EDITORIAL PREFACE

The Global Information Systems Management Course —
An Idea Whose Time Keeps Coming

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Global information systems management (Global ISM) represents a distinct portion of the body of knowledge of management information systems. At a micro level it represents knowledge regarding the use of information technology to enable global commerce largely through multinational corporations (MNCs) as well as emerging institutions such as open source development groups. In addition, it represents the growing issues involving the role of culture (and mixtures of people of diverse culture) in the processes of development and expansion of information systems. This is seen in the growing phenomena of virtual teams, offshore outsourcing, and the diffusion of software creation for export throughout the world. It also represents issues of implementation of systems that may behave unpredictably when introduced into different cultural contexts — for better and for worse. At a macro level, Global ISM represents competitive stances between nations and regions based largely on infrastructure and governmental policies regarding regulation, taxation, education, and the like.

In the view of the authors, the body of knowledge regarding Global ISM, as exemplified in these different issue areas, is of significant importance to information systems practitioners around the world. One way to sensitize such practitioners to this body of knowledge is to include all or some of this material in the MIS curriculum.

It is clear that there are a number of approaches that colleges and universities can take to include this material. First, there is the idea of a course specifically dedicated to this topic. This is the authors’ preferred approach and will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs. Second is the idea of refocusing the introductory MIS course to include these topics. Third would be parceling these topics throughout the MIS program. Fourth would be hoping that these topics are covered in other academic courses such as by international business. Finally, they can simply be left out.

Let’s consider these various alternatives. There is much merit in the idea of refocusing the introductory MIS course to have a pervasive global awareness. Our major concerns regarding this option are (1) that other important material generally included in such a course would be removed to make room for the new topics or (2)
that given the volume of material, GLOBAL ISM will not receive sufficient attention. Collectively, the authors know of no effort that has been made to recast an introductory course in this direction, and would be extremely pleased to learn of such efforts and their outcomes.

We are skeptical about the effectiveness of parceling the material among courses. As it stands, a systems analysis course with some emphasis on user interface may touch on designing for diverse users. Potentially a database course can discuss how culture may influence the selection of entities and attributes pertaining to business processes in different areas. Telecommunication courses may note differences in infrastructure and policies throughout the world. Our concerns for this sort of strategy would be that the student would not develop a coherent view of the relationship among these global issues in MIS and would fail to see the relationships among them across the various courses. Moreover, we would be surprised if such an approach provided the full spectrum of content regarding Global ISM. Collectively, we, the authors, again know of no effort to parcel these topics throughout an MIS program and would welcome hearing about them.

Although much of the discussion regarding policy and business issues that affect IT globally could in principle be addressed in other courses, such as international business, there is already a significant agenda pertaining to international marketing, finance, human resources, geography, and politics against which this topic would be competing for attention. Once again, we, the authors, don’t know of any effort to provide such content through this sort of mechanism and would be pleased to learn of such.

Recognizing that different schools have different emphases in their MIS departments and programs, we have come to believe that a separate course in Global ISM is an excellent approach to incorporating this material. We propose this alternative because: (1) based on our experience teaching this course, the content is sufficient for and even requires a semester for complete treatment; and (2) there are many opportunities for student investigation and exposure to new ideas—for example, in one course students write short papers on a particular technology supporting globalization, a particular firm and how it supports global business through ISM, and a particular nation and how it aligns infrastructure and policies for supporting its IT industry. By providing a special focus on global business issues and technologies, we emphasize the importance to students’ future success of developing a transnational, rather than provincial, professional perspective. Specifically, students are introduced to the world economy in which IS labor resides, the scope and scale of global IS projects, and cultural influences on IS development and use.

Additionally, if designed correctly, such a course may induce students from other fields such as international business to increase their exposure to ISM. For undergraduate business students, a GMIS course would likely fulfill the AACSB-accreditation requirement for an international component. Providing one course for such a diverse audience does provide challenges and opportunities. One challenge is that the lack of IS background of non-MIS majors necessitates additional explanations of some technical issues. However, the presence of international business students provides the advantage of having more diverse student input as some will have had extensive global experience and a business perspective that reflects the organizational environment within which the MIS major will be working. Furthermore, this course provides an opportunity for study abroad experiences, allowing students to combine travel to one or more countries while taking this course for credit.

In situations where the GISM course is offered as an elective, it will be important to market the merits of the course as providing students with tools to be successful in a global economy, even if they never leave their country of origin. It is increasingly likely that after graduation, students will find themselves working on face-to-face teams and distributed teams within a country that include cultural and technical
infrastructure differences. The skills learned in a Global ISM course related to communicating across cultures and organizing distributed teams can readily be applied in a domestic information systems context. One caveat, though, is that a separate course, if it is an elective, may result in students who do not take the course being even less exposed to global ISM content. For that reason we would not recommend extracting all reference to global ISM content from the other courses, but rather use those as a base for substantial expansion in the Global ISM course.

Finally, we, the authors, feel strongly that whether a course is offered as a stand-alone or whether Global ISM material is blended into other courses, it is important that the knowledge shared be based on sound research in the field. Over the past 20 years a significant numbers of books and journal articles have highlighted various aspects of global ISM. While there is still much to be learned and discovered, given this wealth of information, a lack of knowledge and materials on the topic should certainly not be a barrier to the creation and delivery of a course of this nature.