Chapter VIII

Employee Portals: Just the Next Step in the Journey

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Abstract

This chapter investigates the application of portal technology to the area of human resource management. It discusses the evolution of Web-based HR solutions and looks at portal solution evolution of a leading enterprise resource planning systems vendor (SAP). The final section of the chapter employs a case study research approach to examine the implementation of an employee portal in a large Australian organisation and the evolutionary stages which occurred.

Web Portals

The term “portal” has been an Internet buzzword that has promised great benefits to organisations. Dias (2001) predicted that the corporate portal
would become the most important information delivery project of the next
decade. The term portal takes a different meaning depending on the viewpoint
of the participant in the portal. To the business user, the portal is all about
information access and navigation; to the organisation, the portal is all about
adding value; to the marketplace, the portal is all about new business models;
and to the technologist, a portal is all about integration.

The portal was developed to address problems with the large-scale develop-
ment of corporate intranets. Corporate intranets promised much but had to
address multiple problems in the organisation (Collins as reported in Brosche,
2001). On the user side, employees must make informed and consistent
decisions and are being implored to access multiple information sources on the
Web, and on the technology side, intranet sites in organisations have prolif-erated,
resulting in an increase in search complexity for corporate users. Early
versions of portals were merely Web pages with extensive document linkages:
a gateway to the Web. These early versions have been replaced by several
generations of portals. Eckerson (1998) proposed four generations of portals
(see Table 1), and he proposed that portals can be analysed by the information
content, information flow, and the technology focus that make up the portal.
Just as the intranet proliferated within organisations, portals are now starting to
multiply. A mega portal is being developed that hopes to address the unfettered
expansion of portals. The portal management system or the mega portal is being
developed to take control of portal proliferation with the aim to enhance

Table 1. Portal generations (Eckerson, 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>Referential</td>
<td>Generic focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hierarchical catalogue of pages</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pull flow</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Decision support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Personalised</td>
<td>Personalised focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Push and pull flow</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Customised distribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>Application focussed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Specialised</td>
<td>Role focussed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Integrated workflow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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