

# Reflection in an Online Management Information Systems Course

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## **Course Information -- INFO600 Information Technology Management**

Information Technology Management is an examination of systems and technology involved in the production of goods and the delivery of services. The predominant focus is on the manager's use of information and technology to influence the design, operation and control of systems in order to enhance competitive advantage. Topics covered in this MBA course include analysis of current information systems, identification and assessment of an organization's strategic use of information systems and future trends of information technology development. This course explores business processes and information systems; it is highly integrative and draws heavily from other functional areas in business.

## **Ignatian Paradigm and Reflection**

Ignatian pedagogy is based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. The 1993 monograph, *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (Jesuit Secondary Education Association (JSEA)) describes this Ignatian pedagogical vision and provides a process for delivering education in an Ignatian tradition.

Distinguishing features of Jesuit education as described in this document are:

- Cura personalis
- Value focused
- Pursuit of Excellence in study
- Encouragement of life-long learning
- Inspired by Faith but profoundly human focused
- Eclectic in methodology

This monograph on Ignatian pedagogy emphasizes the importance of how an instructor relates to students, conceives of learning, and engages students in the quest for truth. It further underscores the importance of a teacher's own integrity and vision in the formative process of student growth. Five key components comprise the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm: *context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation* (JSEA, 1993). The three central components to be emphasized are *experience, reflection, and action*. These three processes in particular are considered integral parts of the paradigm and help develop the critical thinking, understanding, application, synthesis, analysis and finally the commitment in regards to the learning process. The instructor needs to help the student see how to involve the whole person, mind and spirit. My focus in the Mission Academy project was specifically on the use of *reflection* in my MBA MIS course.

*Reflection* is "a thoughtful reconsideration of some subject matter, experience, idea, purpose or spontaneous reaction, in order to grasp its significance more fully" (JSEA, 2000, Sec 49). Students should be guided to understand the truth being studied more clearly, and understand any

conflicts within themselves when learning new material and notice what moves them with any new experience. *Reflection* can be an even more meaningful experience if shared. Students and instructors should share their thoughts in order to broaden their own personal experiences. A shared *reflection* can provide an opportunity of growth for all those involved.

### **Course Reflection Assignment**

Intellectual activities can evoke affective qualities such as pleasure, indignation, insecurity, etc. These personal reactions affect one's determination to act or to avoid an action. A challenge to an instructor is to formulate questions that will broaden the students' awareness and assist them to appreciate other viewpoints. The instructor must not impose personal viewpoints but rather draw those thoughts from the students and encourage others to share their reflections which can result in a feeling of community. Shared reflections can reinforce, challenge, encourage reevaluation, and ultimately give greater guarantee that the action to be taken is one that will be for "men and women for others." Having a weekly reflection blog for the purpose of exploring class topics encourages this evaluation process.

Reflection can draw meaning and value from experience by:

- Developing predictions about what will work
- Locating source of feelings and reactions
- Exploring implications for oneself and others
- Making explicit what is implicit and assumed
- Seeking truth behind events and ideas

In my syllabus I have the following description for the Reflection assignment:

*T. S. Elliot said "without reflection...we have the experience but miss the meaning."*

*A critically important aspect of Jesuit education is the introduction of reflection as an essential dynamic for learning to be a critical thinker. For centuries, education was assumed to consist primarily of accumulated knowledge gained from lectures and demonstrations. Teaching followed a primitive model of communication in which information and knowledge were transferred from instructor to learner. Students would experience a presented lesson and the teacher would call for subsequent action on the part of students where they then would demonstrate, frequently reciting from memory, what was communicated to indicate that it had been successfully absorbed. While research over the past two decades has proven time and again, study after study, that effective learning occurs through the interaction of the learner with experience, much of teaching continues to be limited to a two-step instructional model of EXPERIENCE--ACTION, many times missing the critical learning piece of REFLECTION. With the addition of REFLECTION students are pushed to consider the human meaning and significance of what they study and to integrate that meaning as responsible learners who grow as persons of competence, conscience and compassion.*

*In our class you will submit REFLECTION statements during the term for the purpose of reevaluating the past weeks' topics. You are to submit three to four paragraphs of what you believe were the key learning points and how these relate to you or your work environment.*

*What did you learn? What was missing from the lessons? What are you doing with what you are learning? Who are you becoming from this learning experience?*

### **Some Extracts of Student Comments from the Reflection Exercise:**

- In reflecting on my first internet class experience and the ease with which communication occurred, I wonder how many companies are using these same capabilities. Are companies electing to reduce travel expenses by holding meetings online versus in person? While it is still important to be face-to-face for many client meetings I think that companies should look to increase their use of the internet for meetings between their own divisions and different locations. In addition to online meeting resources as a time and money saver I am also going to implement remote access software at my company. For many troubleshooting issues, this option will allow our technical team to service clients more quickly, increasing customer satisfaction and eliminating the expense of travel.
- In terms of the case studies, I think the one I found most interesting was the Harrah's study. Not only was I able to get my individual presentation idea from this, I think this is something that my company could look into a little more in terms of getting more loyalty from customers, especially with the ever-changing market conditions, economical strategies and overall globalization. This is something that could be further leveraged by a lot of companies and hopefully my company will also look into this.
- The current event issues presented each week have been my favorite part of the course the past two weeks. There were many topics discussed that I had little or no knowledge of and I learned a lot from these presentations. Additionally, I liked how it gave each student the opportunity to make a virtual presentation in a way most of us had never done before. I thought that when I made my current event presentation I wouldn't be nervous at all because I wouldn't be able to see anyone. However, when it was my turn to present on the first day of class, I was surprised that I was VERY nervous. I realized everyone might be listening more carefully to what I was saying since they couldn't see me, so I didn't want to make any mistakes. Making a presentation in this way was unlike anything I have ever done before and I'm glad that I was given this opportunity, since I will eventually have to do virtual presentations in my organization.
- Frankly, with my busy lifestyle (kids, wife, work, and school), I don't have much time to blog so it took me a while to get used to it. This class definitely challenged me and for once in the MBA program, I felt "disadvantaged" since I knew my younger classmates were more comfortable using the technology. Now I know how my older co-workers feel when new BI tools are introduced and they are not comfortable using them at the beginning. I will be more empathetic in the future.
- I wrote my research paper this week. I had not written a paper for quite a long time, so it was fun to do research and look through my topic (which is GPS usage). I had a funny moment when I looked through my old MLA style handbook and there were no guidelines on how to cite an entry for a web page. Younger folks just out of undergrad would laugh, but I really saw how differently research is done today. When I was in undergrad I spent hours going to and from the library looking up sources and discarding them. For this paper, I still spent 4 hours or so doing research, but I did it with ease,

browsing articles and websites and doing this in the comfort of my own home rather than the library itself.

- Based on this experience, I learned 3 main things. First, I need to stay more in-touch with new technology to ensure that I keep growing my skill sets and stay current and competitive with my co-workers. Secondly, I learned to be more patient and understanding with my older co-workers who may not be as comfortable using the technology tools as I am and continue to teach them how to use them. Thirdly, I learned more about how IT interacts in our daily work lives to improve our productivity, security, and overall connectivity with our co-workers.
- Wow...me... blogging??? Even if only in a limited setting, this is a surprise! I like to read blogs but am not one to exert effort in responding or posting my own thoughts. "Exerting effort" is an appropriate description. I am not a writer. Writing is not easy for me and I struggle at it. Yet I still daydream sometimes of doing something like blogging or even keeping a journal. This would really help in capturing those special moments I want to remember.
- Since enrolling in this class, I have found myself more proactive in being an early adopter of the e-tools deployed at work. I've found many of the class topics interesting enough to discuss with my wife after class, and I've enjoyed showing her a few of the videos shared during class; we've both enjoyed the discussion, especially the amazing growth of social media and mobile devices .
- At Xavier University, the Jesuit value of community maintains that courses are taken in person and that active participation play a critical role in the classroom. I wondered how an online course would maintain the XU values let alone my thirst for education. As I took a look at the syllabus, I was shocked to see the volume of work required and I instantly thought for a day, "Drop!" But I didn't. And, academically, it has made all the difference. Reading case after case, and having fun actually participating comments of value where in a real classroom I would have raised a comment just to comment. Here I appreciated the input of others who gave me the feedback to do something that I have been struggling with for quite a long time.

### **Instructor Reflection**

I discovered that adding the Blog/Reflection exercise to my classes was a beneficial activity for not only students but for me as well. This assignment forced the students to stop and think about the course content, the online experience and how these experiences can relate to business. They reflected on the content of the course and topics that they could take back to their work environment. Overall, I was very pleased with how seriously they took this assignment and as noted in the student *reflection* excerpts the students found value in different aspects of the course. As an instructor, I grew from the experience because I learned what the students valued within the course. I realized what content and delivery aspects of the online course that students valued. Ignatius clearly understood that lasting learning can only happen when one takes time to think and *reflect* on an experience and where it can take them. This holds true through today....a timeless concept.

### **Reference**

Jesuit Secondary Education Association (JSEA). (1993) Ignatian Pedagogy Practical Approach.

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