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University Collaboration and ERP Competence Centres - A Golden Era or Golden Handcuffs?

M. Lynne Markus
Claremont College

Guy G. Cable
Queensland University of Technology

Judy Scott
University of Texas at Austin

Iris Vessey
Indiana University

Klaus-Dieter Gronwald
SAP (Schweiz) AG

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Panel: University Collaboration and ERP Competence Centres – A Golden Era or Golden Handcuffs?

Chair: M. Lynne Markus

The Peter F. Drucker Graduate School
of Management
Claremont Graduate University
1021 N. Dartmouth Avenue
Claremont CA 91711

Guy G. Gable

School of Information Systems
Queensland University of Technology
2 George Street
Brisbane 4000 Queensland

Judy Scott

Department of Management Science & Information Systems
The University of Texas at Austin
CBA 5.202
Austin, TX 78712-1175

Iris Vessey

Kelley School of Business
Indiana University
1309 East Tenth Street
Bloomington IN 47405

Klaus-Dieter Gronwald

Director Global Higher Learning Initiative
SAP (Schweiz) AG
Solothurner Str. 121
CH-4600 Olten, Switzerland

I. DESCRIPTION

During 1999, SAP formalised their University Competence Centre (UCC) program, whereby selected, experienced universities around the world will receive several million dollars of computer hardware, software and support from SAP and hardware partners to establish showcase service bureaus in support of ERP-related teaching and research. Through the program, university activity with SAP products will to a large extent shift from in-house installations to the UCCs. Member university staff and students will have Internet access to the most recent versions of SAP's software including New Dimension products (e.g. Business Warehouse, Knowledge Warehouse, Customer Relationship Management, etc.).

While the program suggests compelling potential for cooperation across member universities and globalisation of related curricula, it also implies substantial commitment and increasing SAP control over UCC and member activities and resources. Application Service Provision, Education-by-wire, Industry-University Collaboration, and virtual competence centres for knowledge management/content generation are all manifested in the UCC project. These consequences and implications of participation in the UCC program for member universities, non-members and students will be explored by this panel.

II. PANEL MEMBERS

Lynne Markus will chair the panel and moderate the discussion.

Guy Gable will represent the views of a newly appointed UCC. He initiated and has directed QUT's growing deployment of SAP products in curriculum and research, culminating in the establishment of the Australian SAP University Competence Centre at this university. Guy Gable will review problems, issues and reactions from the Australian University community.

Klaus-Dieter Gronwald will describe the efforts of SAP AG to support universities worldwide in using their system through UCCs. He will explain the evolving program of University Competence Centres, which are the main vehicle of SAP's support for universities. He will also explain SAP's expectations of partner universities using SAP R/3 and of UCCs. The UCC program will be compared with approaches by other ERP-providers and relative advantages and disadvantages discussed. In addition to representing the SAP view, he will present the views of the very first SAP UCC he created in Switzerland.

Judy Scott will represent the views of University of Austin Texas, one of the first SAP R/3 installations for teaching and research worldwide. She will discuss the lessons learned from a three-university ERP-related virtual team collaboration. The number of R/3 systems installed worldwide for teaching and research has grown dramatically over the past two years. Judy will emphasise implications of UCCs for these established university installations.

Iris Vessey is a prospective UCC customer and will present the views of a university that is exploring, but has yet to commit to joining a UCC.

III. PROPOSED TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

M. Lynne Markus will summarise the ERP in teaching and research context and the advent of the UCC program.

In round 1 each panellist presents a brief summary of his/her experience in ERP-related education. In round 2, the participants will address several main discussion questions and will have available to them a series of more specific subordinate questions.

Should all schools and IS programs get involved in ERP education in general and in the SAP UCC program in particular? Why or why not? What are the benefits and drawbacks of a vendor's heavy participation in University education?

How does a UCC make collaboration possible?

How does it encourage collaboration?

Does it in any way discourage collaboration?

Is the collaboration it encourages always beneficial?

What are the benefits and to whom?

Are universities 'forced' to collaborate?

What are the long-term consequences of such collaboration?

Who owns the intellectual property?

Who is best placed to benefit from the IP? SAP?

What alternative future strategies might all of this suggest for SAP?

What might be the medium- and long-term consequences?

What mechanisms might SAP employ to require 'disclosure' from partner universities?

Are UCCs like drugs that universities can become addicted to?