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Chapter XVII

A Course on Enterprise Portal Development and Management: Issues, Challenges, and Solutions

Kuanchin Chen, Western Michigan University, USA

ABSTRACT

Enterprise portals present a great opportunity to bridge online applications with the back-end business systems. Although enterprise portals are now widely adopted in the business environment, the literature has been scarce in studies on how an enterprise portal course is better delivered in an information systems curriculum. The goal of this article is to discuss the potential issues and challenges arising from the delivery of such a course, and to propose a comprehensive teaching framework. The framework consists of three teaching modules (i.e., portal basics, portal management, and portal development) to better cover enterprise portals with topics ranging from technical details to business decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Internet applications started to gain popularity in the early 1990s, but many of these were standalone online applications with little reliance on each other. Despite the great benefits realized for this type of applications in the early Internet era, it falls short in today's business where data are integrated from multiple data sources and applications. Sharing of data as well as software components have been the key for multiple applications to work together. This not only saves development efforts, but also allows individual applications to excel in their respective areas. The results of this integrated approach are software suites and online portals that offer services with support from multiple software applications. Portals have been a modern buzz word grown out of business needs, but the literature has been scarce in how to deliver a portal design and management course. This article focuses on the issues involved in teaching portals and therefore offers a framework to enhance the teaching pedagogy.

A recent InfoWorld/TechFlow Portal Pulse Survey (2005) uncovered the current role of portals in the business world. The survey involved 444 respondents from more than 22 industries, of which 62.5% were using portals. Results suggest that the respondents considered that user satisfaction (95%) and operational efficiency (95%) were the most important benefits of enterprise portals. They also wanted a portal project to be highly customizable (94%), in low cost (91%), and faster to implement (86%). In addition, the technology that a portal system supports was considered part of the base line decision (78%). Although the preferences on faster implementation speed of a portal system is noted in the Portal Pulse Survey, it had no significant impact on the real enterprise portal implementation and e-business performance (Yang, Yang, & Wu, 2005). Therefore, decisions to adopt an enterprise portal should not simply focus on the features or functionality of portal systems. Rather, they should incorporate a wide range of business as well as technical factors that are most applicable to the target environment.

Although portals have gained popularity in recent years, there have been issues ranging from the fundamental definition of the word "portal" to the pedagogical options available to implement or extend a portal system. The current issues and challenges to bring such a new subject to the information systems education should be assessed before a comprehensive solution can be provided. The following section outlines the current issues involved in the use and implementation of enterprise portal systems. A section then follows to examine constraints and recommendations in bringing portal education to the information systems curriculum. Future trends are also explored.

PORTALS — CURRENT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Definition of Enterprise Portals

The term "Web portals" was originally coined to describe Web sites of large online application or information providers (often search engine sites) that offer organized access to their online offerings (Smith, 2004). Although this early conceptualization of the term offers some insights about enterprise portals in practice, the literature has not been consistent in its definition (Cloete & Snyman, 2003). "Corporate portal," "enterprise portal," and "busi-

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