Chapter I

Critical Success Factors for Implementing ERP Systems as a Vehicle for Business Curriculum Integration at a Large State University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter documents and analyzes an initiative in which the College of Business Administration implemented an ERP system in their coursework with the goal of integrating curriculum across disciplines. While the narrative will not attempt to provide the precise reason that the College did not achieve its goal, it will point to a number of challenges that arise in such initiatives. Analysis of these events is provided in order to assist other educational organizations in determining critical success factors for entering in technology alliances relationships with third party providers.

INTRODUCTION

In 1998, the College of Business Administration (CBA) within a large public University engaged in the endeavor of integrating its business curriculum via the implementation an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. Over the next five years, significant investments of time, money, and faculty and staff resources were put toward the initiative, but in the end, the college failed to achieve its initial objective. Was the objective too aggressive or was the execution of the plan flawed? This chapter provides a description of the ERP initiative from its conception, analyzes the outcomes, and presents those factors that if they had been better anticipated may have helped alter the results.

The CBA is a unit within a large state university in the southern United States. The university has a total enrollment of over 30,000 students and is located in a large metropolitan area. The CBA is the largest of the university's professional schools, enrolling approximately 4500 undergraduate and graduate students each year. The CBA is organized into five academic units, the departments Finance, Decision Sciences and Information Systems, Management and International Business, Marketing and Business Ethics, and a School of Accounting. The CBA offers a broad variety of undergraduate business majors managed within each of the departments as well as a significant number of Masters Degree programs including MBA and specialized Masters of Science degrees. The College is accredited by the Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International (CBA, 2005).

Business curricula, in both graduate and undergraduate programs, is generally composed of a set of courses that are known as the "core" that represent a fundamental set of content in which all students must be proficient. The core is a significant percentage of the entire business degree program and generally includes courses in management, marketing, accounting, finance, operations, management science and statistics, international business, business law, and ethics. Large business colleges, like the CBA that tend to be functionally organized, manage core courses by allowing each of the departments to determine the relevant material for the specific courses that they are assigned to administer. Departments traditionally manage these courses in isolation without considering the content in core courses of other departments. In recent years, many collegiate schools of business have considered integration of core coursework across departments in order to increase the quality and relevance of the business education experience. This integration takes on a variety of forms in practice including the use of common case studies across courses, team teaching, and/or the creation of new multi-disciplinary courses. The incorporation of ERP systems in the curriculum has also been viewed as another possible mechanism for achieving this cross-functional integration.

ERP systems became popular in the mid to late 1990s with the goal of replacing legacy functional systems in accounting, human resources, order and inventory management and customer service with a unified application. ERP systems are divided into modules along the lines of the old standalone systems except that these modules access the same database. Each functional department still has their own application, except now the data is linked so that, for example, finance personnel can view the order management system to see if an order has been shipped. Among other stated goals, ERP systems can integrate financial and customer information across business units, standardize and speed up manufacturing processes, reduce inventory, and standardize HR information (Koch, 2005).

This chapter begins by telling the story of a college leadership that bravely struck out in a new direction with the goal of integrating management education across the disciplines

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