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Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System Implementation: A case for User participation

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Abstract

The introduction of an information system such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in an organization brings with it changes on how users work. An ERP system cuts across the different functional units of an organization and therefore if not properly managed during its implementation may lead to resistance from the users. The different streams of research on ERP systems have mainly been on ERP adoption, success measurement, and critical success factors (CSFs). There is a paucity of studies on user participation and the contribution of users towards the successful implementation of ERP systems. This paper reviews literature on ERP implementation with an aim of building a case for involving users in this implementation.

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Key terms: Enterprise Resource Planning, ERP systems, ERP implementation, user participation, CSFs.

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1. Introduction

Information Systems (IS) are social systems which deal with the interaction of people and technology. An information system, including an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, is user-interfaced and designed to provide information useful to support strategy, operations, management analysis, and decision-making functions in an organization.

The implementation of an ERP system affects users at various levels of the organization since it cuts across all functional units. These users range from top management to low level users who use the system on their day-to-day operations. Earlier studies on ERP systems that focused on critical success factors, such as Al-Fawaz *et al*. [2]; Esteves *et al*. [12]; Zhang *et al*. [33], have identified user participation and involvement as one the important factors for successful ERP implementation. User participation is defined as the assignments, activities and behaviours that users or their representatives perform during the systems development process (Barki and Hartwick, [7]).

Based on financial resources required, the number of people involved in the process of adoption and the scale of implementation demanded by ERP systems makes them the largest systems that most organizations work with (Chang *et al.* [9]). A number of studies recently conducted, among them Wah [29] and Xue *et al.* [31], report that some ERP system implementation cases have had considerable difficulties. These difficulties have contributed to higher failure rates of ERP systems implementation reported in some studies (such as Yeh *et al.* [32]).

Chang *et al.* [9] state that an enterprise resource planning system is a new management technology. Wu and Wang [30] state that it integrates core corporate activities and diverse functions of the enterprise by incorporating best practices in order to facilitate rapid decision-making, cost reduction, and greater managerial control. Because of this promise of integration and facilitation on rapid decision-making, more organizations and institutions globally are implementing ERP systems (Markus *et al.* [19]). Along with this adoption, there has also been a greater appreciation of the challenges that arise from implementing these complex technologies.

According to Al-Mashari [4], ERP systems are one of the most innovative developments in information technology (IT) of the 1990s. Al-Mashari further asserts that many organizations are now adopting ERP systems making them today's most widespread IT solutions. This world-wide adoption is pegged on the advantages that ERP systems present which include better information sharing within the organization, improved planning and decision quality, smoother coordination between business units resulting in higher efficiency, and quicker response time to customer demands and inquiries.

There are many in the information systems discipline who believe that user participation is necessary for successful systems development. This belief is neither grounded in theory nor substantiated by research data (Mattia and Weistroffer, [21]). This indicates that researchers have not addressed fully the underlying complexity of the concept of user participation. This is indicative of a deficiency in understanding user participation in information systems development as it occurs in organisations.

A quick review of literature addressing ERP systems implementation reveals that more focus has been directed to success or failure including CSFs, success measurement and evaluation of ERP systems. There is a paucity of studies on user participation and the contribution of users towards the successful implementation of ERP systems. This paper seeks to build a case for user participation in ERP systems adoption and implementation by reviewing literature relating to ERP systems.

This paper is organised in 5 sections with the introduction being Section 1. Section 2 presents a background on ERP implementation, past research on ERP implementation and user participation in ERP implementation studies. Section 3 describes the methodology followed in identification, categorization, collecting and reviewing articles. A discussion on the reviewed articles is provided in Section 4. The paper concludes with Section 5.

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