Chapter XIII

From ERP Systems to Enterprise Portals

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the development of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems toward Enterprise Portals (EPs). Enterprise Portals aim at creating a single entry point for its users to all internal and external applications, information, and services necessary for performing their jobs. EPs can be personalized to users depending on the roles they perform. There is a growing interest in EPs, but EP-research is scarce. Using a content analysis, we evaluate one specific EP—SAP AG's Enterprise Portal my SAP Workplace. The evaluation had an overall effectiveness approach. The evaluation suggests some of the strengths of current EPs, for example, their internal and control focuses, and some of their weaknesses, for example, lack of external focus and lack of support for top-managers.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is fourfold. First, to present and discuss some of the developments and changes of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems and the development of Enterprise Portals (EPs). Second, to present EPs and exemplify with a leading EP product: mySAP Enterprise Portals from SAP Portals.[1] Third, to evaluate SAP's EP solution using a content analysis. Fourth, based on the evaluation, discuss the future of EPs.

ERP systems, such as SAP R/3, Oracle Applications, PeopleSoft, and Movex, were criticized for being costly, being difficult to implement and change, being overly rigid and hierarchical, and using antiquated technology (Markus & Tanis, 2000; Davenport, 2000). There is a body of literature related to ERP systems addressing technical, organizational, strategic, economic, educational, evaluation, and implementation issues (Markus & Tanis, 2000; Ross & Vitale, 2000; Davenport, 2000; Shanks et al., 2002; O'Leary, 2000; Holland & Light, 1999) and product specific implementation issues (Curran & Ladd, 2000; Bancroft et al., 1998). In addition, there is also empirical research on different aspects of ERP development, implementation, use, and impact (Kalling, 1999; Adam & O'Doherty, 2000; Davenport, 2000; Shanks et al., 2002), which have applied different theoretical frameworks to analyze the ERP systems phenomenon.[2] The ERP literature suggests and shows that implementation and use of ERP systems is problematic and can lead to a number of drawbacks, for example:

- High and increased costs for running business information applications
- Difficult and time-consuming implementations
- Need for enterprise process reengineering due to standardized "best practice" processes embedded in the ERP systems — the "one-size-fits-all" fallacy
- Difficult and costly to fulfill specific requirements due to inflexibility in ERP systems
- Need for large allocation of internal resources (e.g., money, personnel, and time)
- Technical problems due to lack of technical skills and support by the ERP system vendors
- Cultural clashes due to that ERP systems force organizations to standardize business processes across intra- and interorganizational boundaries and that ERP systems require organizations to use unequivocal data definitions

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