



Chapter XI

Organizational Knowledge Sharing in ERP Implementation: Lessons from Industry

Mary C. Jones, University of North Texas, USA

R. Leon Price, University of Oklahoma, USA

ABSTRACT

This study examines organizational knowledge sharing in enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementation. Knowledge sharing in ERP implementation is somewhat unique, because ERP requires end users to have more divergent knowledge than is required in the use of traditional systems. Because of the length of time and commitment that ERP implementation requires, end users also are often more involved in ERP implementations than they are in more traditional ERP implementations. They must understand how their tasks fit into the overall process, and they must understand how their process fits with other organizational processes. Knowledge sharing among organizational members is one critical piece of ERP implementation, yet it is challenging to achieve. There is often a large gap in knowledge among ERP implementation personnel, and people do not easily share what they know. This study presents findings about organizational knowledge sharing during ERP implementation in three firms. Data were collected through interviews using a multi-site case study methodology. Findings are analyzed in an effort to provide a basis on

which practitioners can facilitate knowledge sharing more effectively during ERP implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Enterprise resource planning (ERP) is a strategic tool that helps companies gain a competitive edge by streamlining business processes, integrating business units, and providing organizational members greater access to real-time information. Many firms are using ERP systems to cut costs, standardize operations, and leverage common processes across the organization. ERP allows firms to have a more convergent view of their information by integrating processes across functional and divisional lines using a centralized database and integrated sets of software modules (Scott & Kaindl, 2000; Zheng et al., 2000).

However, the convergence that ERP affords at the organizational level often results in a divergence of the knowledge required at the individual level (Baskerville et al., 2000). ERP imposes a new framework on the organization (Robey et al., 2002). It requires end users to have broader knowledge than is required in the use of traditional systems. They must understand how their tasks fit into the overall process and how their process fits with other organizational processes (Lee & Lee, 2000). Thus, knowledge sharing is one critical piece of ERP implementation. During implementation, an organization begins to build the foundation on which end users can understand enough about the ERP framework to realize its benefits (Robey et al., 2002). Because of the time commitments and the extensive knowledge sharing that must take place during ERP implementation, end users often are more involved in the implementation than they are in more traditional implementations. In some cases, ERP implementations are managed and led by end users and end-user managers, and IT staff serves primarily as technical advisors (Jones, 2001). Unfortunately, there is usually a significant gap in knowledge among these implementation personnel, and people do not easily share what they know (Constant et al., 1994; Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2000; Osterloh & Frey, 2000; Soh et al., 2000).

This study was undertaken to examine how firms ensure that organizational knowledge is shared during ERP implementations. One objective is to identify facilitators of organizational knowledge sharing. Another is to synthesize findings into lessons about knowledge sharing during implementation that other firms can apply in their own ERP implementations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Knowledge sharing in ERP implementation is somewhat unique, because ERP redefines jobs and blurs traditional intraorganizational boundaries (Lee & Lee, 2000). Knowledge must be shared across functional and divisional bound-

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