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Chapter 1 Accounting Information Systems and the Accountant

Discussion Questions

1-1. The answer to this question will vary with each university's location. However, it is likely most students will reveal that their parents are employed in non-manufacturing jobs. Instructors may wish to emphasize that the large numbers of service sector employees and knowledge workers reflect a trend.

1-2. The question is designed to encourage students to think about some of the information reporting limitations imposed by the traditional accounting general ledger architecture. Other activities that do not require journal entries include (1) obtaining a line of credit, (2) issuing purchase requisitions or purchase orders, (3) signing contracts, (4) hiring a new executive, and (5) sending financial information to investors or bank loan personnel. But instructors may wish to point out that important information about a company's business transactions may be included in an annual report outside the financial statements. The management letters and footnotes in annual reports may reveal more about a company's future prospects than the financial statements themselves.

Managers have access to much more information than what is published in financial reports. Whether or not they would like to have access to more non-financial information, or if they would prefer that the accounting information system capture data about business events rather than accounting transactions, is debatable. It may also be a function of the accounting system in a particular company. Instructors may wish to have more information available to them but the downside is that too much information can be just as problematic as too little information.

1-3. The financial accounting systems we have known for more than 500 years are changing dramatically as a result of advances in information technology and financial accounting software. For example, databases allow accountants to collect and store all the data about a transaction or other file entry in one system, allowing those reading such information to retrieve it quickly, efficiently, and specifically in any format they wish. Financial data can be more easily linked to nonfinancial data as a result of database technology as well. Thus, it is likely that financial reporting will undergo tremendous change in the next few years as we learn to use technology more effectively in the design of financial AISs.

ERP systems are another example of the information age's impact on financial accounting. Now, organizations capture more data and produce more information than ever before. This allows companies to integrate more of their financial and non-financial systems, better forecast everything from raw materials requirements to finished product production, and to perform more sophisticated analyses of important business functions. For instance, sales can be examined at many different levels and organized according to criteria such as geography, customer, product, or salesperson at the touch of the keyboard.

One of the most important changes in AISs is the way these systems will gather financial information in the future. Although many of these systems will continue to capture data in traditional batch mode or at POS sites, we expect newer systems to collect more of it on mobile devices—for example, cell phones, PDAs, and digital cameras. Because more employees are working from home these days, "digital commuting" may be another trend.

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