Chapter XVIII

The Status of SAP-Related Education:
Results of a Global Survey

Michael Rosemann, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Amelia A. Maurizio, SAP America, Global Education Alliances, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the most popular enterprise system — SAP — and summarizes the outcomes of a global survey on the status quo of SAP-related education. Based on feedback of 305 lecturers and more than 700 students, it reports on the main factors of enterprise systems education including, critical success factors, alternative hosting models, and students' perceptions. The results show among others an overall increasing interest in advanced SAP solutions and international collaboration, and a high satisfaction with the concept of using application hosting centers. Integrating enterprise systems solutions in the curriculum of not only universities but all types of institutes of higher learning has been a major challenge for nearly ten years. Enterprise systems education is surprisingly well documented in a number of papers on information systems education. However, most publications in this area report on the individual experiences of an institution or an academic.

INTRODUCTION

Enterprise systems (ES) form the core of the application infrastructure of most large organizations. While the initial focus of these solutions was on the integrated support for all intra-organizational processes (logistics, accounting, human resource management), the scope has extended in three directions. First, complexity-reduced versions of those systems now target the market of small and medium-sized organizations. Second, ES now also cover advanced solutions for inter-organizational processes such as customer relationship management (CRM), supplier relationship management (SRM), and supplier chain management (SCM) (Klaus, Rosemann, & Gable, 2000). Third and most recently, the scope of ES extends to the technical integration platform that underlies the landscape of those applications as demonstrated in new ES platforms based on the idea of a service-oriented architecture.

ES education is an area demanding special attention for a number of reasons (Rosemann & Watson, 2002). Students have a strong interest in this subject hoping to gain market driven skills. While this often ensures high attendance, student perceptions and expectations must be managed carefully in that it is not the objective of such initiatives to enhance student skills via training activities. Managing ES is typically comprehensive and complex. The frequency of upgrades and innovations from one software release to the next characterizes the rapidly evolving nature of these IS solutions. Because of the frequency of changes in the functionality within the system, it is often difficult for the lecturer to stay abreast of these changes and to understand the implications of these changes to business practice, as well as research and education. By the time textbooks of satisfying quality are available, there are new system upgrades and innovation cycles to deal with almost making the text book obsolete. ES are used to support the learning of traditional business functions (e.g., accounting, cost management, operations management, human resource management), contemporary business process analysis (e.g., order-to-cash, plan-to-produce, procure-to-pay, hire-to-retire), and advanced technological solutions (e.g., data and knowledge management, systems administration, application development, Web services).

The increasing global implementation of ES since 1993 (Chung & Synder, 1999; Davenport, 1998; Davenport, 2000; Rosemann, 1999) did not initially correspond with a similar integration of ES into the curricula of universities and other institutes of higher learning (Gable, Scott, Erlank, & van Heer, 1997). The consequence was not only a shortage of graduates with a solid understanding of and appreciation for this kind of system, but also a lack of credible academic research on ES (Eder, Maiden, & Missikoff, 1999; Gable, 1998). A main reason for this development has been the tremendous complexity of ES that posed a significant challenge for many institutions. It wasn't until 1997 that ES found their way into the curricula of business, information technology/information systems and engineering schools (Gable & Rosemann, 1999).

This chapter provides a condensed overview about the status quo of ES education using SAP solutions as an example. The chapter is based on a global survey that was conducted between September 2003 and January 2004 involving responses from 305 lecturers and more than 700 students. It updates and extends a previous global survey on the integration of SAP solutions into the curricula from 1999 (Gable & Rosemann, 1999).

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly summarizes previous related work on ES education. Section 3 provides background information in terms of the survey design and participants in this study. The discussion of current practices and experiences with SAP-related education in section 4 forms the core part of this paper. The perceived

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