

Chapter 58

Understanding the Use of Business-to-Employee (B2E) Portals in an Australian University through the Employee Lens: A Quantitative Approach

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of the existing body of e-business literature is primarily directed at Business-to-Consumers (B2C) and Business-to-Business (B2B) forms of e-business. In contrast, Business-to-Employee (B2E) is relatively less highlighted in the scholarly literature. Despite the lack of attention given to B2E systems, it represents an emerging area which has the potential to have a major impact on organisations. In general, B2E systems use intra-business networks allowing organisations to provide useful services, information, or products to their disperse employees (Turban et al., 2008). By providing easy access to

relevant information, services, and products, B2E systems help in creating satisfied workforce that is expected to be more loyal to organisations (Dube, 2005). These systems also help organisations in reducing their administrative costs by streamlining employee related process (Singh, 2005) and eliminating expenses related to paperwork, postage, printing and travel (Killen Associates Report, 2001). Adoption of B2E e-business systems can even assist organisations in outperforming competitors by connecting their employees together (Hansen and Deimler, 2001).

Recognising the above mentioned benefits, an increase in the demand for various types of B2E e-business solutions is noted by several industry reports (Killen Associates Report, 2006; Merrill Lynch

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Capital Markets cited in Brooks, 2004; and Banks, 2004). Regrettably, despite a growing demand for implementing B2E solutions, their usage in organisational settings has not been critically analysed and reported in the current scholarly literature. We argue that evaluation of the use of B2E solutions by employees represents a key research concern because the benefits arising from the introduction of such solutions are unlikely to be realised when they are not satisfactorily diffused among employee community. Therefore, managers need to be aware of the factors that may potentially affect the use of B2E e-business systems in their organisations. Against this background, we report the experience of a large Australian university in introducing an employee portal (a popular form of B2E e-business system) by analysing the perceptions of a segment of university staff about the influences of popularly discussed factors on their portal usage behaviour. Our findings provide interesting interpretations of the influence of several factors on the low usage of portal by employees. More specifically, we find that portal usefulness is a complex construct that fundamentally consists of two dominant dimensions (i.e. perceived collaboration usefulness and perceived information communication usefulness) – both of which are in turn influenced by management support. The discovery of these dimensions represents a major contribution of our work.

Our paper is organised as follows. First, we review various streams of literature related to B2E and similar other systems. Next, building on literature review and our prior research in this area, we identify a range of factors that may potentially affect use of B2E systems by employees. Then, our research approach is described. Next, background of the participating university is described. Then, the survey findings are presented and discussed in light of the existing e-business and IS/IT implementation literature. Finally, our contributions are highlighted and future directions of our research are indicated.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE: AN ANALYSIS

As the literature on B2E e-business systems is limited, we have consulted several related streams of literature to identify how various factors may influence the use of employee-oriented IT systems in organisational settings. These include: e-business literature, human resources (HR) literature, sales force automation (SSA) literature, diffusion of innovation and IS/IT implementation literature. In the following sub-sections, we provide a brief but insightful review of the key findings from each stream from the perspective of employees using some forms of B2E systems.

E-Business Literature

Existing e-Business literature cites the works of several scholars who have studied such aspects as usability and design challenges associated with various types of B2C interactive portals (e.g. Kiebling and Kostler, 2002; Gounaris and Dimitriadis, 2003; Holsapple and Sasidharan, 2005) tourist portals, citizen portals) which have some degree of similarity with employee portals. We acknowledge this similarity but argue that distinct differences exist between B2C portals and employee portals in such areas as type of users (external customers vs employees), degree of access given to organisational controls via portals (limited for customers vs high for internal employees), and type of services and information offered (e.g. superannuation is not relevant for customers but of importance to employees). Therefore, as the motivations and purposes of employee portals are different than B2C interactive portals (although many of the underlying technical issues are similar), we can expect that the usage behaviour of portals by employees is different from that of the users of B2C portals. Consequently, we have restricted our literature review attention to the B2E systems only.

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