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Chapter III

ERP Education: Hosting, Visiting, and Certifying

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, there have been discussions by computing professionals about how to best respond to developments in the information technology and communications industry. At the same time, there has been a downturn in employment opportunities in this industry (ICT Skills Snapshot, 2004). Recent research also indicates that many of the entry-level positions that graduates traditionally entered have diminished due to the economic downturn and to companies outsourcing positions to off shore companies. This chapter presents the path that the Victoria University (Australia) school of Information Systems took in introducing multiple programs in an endeavour to compliment traditional course delivery and to better connect a University School with ICT industry requirements. The programs included the use of SAP hosting centres for access to ERP systems, conducting an ERP visiting expert teaching delivery model for SAP content and multiple SAP certification programs. The results of these programs as described in this paper show that flexibility in delivery mode and effective merging of ERP curriculum and ERP certification content is crucial to achieving successful programs.

INTRODUCTION

Many universities have committed considerable time and resources in modifying their curriculum to incorporate enterprise resource planning systems (ERP) (Hawking, Shackleton, & Ramp, 2001; Lederer-Antonucci, 1999; Watson & Schneider, 1999). For many universities it has been a struggle even though ERP vendors have developed a number of initiatives to facilitate curriculum development. As companies' ERP system usage has become more strategic in nature, ERP curriculum must evolve to reflect this usage. Information systems curriculum in universities has undergone rapid and continuous change in response to the evolution of industry requirements. Over a period of 40 years, the information systems (IS) discipline has become an essential component in the employment of information technology personnel in business and government organisations. In recent times there have been discussions by IS Professionals how to best respond to developments in the information technology and communications industry (Hawking & McCarthy, 2000). The industry now requires a broad range of skills that support the development, implementation, and maintenance of e-business solutions. A recent Australian report identified skill shortages in security/risk management, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, data warehousing and customer relationship management (CRM) (ICT Skills Snapshot, 2003). At the same time, there has been a downturn in employment opportunities in this industry (ICT Skills Snapshot, 2003. This chapter discusses the evolution of ERP education and the issues it now faces. It provides an example of how one university is addressing the "second wave" of ERP education and the challenges that educators face in preparing students for rapidly developing software environments.

ERP SKILLS AND CURRICULUM APPROACHES

The shortage of ERP related skills in not a recent phenomenon. A survey by Hewitt Associates (1999) found that people with ERP skills were in short supply, and consequently in high demand experiencing rapid changes in their market value. In Australia, an IT Skills Shortage study (ICT Skills Snapshot, 2003) commissioned by the Government, found skill shortages in enterprise wide systems, and more specifically SAP R/3 and PeopleSoft implementation and administration. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in their Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL, 2000) identified information technology specialists with SAP R/3 skills as people who would be encouraged to migrate to Australia.

In accordance with this demand, many universities identified the value of incorporating ERP systems into their curriculum. ERP systems can be used to reinforce many of the concepts covered in the business discipline (Becerra-Fernandez, Murphy, & Simon, 2000; Hawking et al., 2001). The ERP vendors argue that their products incorporate "world's best practice" for many of the business processes they support, making them an ideal teaching tool (Hawking, 1999; Watson & Schneider, 1999), while at the same time increasing the employment prospects of graduates. Universities also realised the importance of providing students with "hands on" experience with particular ERP systems and formed strategic alliances with ERP system vendors to gain access to these systems. The ERP vendor benefited from these alliances by increasing the supply of skilled graduates that can support their