Chapter XVIII


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ABSTRACT

Executive Information Systems (EIS) began to become popular in Spain in the 1990s. This chapter offers a primary descriptive study of EIS in Spain, bearing in mind two aims: to study the EIS usage in Spain and undertake a comparative analysis with reference to previous research. In this way, starting from the recognized EIS development framework of Watson, Rainer and Koh (1991), the authors focus on the structural perspective of the EIS elements and the development process. The study is based on a survey involving 70 organizations. The results show both parallelisms with preceding studies and new contributions to the current knowledge in the EIS field. Finally, the chapter identifies future trends in the executive information system concept.

INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, Watson, Rainer, and Koh (1991) set a landmark in the study of executive information systems (EIS) practices. Their work described a useful framework for EIS development which encompasses three elements: a structural...
perspective of the elements and their interaction, the development process, and the dialogue between the user and the system. They cast light on EIS research because previous literature was mainly based on case studies or had an anecdotal character. Indeed, based on their framework, they offer the first important descriptive study of EIS practices.

Starting from this milestone, several contributions that show a general view on EIS usage in different countries can be found in the literature (Allison, 1996; Fitzgerald, G., 1992; Kirlidog, 1997; Liang & Hung, 1997; Nord & Nord, 1995, 1996; Park, Min, Lim, & Chun, 1997; Pervan, 1992; Pervan & Phua, 1997; Thodenius, 1995, 1996; Watson, Rainer, & Frolick, 1992; Watson, Watson, Singh, & Holmes, 1995). However, there has been little interest in EIS among Spanish researchers because of the nonexistence of any empirical research on EIS usage in Spain. Given this picture and following the trend manifested in the preceding research lines, this chapter is aimed at the following objectives: (1) to study the EIS usage in Spain and (2) to undertake a comparative analysis between the Spanish situation of EIS and the results obtained in several descriptive studies.

Based upon EIS literature, a questionnaire was constructed. The questionnaires were distributed to 136 Spanish organizations that were using EIS. As a result, 70 usable surveys were attained. This figure is higher than any previous work.

BACKGROUND

There are two terms which are equally used to describe those information systems developed to support top managers (Watson et al., 1991): executive information systems (EIS) and executive support systems (ESS). Rockart and DeLong (1988) suggest that while the first term makes reference to an information supply system, the second refers to a broader scope information system (IS), covering, among others, electronic communications, data analysis and office automation tasks. Although both terms are nowadays considered as synonymous, in practice the first name has prevailed (EIS), absorbing all the above features that used to characterize ESS (Partanen & Savolainen, 1995).

An executive information system can be defined as a computer-based information system designed to provide executives with easy access to internal and external information relevant to their management activities.

EIS differ considerably in scope and purpose. These systems can be developed with a corporation, division or functional action field. On the other hand, the primary purpose of the system will change from one organization to another, and this will also occur with the information it may include. From this perspective, an executive information system should be considered as something as unique as the organization it serves (Watson, Houdeshel, & Rainer, 1997).

Among the main characteristics of such systems the following can be highlighted: (a) focus on the information needs of each executive; (b) extract, filter,
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