Chapter III

The HUB as an Enabling IT Strategy to Achieve Smart Organizations

Arturo Molina, ITESM, Campus Monterrey, Mexico
Ricardo Mejía, ITESM, Campus Monterrey, Mexico
Nathalíe Galeano, ITESM, Campus Monterrey, Mexico
Teresa Nájera, ITESM, Campus Monterrey, Mexico
Marcela Velandia, DaimlerChrysler Vehículos Comerciales México S.A de C.V., Mexico

Abstract

This chapter introduces the concept of virtual enterprise broker (VEB) supported by the use of a “HUB” of integrated e-services as an enabling IT strategy to design and create smart organizations. The VEB model is described in terms of core processes, success measures, and supporting ICT (information and communication technologies). The VEB is a business entity that enables the design, configuration, creation, and operation of
smart organizations. VEB core processes are supported by e-services integrated in a “HUB” (The concept of HUB refers to a proposed centre of integrated e-services for virtual business) that is supported by Web-based applications and technologies. Six integrated e-services have been defined, based on the concept of on-demand services for value added industrial networks: e-marketing, e-brokerage, e-planning, e-engineering, e-supply, and e-productivity. The conjunction of these e-services improves industrial networks performance. A description of the e-services and HUB architecture is presented in detail.

Introduction

The concept of virtual enterprises (VE) has been around for some time (Byrne et al., 1993; Davidow and Malone, 1992; Goldman Nagel, & Preiss, 1995; Camarinha-Matos, Afsarmanesh, & Garita, 1998; Eversheim, Schuth, Bremer, & Molina, 1998). There are some frameworks that help to define how the virtual enterprise works. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of the models and research described in the literature related to virtual enterprises.

The research presented in this chapter has its foundation on the Framework for Global Virtual Business, created by COSME network (COSME was a network created by the European ALFA Project, between four European and two Latin American universities), to conceive how virtual enterprises could be designed, created, and operated to exploit new opportunities in global markets (Molina et al., 1998). This framework is described to some extent in order to explain the relevance of brokers in the formation of Virtual Enterprises.

The COSME framework defines three business entities: virtual industry clusters, virtual enterprise brokers, and virtual enterprises (Molina, Ponguta, Bremer, & Eversheim, 1998; Bremer, Eversheim, Walz, & Molina Gutiérrez, 1999):

- Virtual Industry Cluster (VIC) is an aggregation of companies from diverse industries, with well-defined and focused competences, with the purpose of gaining access to new markets and business opportunities by leveraging their resources and therefore their competences. The companies can be geographically distributed or not.
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