Chapter III

Understanding an ERP System Implementation in a Higher Education Institution:
A Grounded Theory Approach

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Abstract

This chapter addresses the problem of enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementation in Higher Education Institutions (HEI). It attempts to contribute to the understanding of ERP implementations in this kind of organizations by identifying and analyzing the major factors that affect this type of projects. Special attention has been paid to contextual influence and to organizational factors. The conclusions of this work suggest that most problems in ERP implementation projects are not technological but may be attributed to organizational factors. The chapter describes an in-depth case study carried out at a HEI that implemented an ERP system in
2001. The case was studied as part of a grounded theory based research project whose aim was to develop a model for the implementation of ERP systems.

Introduction

In recent years, a growing number of HEIs worldwide are exploring the use of ERP systems as a means of supporting their organizational processes, while linking areas like financial, real estate, and staff management, management of students, and support of teaching and learning. This adoption of ERP systems by HEIs is bringing problems in ERP implementation projects that are specific to these types of organizations. Because HEIs comparatively have modest IT/IS resources and budgets, they expect to benefit largely from implementing off-the-shelf application products like ERP systems. They do not usually have the depth of experience or a constant availability of adequate expertise to be able to handle the in-house development of an enterprise-wide system.

This chapter reports the results of an in-depth case study carried out in the economics management area of a Spanish HEI that implemented an ERP system in 2001 by following a “big-bang” implementation approach. The big-bang approach is characterized by the “go live” of all implemented ERP modules at the same time.

The interpretive perspective adopted in our research reflects our aim for understanding the phenomenon of ERP implementation in a HEI within the full-fledged organizational context where it occurs. In order to keep the confidentiality of the research site and the people involved in this case study, we deliberately omitted the name of the institution and ERP product. The chapter is structured as follows. First we present the literature review on ERP. Then we describe the case study background. Next, we present the research methodology. Subsequently, we describe the findings. Finally, the conclusions and the implications for further research are outlined.

Prior Research on ERP

Esteves and Pastor (2001) reviewed 189 articles on ERP topics that were published in conferences and top information systems journals. They noted that implementation approaches have been studied and that new ones have been proposed. However, they detected that “implementation” does not mean the
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