

Portals in the Public Sector

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INTRODUCTION

A complete enterprise portal solution should provide all users personalized, convenient, and secure access to everything needed to perform their tasks or job functions. The SAP portal platform provides a single point of access to a variety of information sources in an organization and enables personalization of this content based on the user's classification. Content is provided in the portal client through a standard browser on the end user desktop, without a need to install any additional components.

This article reviews the SAP portal offering and discusses issues around the design and delivery of portal technology. In particular, the public sector environment will be discussed with analysis of the employee portal for the State of Louisiana.

BACKGROUND

Enterprise Portal Introduction

An enterprise portal is a portal intended for integrating information and applications for different user communities. These portals have evolved from solely providing internal company information to tools that can integrate document management, collaboration, knowledge management, and other functions (Hawes, 2000). Enterprise portals can be classified by their intended users with terms such as B2B (business-to-business), B2G (business-to-government), and B2C (business-to-customer). Enterprise portals can also be categorized by functionality, including categories such as information portals, collaboration portals, expertise and knowledge portals, operations portals, etc. However, most

enterprise portals fall under a combination of categories. An enterprise portal is often a packaged software product sold by enterprise resource planning vendors for use in conjunction with their ERP offerings. The more advanced packages also allow integration with information systems other than those offered by the portal vendor. An enterprise portal may be kept strictly behind a corporate intranet or may be available on the internet, but in nearly all cases, authentication is required. A complete enterprise portal conveniently provides all information and applications relevant to a particular user, while restricting access to unauthorized resources in the organization.

SAP Enterprise Portals

The purpose of SAP enterprise portal (SAP EP) is to provide all members of an enterprise's value chain with unified access to the information needed to carry out their daily tasks, collaborate, and make informed decisions. The SAP portal platform is one of the building blocks of SAP NetWeaver into which other components can be integrated. SAP NetWeaver is a comprehensive integration and application platform that integrates people, information, and business processes across organizational and technical boundaries. SAP EP is built upon the iView, the program that displays the portal content. iViews can be grouped into pages and worksets. Access to content and navigation structure is determined by user and group roles, which contain related tasks, services, and information.

Predefined content, offered as business packages, helps make implementation speedier and can lower the costs associated with the integration of existing systems. This content is available for specific industries and functions and is based upon established best practices. SAP EP follows

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Figure 1. Object structure

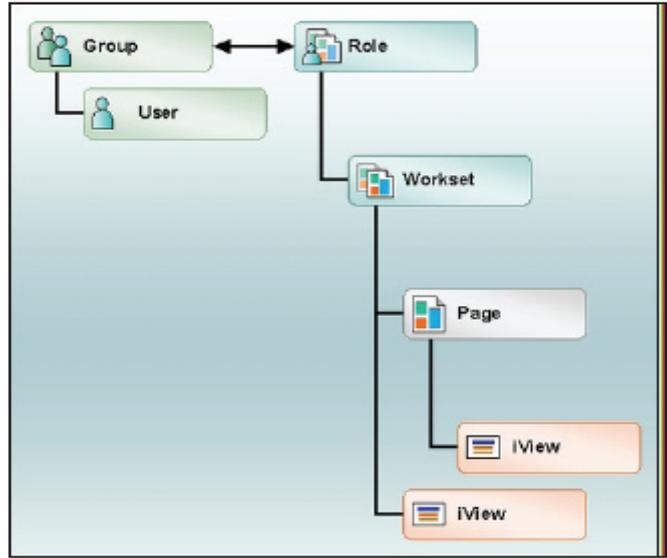
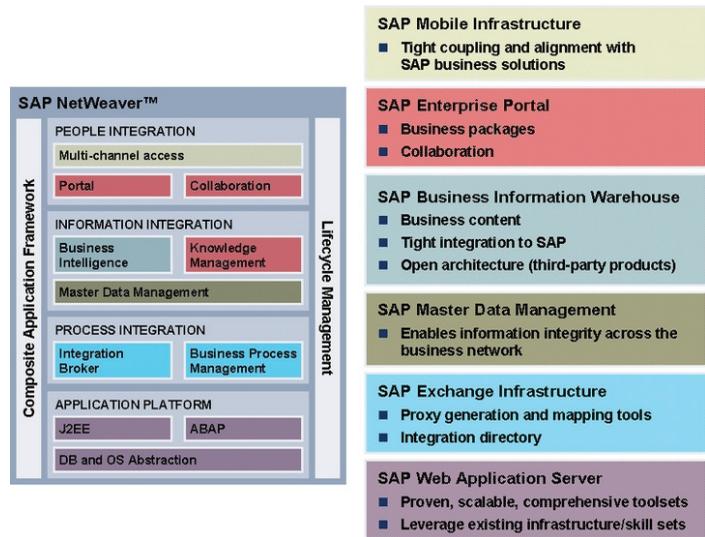


Figure 2. Portal positioning in SAP NetWeaver



open standards and is tightly integrated with other SAP NetWeaver components, so it supports heterogeneous IT landscapes. SAP NetWeaver also provides compatibility with Java, J2EE, and Microsoft .NET.

SAP EP is classified as part of the people integration aspect of SAP NetWeaver, along with its dependent collaboration tools. Collaboration enables both real-time and asynchronous communication between users of the portal through tools such as instant messaging, virtual workspaces, and community calendars. The knowledge management module is considered an Information Integration aspect of SAP NetWeaver and is implemented through the portal. This module serves to provide easy access (via navigation and search tools) to structured and unstructured data from

various resources in order to process data and business information (Pijpers & Jelassi, 2004). This means managing knowledge so it is “accessible to the right people at the right time” (Leonard & Kiron, 2002, p. 13).

PORTALS IN STATE GOVERNMENT: A CASE STUDY

The State of Louisiana portal analysed in this article is one aimed at providing self-services for paid state employees. While modest in scope, this portal serves an example of challenges encountered in implementing such a project. Similar



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