**Key Assignment**

During the course, the combined week’s assignments will be your final Key Assignment deliverable, as depicted in the following flow diagram:



Throughout this course, you will be working with a scenario in which some basic background information is provided about a retail store. This information could apply to any retail store in general. Your goal is to select a small-to-medium-sized retail store of your choice, making sure that it is in an industry that you are familiar with or perhaps want to know more about. Each assignment that you complete in this course will be based on the general retail store scenario that is provided and any additional information that you discover during your exploration and problem-solving process. Be sure to refer back to the Discussion Board in Unit 1 as you progress through the problem-based learning (PBL) process. Or, better still, write down the outline that is provided in the Unit 1 Discussion Board as a guide for you to follow throughout the course.

**Problem-Based Learning Scenario**

A retail store wants to offer its products online in response to numerous customers requesting to be able to purchase the company’s products electronically. The company is beginning to see some growth in spite of the recent economic downturn. The company strives to meet the needs of its customers, including giving them the perception that they are the company’s highest priority. Being a profitable operation has not always been the case, and the company has historically struggled with customer service issues, inventory-management problems, employee turnover, and poor productivity overall. Naturally, the stakeholders of the company began to lose faith in the viability of the company, and unfortunately, numerous stakeholders have dissolved their relationship with the retail store entirely.

Approximately 7 years ago, the company hired a freelance information technology (IT) organization to create a data-driven information system that would support customer records and order entry. The store manager convinced the owner of the company that this route was the way to go. After all, anything would be an improvement over what the company had at the time. The owner felt that because it was important to have an efficient way to track customers and orders, any computerized system would be sufficient. He was not too proud to share his lack of technological skills, and often deferred to others when it came to making decisions in this area. He often joked that perhaps some computer training would do him and his employees some good. He was never really assured that his data were backed up correctly or that his system was secure. And what if the system crashed or the data started to appear unusual? He also had never heard of any of his employees backing up the system files. If he lost all of his data, he would not know where to turn or what to do. The very idea of his business depending so much on technology was almost too stressful to think about. Deep down, however, he really wanted some assurance that his information was reliable and secure.

The customer records and order entry system that was installed solved a few problems for the short term but quickly proved to lack the capability to meet the goals, objectives, and overall data needs of the company. The freelance technology company provided no documentation on how to use the system or even how it was designed. A large component that was missing was having the ability to track the product inventory. The system in its current state does not seem to be fully functional and often lets employees override the store procedures that the owner has clearly stated should be adhered to. For example, customers are given discounts when they are not eligible, certain products are completely depleted from inventory without being flagged for reorder, and prospects who have never placed an order are set up as customers with a fake order to give them free product samples and promotional materials. This usually involves a person who is friends with an employee collaborating to set up fake order for a product that is not even real.

Although the owner does not feel that he is very technically proficient, he admits that perhaps he should have researched the needs of his company and the possible options before jumping on the first opportunity that presented itself. He knows that he reacted to the problem instead of responding in an effective manner. After all of that trouble, employees cannot keep track of customer records, orders get misplaced on the system, and products that are not in inventory keep coming up as available. The problem has gotten so bad that the owner has directed all employees to resort back to the manual method to handle all daily business transactions.

At this point in the company’s history, the need for positive changes is apparent to the owner. He is committed to his company and his customers. He values all of the input that stakeholders have provided to him over the years and knows that with a little determination, the company can be a success. His employees are loyal to him and appreciate his attentiveness to their needs and concerns. He knows that each employee is good at solving problems and wants to able to reward all of them by recognizing when they are able to solve problems for the company. He sees his employees as dedicated and capable of meeting any of the goals and objectives that he sets for them. He often compliments them on the cleanliness of the store and the way that the shelves are organized. He has told them that the company takes pride in its appearance and ability to greet the customer with a smile. This includes having the products that the customer wants at a reasonable price; that is what he calls customer service.

**Problem-Based Learning Perspectives:**

[Problem Based Learning Scenario](https://resources.careered.com/LCMSFileSharePreview/Resources/HTMLFiles/52964.html)

**Kelly, Customer Service Representative**

“Every time customers call me and want to know the status of their order, I feel like it takes forever for the system to provide a simple answer to a simple question. I can understand why customers get frustrated with us because all they want is to know what is going on with their order. After all, they are trying to coordinate their busy lives and such. I feel like an idiot when I cannot answer the customer right away, and I am upset because I thought this system would make things better. I feel like I spend more time listening to customers complain, and it makes me uncomfortable.”

**Mark, Cashier**

“I don’t understand why I can’t simply give the customers a break sometimes. I know they should not get a discount all the time, but if I know them, I think it is good customer service to make them happy. Plus, the system allows me to do it. If this was such a bad thing, then the system should not allow me to give discounts and promotional products when I am not supposed to.”

**Sandy, Product Manager**

“This new system was supposed to help me manage product inventory more efficiently but it isn’t. I do not have time to go back into the warehouse and count everything. I told customers that we had plenty of stock, and we actually had none in the warehouse, so naturally the customers are really angry with me. But it is not my fault. The system told a different story, and I relied on the system to be right. Now the owner is mad at me because he thinks I am not capable of doing my job. He says I should always check to make sure that the system is not lying, but I don’t have the time to do this!”

**Ralph, Store Manager**

“I really thought a new system was the way to go; after all, technology is supposed to solve all problems, right? Why can’t things just work? The owner is really upset because we spend so much time trying to fix problems that occur on a daily basis that we do not have time to make things better in the store. At this point, we will never be able to sell our products online. We cannot even manage the store we have! Orders get misplaced, customers are angry because the wrong products come in on their orders, and I am really tired. I just don’t understand it. I have seen technology actually help businesses run more smoothly. Why does technology not work for us?”

**Ellen, Customer**

"I love the convenience of shopping online. With my busy lifestyle, I have no time to go shopping at the store for what I need. I do appreciate being treated with respect as a customer too. After all, I should get the product I want at a fair price and should have the ability to choose from a wide selection. I love the websites that have customer support options so that I can call if I have a problem. I will be honest, however, that I have little patience for order mix-ups and things like that. A company that sticks by its word, though, means a lot to me. We all make mistakes; it's how we fix those mistakes that matters."