consideration of change in an active and purposeful way. Then you will take on board the approaches and supporting thinking as a natural process. Use the syllabus as a mean to focus on the process and importance of change as it affects you and organisations across the world.

As you consider the '**Systems & Activities**' syllabus appreciate that you are looking at key areas which are part of all organisations. Read, look at examples, think and, most importantly, take on the challenge of making the syllabus work for you in your future.

Activities

In the middle of each lesson, there are a number of activities based on the overall lesson aims. These tasks do not attempt to cover everything that has been dealt with in each chapter but, in each case, *have singled out* the most important matters concerned with the topic.

The tasks are designed to assist readers to apply the theory to a situation from their own experience. There are no answers provided as each case will be different, but students should be able to check by referring again to the previous pages.

At the end of each lesson, there is also the opportunity to review whether the key topic areas have been covered. It is yet another way to check how much knowledge has been taken in and especially, whether it has been understood enough to apply to real situations.

Tutor-marked Assignments

At the end of certain lessons you will also find a **tutor-marked assignment**. Throughout the IAM course, these are normally based on actual IAM examinations. Your answers to the TMAs should be submitted to your tutor for marking and when your script is returned, you should also receive brief guidelines on how an examiner would approach marking these questions.

Components of the Syllabus

Aim

To introduce key areas of activity which are integral to the practice of Management and Administration processes.

Below is a summary of the main topics to be covered by the syllabus for this module.

Business & Organisations

- The business organisation
- The customer concept
- Organisational aims, objectives and values
- Mission statements
- Productivity
- Compliance with legal and statutory requirements

Using Systems

- Systems
- Procedures
- Using systems and procedures in administration
- Monitoring and revising systems
- The systems approach

Planning & Control

- The need for planning
- The concept of control
- The control process
- Setting standards
- Measuring performance
- Correcting deviations
- Control information
- Control and feedback

Quality

- What is quality?
- Total quality
- Quality culture
- Continuous improvement
- Quality assurance
- Measuring quality
- Quality auditing
- Quality appraisal

Change

- Organisational change
- Sources of change
- Planned and unplanned change
- Organisational cultures and systems
- Impact and management

Additional Reading

As stated in the General Introduction, this module, like the others, is intended to feed into your day-to-day business activities. You will *not* get full value from it if you simply read the course and tackle the assignments in isolation. To do well, you *must* also read around the subject, gather ideas from various sources and apply the theories within a specific business context such as your own work.

The Institute issues lists of recommended reading for the Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses. It is essential for students to read regularly quality newspaper articles and features in journals which relate to their areas of study. This will help them to be up-to-date and enhance their reading of recommended texts. All students should read the Institute's journal which contains items of interest and topicality to Administrative Managers.

Most college tutors are well-informed on the availability and relevance of books covering their specialism and students are advised to heed their recommendations.

Availability: Most books are available at quality booksellers throughout the UK and in some other countries. Alternatively books can be ordered from the following supplier:

Page One Books
9 Princes Avenue
Hull HU5 3RX (United Kingdom)

Tel: + 44 (0) 1482 440853

Fax: + 44 (0) 1482 494770
e-mail: bookshop@page1.co.uk

In case of difficulty, students are advised to contact The Administration Officer, IAM Management Services Limited, 16 Park Crescent, London, W1B 1BA, telephone: +44 (0) 20 7612 7088 (Student Services) or email norma.baldwin@instam.org **who can supply books to all parts of the world.**

If you wish to buy one text to support your studies as a whole, OOL would recommend:

Ian Marcousé et al – **Business Studies**
Hodder & Stoughton, 1999 ISBN: 0-340-70462-4 Price: £18.99

IAM Recommended Texts for this Module

Core Texts

Bell, McBride, Wilson - **Managing Quality**
Butterworth/Heinemann 1994 ISBN 075061823X Price: £19.99

John Bank - **Total Quality Management**
Pearson ISBN 0135731143 Price: £19.99

Supplementary Texts

P Holden - **The Excellent Manager's Companion**
Gower 1998 ISBN 056607947X Price: £35.00

T Lucey - **Management Information Systems**
DB Publishing ISBN 185805303X Price: £15.99

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