

Chapter 13

Employee Attitudes towards Business-to-Employee (B2E) Portals Use: Analysing the Role of Demographic Characteristics

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ABSTRACT

B2E portals represent a state of the art technology for organisations (businesses) to deal with employees using electronic communication, access and data management. B2E portals enable reduced operation costs for organisations and satisfied employees by offering them convenience, flexibility and agility. However, adoption, continued use, and eventual success of portals depend to a large extent on employees' attitudes towards portal use, which generally impinges on demographic characteristics of employees. To establish the influence of demographic characteristics on employee attitudes towards portal use, this chapter reports a study on B2E portal use and employee attitudes from a large Australian university. This chapter highlights that employees' attitudes towards portal use is only somewhat positive, and not

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overwhelmingly favourable. Although not statistically significant, attitudes of employee varied based on age and educational background. Senior management of organisations should thus formulate strategies to develop positive attitudes for portal use to accelerate its diffusion among employee communities. Such strategies should take into consideration of the possible effect of employees' age and educational characteristics. E-commerce researchers could undertake further research to find out whether demographic characteristics become more significant once the portals are in use for sometime.

INTRODUCTION

In the current climate of global economic crisis, many organisations are aspiring for a lean organisational structure and a more productive workforce. Adoption of innovative web-based B2E portals can be regarded as an important mechanism to help organisations maintain committed and satisfied employee community. B2E portals, by providing customised services and information tailored to employees' roles and needs, can help improve their decision making abilities (Singh, 2005; Turban et al, 2008). They also streamline the way employees handle information and execute business processes (Mootheiril and Singh, 2009; Urbach et al, 2009), and reduce expenses related to employee travel and improve corporate communication (Singh and Waddell, 2008; Tojib et al, 2008). With improved business processes, enhanced learning, electronic communications, and knowledge management (Singh and Waddell, 2008), it is possible for B2E portals to help organisations in outperforming competitors. However, it would be inappropriate to assume that employees would happily embrace B2E portals once senior management of their organisations decides to introduce these technologies. This is because employee acceptance and subsequent usage of technologies is quite often influenced by their attitudes. Our view is in line with the arguments expressed in several theoretical frameworks (elaborated in Section 2) reported in the existing IS/IT literature. We also believe that the formation of employee attitudes towards use of portals is often influenced by their demographic

characteristics. This is rooted in the cumulative empirical evidence and theoretical arguments [e.g. Zmud's (1979) MIS success model] reported in the literature. Examining the influence of demographic orientations on employees' attitudes is important because negative attitudes can form a barrier for successful adoption and subsequent use of B2E portals by employees. In addition, knowledge of demographic characteristics is also insightful because management could identify those segments of their workforce which are more likely to offer resistance and demonstrate a lack of cooperation for the acceptance of portals. Appropriate policies can then be formulated by management to help those segments of employees develop more positive attitudes towards portal use.

As B2E portals represent a new type of technology, little has been published about how employees feel about the use of portals and whether there exists a significant difference in employee attitudes based on their demographic characteristics. The lack of research in this area is not surprising given the fact that academic research literature tends to lag behind practice (Kim and Han, 2001). We acknowledge that although some studies are reported in the existing literature on users' attitudes and use of various types of Internet-based applications (e.g. Nachmias et al, 2000; Zhang, 2005; Konradt et al, 2006), their findings are not directly applicable to the B2E portal context because of the existence of differences in characteristics and purposes of use.

In this chapter, we thus report the findings of a survey among 161 employees of a large Australian university which has introduced an

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