Chapter XII

Re-Examining the ERP Concept: Toward an Agenda for Reducing the Unbalance Between the Push and Pull Sides on the ERP Market

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ABSTRACT
In this chapter we use the concept of discourse to provide an insight into the current structure of the ERP market, from the perspective of an organisation adopting ERP. We propose that the ERP market is characterised by a subtle but pervasive conflict between two fundamental orientations: the arguments, methodologies and software products put forward by ERP vendors on the push side and the perceptions and goals of managers in the organisations implementing ERP on the pull side. We
content that there is a mismatch between the rationale emphasised by the vendors and the goals pursued by managers and that the push side has been overly dominating the ERP agenda. This unbalance needs to be addressed, in part, through an analysis of the discourses that characterise the ERP Community. As far as the authors are aware, we are the first to approach the study of the ERP market from this perspective, attempting to facilitate the empowerment and enlightenment of the managers in charge of the organisations implementing these systems. This chapter reports on one element of a larger ongoing research study, the objective being to lay the foundations for a new research agenda in the area of ERP adoption.

INTRODUCTION TO A COMPLEX PHENOMENON

Although there is no agreed-upon definition for ERP systems, their characteristics position these systems as integrated, all-encompassing (Markus & Tanis, 2000), complex megapackages (Gable et al., 1997) designed to support the key functional areas of an organization. The American Production and Inventory Control Society (APICS) defined ERP as follows:

An accounting-oriented information system for identifying and planning the enterprise-wide resources needed to take, make, ship, and account for customer orders.

Therefore, by definition, ERP is an operational-level system. Also, borrowing from the insights of Wood and Caldas (2001), ERP can be described as follows:

...a comprehensive Information Technology package built on the promise that all critical information should be totally integrated in one single information database. (p. 387)

In examining the theoretical underpinning of the ERP concept, it is useful to go back to the first classification of systems and the most referenced framework for the implementation of management information systems, that of Gorry and Scott Morton (1971, 1989). In their seminal 1971 article, they developed a framework that has become the foundation for much of the
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