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Strategizing and Innovating with Enterprise Systems:
The Case of a Public University

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ABSTRACT

The higher education industry worldwide is currently facing a number of challenges in trying to be academically competitive and operationally efficient at the same time. Information technology, in the form of large scale Enterprise Systems, have shown the promise of enabling them to run their operations more efficiently and at the same time compete better in the academic market. This case discusses a globally renowned and highly ranked public University based in Australia and its journey of adopting an Enterprise System. The case further illustrates how the organization, enabled by its Enterprise Systems, achieved both operational efficiency as well as managed to retain its position at the top end of the academic market through innovation and better strategic decisions.

KEYWORDS

Business Value of IT, Enterprise Systems, ERP, Implementation, Innovation, Integration, Operational Efficiency, Optimization, Strategic Decision Making

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, Information Technology (IT) has been reported to play a strategic role in organizations, and a variant of IT called 'Enterprise Systems' are increasingly becoming the favoured IT platform around the world. Enterprise Systems (ES) are large-scale, packaged, application systems that can be used to streamline and integrate business processes, and enhance information levels within the organization as well as with its business partners. ES has become a generic term that includes a number of systems like Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and other similar systems. These systems were originally adopted to improve operational efficiency. However, all organizations that have adopted Enterprise Systems hope to get more out of these systems than just improving operational efficiency; they want to be able to strategize and innovate, and thus compete better in the market. This case study, using a highly ranked and world renowned University based in Australia, attempts to explore how Enterprise Systems can enable organizations to innovate and strategize.

BACKGROUND

This section presents an overview of the chosen organization for the case study: its basic facts, mission, vision and strategy.

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Basic Facts

UniCo (real name not disclosed for confidentiality reasons) is a public university located in Australia. It was founded in the 19th century and is one of the oldest Universities in Australia. It is a member of Australia's "Group of Eight" universities and the Universitas 21. The University time and again ranks among the top universities in Australia and the world. UniCo has one of the highest financial endowments of any university in Australia. UniCo has consistently ranked first or second on the key national research indicators set up by the federal government to allocate public funds for research and training infrastructure in the nation. The university has close to 36,000 students, and more than 7,300 staff members, both academic and professional. Figure 1 shows a partial view of the high level organization chart of UniCo.

Mission and Strategy

UniCo was originally established to offer degrees to advantaged students at a standard that would be at par with that of Oxford. In subsequent times, the University took up research, public service, and cultural initiatives in line with its spirit as a public institution. Today, UniCo retains its public spirit, but is now a massive complex organization facing the insecurity of being between the extremes of regulated responsibility towards the public and market-driven private income. It aims to strike a balance between a traditional vision of teaching and research with the more recent objectives to meet professional, economic, and community demands.

To realize the vision to be 'one of the finest in the world', UniCo devised the 'Triple Helix', with three key priorities for the institution – research, teaching and knowledge transfer. As the name suggests, the triple helix is made up of three strands intertwined with each other. The first strand, Research, involves the systematic generation of new knowledge, birth, and growth of new ideas and experimentation with new techniques. The second strand, Learning and Teaching, involves a body

Figure 1. Organization structure (partial) (Source: UniCo Website)