

**MAKING SENSE OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS JUNGLE: TOWARD ORGANIZING
PRINCIPLES FOR CIS/MIS CURRICULA**

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ABSTRACT

In the halls of academia, issues of curricula are as much issues of disciplinary boundaries as they are of territory and domain. It is much more so in the case of departments and disciplines with fluid boundaries such as CIS, Organizational Science, and Management. It is argued in this paper that where the discipline is in a state of flux and foundational issues are awaiting clarification, the organizational structure, rather than disciplinary boundaries, determines the administration of curriculum. For example, in a Business School with only two departments, viz., Management and Accounting---one frequently seen configuration is that a number of functional areas such as Finance, Marketing, and Management (OB,HRM,Principles of Management, POM) are subsumed under Management whereas Accounting, and Business Law are included Accounting. CIS/MIS is included in Management almost as often as it is in Accounting.

The question is, why does Business Law belong in Accounting any more than it does in Management? Or for that

matter, why do CIS/MIS belong in Accounting as opposed to Management or vice versa?

The search for administrative rationality, could be completely misplaced in queries of this nature. The answers lie in the very practical considerations of size and feasibility of departments as organizational subunits. In some Class I (doctoral-degree granting institutions), Operations Research and Management Science are included under the Management Department, whereas in some other schools, they are housed separately under the department of Information Systems and Quantitative Science. Likewise, it is fair game for Business Administration in general to be a school, a department, a major, or just a course—depending on the size of the school, its mission, and most importantly, its departmental structure.

One redeeming factor, the factor that is relevant to this discussion, is that no matter how departments are organized in different institutional contexts, there seems to be a commonality of direction. We do not see Business Law under the administrative control of Accounting when there *is* a separate department of Business Law. Similarly, the issue we consider is not how CIS/MIS curriculum is handled in schools where there is no department of CIS, but how it is handled where there exist separate department(s) of CIS and MIS.

In the tradition of strong inference, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: In colleges and universities where there is a separate departmental identity for CIS/MIS, curricular issues and course administration of MIS are dealt with by the faculty of that department.

H2: In colleges and universities where there are separate departments for CIS and MIS, the CIS departments tend to be technology-heavy and MIS departments tend to cater to business applications of technology.

A peripheral, but related issue is that of the domain battle between CIS and CS. Some three decades ago, the distinction between the two was much clearer than what it is today. Consistent with their historical focus on business applications, CIS departments in some schools are calling themselves BIS departments now not only to distinguish themselves from CS and also to signify commitment to establish a footing in the curriculum for School of Business. Implications of such fluid domain boundaries are discussed.