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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ERP SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION OF ENTERPRISES

Abstract: Digital business transformation is a concept without which many things in the 21st century would not look the same. The integration of digital technologies into business processes enables more efficient functioning and the execution of tasks that are part of a business process. In the context of digital business transformation, technologies and tools such as IoT (Internet of Things), cloud computing, big data, artificial intelligence, ERP systems, and many others are used. The focus of this paper is on ERP systems and their role in the context of digital business transformation. ERP systems facilitate easier coordination, monitoring, and optimization of various business processes and their integration into a unified whole. Since ERP systems are centralized, all business processes are fully tracked. This reduces the time spent on various activities within a business process, as all relevant information is available at the right time and in the right place. The implementation of ERP systems brings numerous benefits to a company, one of which is labor cost savings, as the application of an ERP system ensures a reduction in the number of employees. Although the benefits of applying digital technologies in daily business operations are significant, there are also many challenges that companies face during the process of digital business transformation through the application of various technologies, including ERP systems. This paper will first discuss the concept of digital business transformation, followed by a discussion of ERP systems in the context of digital business transformation, where an overview of their opportunities and challenges will be provided. The first part of the paper will utilize the literature review method. The second part defines the concept of an integrated information system, as well as the opportunities and challenges related to the implementation of ERP systems in the context of digital business transformation. In the final part of the paper, a case study example will be used to describe the application of ERP systems in the operations of courier companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will help in understanding both the opportunities and challenges of ERP system implementation.

Keywords: Digital technologies, digital business transformation, ERP systems

1. INTRODUCTION

The progress and development of technologies have an impact on the everyday functioning of humans, and thus on business operations as well. In today's conditions, it is nearly impossible to imagine business operations without the application of modern technologies, which bring numerous opportunities and certain challenges. Automation and digital

transformation of business operations have led to a complete reorganization of business processes, with a focus on improving the quality of products and services, as well as reducing the time required to execute business processes. Before the emergence of digital technologies, business operations were much more complicated, and numerous procedures required significantly more people and time to complete all necessary activities. Errors in various calculations were often made, a situation everyone strives to avoid (Srećko Ilić, Srđan Damjanović, 2024). Digital technologies include numerous technologies used today, some of which are: artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, cloud computing, big data, blockchain, the Internet of Things (IoT) and many other technologies. The focus of this paper is on the opportunities and challenges of integrating ERP systems in the context of digital business transformation. In order for a company to operate successfully in conditions shaped by the so-called "global market," it is concluded that digital transformation of business is no longer an option, but an imperative. Digital transformation of business involves the complete integration of digital technologies into all segments of business operations in order to improve business processes and organizational models, as well as organizational culture. The ERP system represents an integrated information system, or a software platform that integrates all key business processes and functions within an organization into a unified whole. This integration of business processes and functions ensures data centralization and automation of numerous business processes, which ultimately contributes to improving efficiency, productivity, and the quality of business decision-making. In addition to the advantages mentioned, the implementation of an ERP system in the context of digital business transformation brings numerous challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient staff capabilities to work with it, and the high costs of implementing these systems (Marijana Živković, Srđan Maričić, 2023).

The key research question posed in this paper is: "What is the importance of ERP systems for business process execution in express mail operations?" The first part of the paper deals with the literature review in which digital technologies and digital business transformation are defined. The second part defines the concept of an integrated information system and reflects on the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing ERP systems in the context of digital business transformation. The third part describes a case study of the application of an integrated information system in Bosnia and Herzegovina's express postal services regarding the automation of the billing process for express mail services provided.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a literature review as a research method. The research includes scientific papers found in the Google Scholar and ResearchGate databases. Key terms used for the search were ERP systems, digital business transformation, implementation, opportunities, and challenges. Only papers published in scientific journals and conference proceedings were considered for this work. The search results based on the mentioned terms, which included theses (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral dissertations) or papers that were not fully accessible, were not used in the preparation of this work. In addition to the literature review, the third part of the paper analyzes a case study of the integrated information system used in the operations of express postal services in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many authors have written on the topic of ERP systems. Below is a brief overview of some works that describe the significance of ERP system implementation in modern business.

The development of technologies is an ongoing process that happens daily. Digital technologies have caused changes in many areas of human life, including business. Business digital transformation refers to the application of digital technologies across all business areas, which leads to the creation of new business processes, models, software solutions, and systems. The goal of digital transformation for any business entity is to increase revenue, reduce costs, and, among other things, enhance competitive advantage (Schwertner, 2017).

The integration of digital technologies into all business segments brings about fundamental changes in how an organization operates. Organizational changes occur when a company moves from its current state to a new, desired state. The digital technologies most prevalent in the digital transformation process are: artificial intelligence, machine learning, cloud computing, big data, blockchain, IoT, and many other technologies, among which it is crucial, in line with the topic of this work, to pay special attention to integrated information systems—ERP systems (Schwertner, 2017).

Machine learning is based on mathematical and statistical techniques that allow computers to independently acquire knowledge based on prior experience related to data processing. Machine learning requires algorithms developed from empirical data and test data. Algorithms are a set of well-defined steps aimed at solving a particular problem. The goal of machine learning is to enable optimization of results and improve predictions through learning processes. Machine learning is a branch of artificial intelligence and is often confused with deep learning, but these two terms are not synonymous. Deep learning refers to working with neural networks. Artificial intelligence is the broadest term, encompassing machine learning and deep learning (Daniel Paschek, Caius Tudor Luminosu, Anca Draghici, 2017).

Big data refers to massive amounts of data that can be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured. Because of the variety of data types that can be collected, traditional statistical tools are inefficient for processing such large quantities of data, which is why this technology has taken on the task of processing these types of data. In addition to the advantages it brings, challenges arise concerning data sharing, analysis, management, visualization, and data security. This concept is applied in many aspects of business. Among other things, IoT technologies are supported by the big data concept, as smart devices in the IoT system collect vast amounts of data that need to be processed, and big data helps with that (Ahmed Oussous, Fatima-Zahra Benjelloun, Ayoub Ait Lahcen, Samir Belfkih, 2018).

Blockchain technology enables the transmission and storage of data in a decentralized manner, where data is not organized and stored in one place but is distributed across multiple locations. The advantages of blockchain technology in the context of business digital transformation include (Gokhan Kirbac, Berna Tektas, 2021):

- Increased reliability of events and documents
- Improved competitive advantage
- Order tracking
- Process optimization
- Increased productivity
- Digital document manipulation
- Expanded digital collaboration, etc.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the digital technologies that significantly contributes to business digital transformation. In recent years, a great deal of attention has been paid to implementing AI in business activities. Company management stands at a crossroads between exploiting existing technologies or investing in new AI technologies that would provide numerous advantages in future operations. The goal of implementing AI technologies in businesses is to enhance organizational capabilities. AI is one of the most important technologies contributing to the success of business digital transformation, especially in decision-making, where AI plays a key role due to its ability to process vast amounts of collected data. It is impossible to expect a human to process such vast quantities of data within the same time frame, which represents the greatest benefit of applying artificial intelligence in the context of business digital transformation (Holmstrom, 2022).

Cloud computing has changed the way organizations and individuals conduct business. Providers of necessary resources allow users access to servers, data storage, databases, networks, and software required for data processing and analytics. Accessing cloud services requires an internet connection, which compensates for the significant costs that businesses would need to incur to secure the necessary infrastructure without using cloud services. In addition to compensating costs, the administrative aspect of system maintenance is transferred to the service providers. The three service models that cloud enables are: Software as a Service (SaaS), Platform as a Service (PaaS), and Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS). Cloud can be implemented in a company in several ways, including public cloud (implemented and managed by a specific organization), private cloud (implemented and managed within the organization using it), community cloud (resources shared among several organizations, with implementation and management handled by one of the organizations or a third party), and hybrid cloud (a combination of the aforementioned cloud types) (Ana-Gabriela Babucea, Octavian Sirbu, 2023).

IoT refers to a network of smart devices that collect environmental data, store it, and based on the processed data, execute commands, which can be manually assigned or automatically by the system if properly defined. Smart devices, as part of the IoT system, contain sensors that monitor the environment and record any changes. Not only homes, buildings, and cities but also manufacturing plants can be part of an IoT ecosystem, where these technologies can facilitate the digital transformation of business. Of course, IoT technology does not need to be implemented alone for digital transformation to occur; it often integrates with other digital technologies (Ahmed Oussous, Fatima-Zahra Benjelloun, Ayoub Ait Lahcen, Samir Belfkih, 2018). IoT technologies can achieve business process automation, which leads to improved product and service quality. In business processes, IoT technologies ensure increased productivity, reduced production costs, and enhanced accuracy and precision during product and service delivery. IoT systems can also conduct self-checks to detect components that could potentially cause delays in production facilities. In doing so, IoT technologies can alert responsible parties in advance about the situation, enabling corrective actions to prevent production delays or safety and security incidents involving employees (Srećko Ilić, Srđan Damjanović, 2024).

An Integrated Information System – ERP is a set of standard business functions integrated into a unified whole, ensuring the centralization of data and automation of organizational activities, which contributes to increased efficiency, improved business performance, and optimized operations. In ERP systems, all software modules are integrated with a central database, allowing employees and decision-makers to quickly access necessary information. There are several reasons why company management decides to implement an ERP system, and the most significant reasons are (Faisal Mahmood, Abdul Zahid Khan, Rahat H. Bokhari, 2019):

- Improving business performance
- Ensuring organizational growth
- Reducing costs and shortening the time required to perform business processes
- Increasing efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.

4. ERP SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION

The decision to implement an ERP system is not made ad hoc, it follows a series of quantitative analyses. First, it starts with lower-level managers, who make operational decisions, including many employees who are well-acquainted with the working environment. The reason is simple—employees who know the work environment best understand what needs to be done to improve working conditions. Proposals from employees in the production sector, led by their lower-level manager, are passed to middle-level managers, who analyze these suggestions. Middle-level managers make tactical decisions, which are presented to top management, the highest level in the hierarchy. Finally, top management makes the final decision on whether to implement the integrated information system in the company. If the decision is positive, the first step is to identify and define the ERP system to be implemented in the company. This step involves dimensioning the information system according to organizational needs, quantitative and qualitative characteristics, procurement costs, upgrade and update possibilities based on needs, and the system's lifespan (Marijana Živković, Srđan Maričić, 2023).

The second step in implementing an ERP system is defining decision-making criteria and weighing the criteria themselves. Weighing the criteria involves determining the importance of each criterion based on absolute and relative comparisons. Absolute comparison involves comparing each criterion with the starting criterion, while relative comparison involves comparing each criterion with the other criteria. Decision-making criteria primarily include the quality of the information system and the capabilities that the information system offers the organization (Marijana Živković, Srđan Maričić, 2023).

When deciding on the implementation of an ERP system in an organization, it is advisable and should be considered by the decision-maker to explore alternative solutions that would be compatible with the main idea while ensuring that the cost of the alternative solution is acceptable. After successfully completing all the steps, a decision is made to implement new integrated information software. During the decision-making process, there are many limitations that can lead to a wrong decision. The integrated information system being implemented does not have to be complete or final at the time of implementation. Since an ERP system consists of several modules, its implementation can occur in phases, allowing the ERP system to be upgraded and supplemented over time. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for start-up companies with limited financial resources, as they can gradually introduce the ERP system into their business to enhance and automate their operations (Marijana Živković, Srđan Maričić, 2023).

The opportunities an organization has when deciding to implement an integrated information system are (Marijana Živković, Srđan Maričić, 2023):

- Unified IT costs for the organization – while implementing an ERP system initially requires significant financial investment, in the long term, IT costs will be unified, as all costs are directed to a single system. If a company does not use an ERP system, resources are spent on numerous individual systems needed for each functional area in the company.
- System transparency – all data related to the company's operations are stored in a central database, making it easy for management and data users to access.
- Centralization of information – all important information is located in a centralized location.
- Reporting and planning – the company has a unified reporting method for each department.
- Ability to compare and analyze functions in different departments – reducing the amount of communication required to obtain such information.
- Increased efficiency and cost-effectiveness – reducing IT costs, employee training costs, effort and time spent on daily tasks, reducing or eliminating manual operations, and achieving automated processes, allowing employees more time to focus on improving activities that impact the company's revenue.

In addition to the opportunities provided to the organization by the implementation of an ERP system, there are also certain challenges that the organization faces during the implementation of these systems, which include (Marijana Živković, Srđan Maričić, 2023):

- High cost of ERP systems – The amount of money that needs to be allocated in order to secure an ERP system is significant, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises.
- High implementation and maintenance costs of ERP systems – In addition to the costs related to purchasing the ERP system, the implementation costs can also be extremely high, potentially up to four times greater than the purchase costs. In addition to these costs, there are also time and labor costs to train employees to handle the system, as well as costs for programmers, experts, and consultants for ERP systems, as well as hardware costs to ensure the system operates as intended.
- Transition to a new ERP system and adaptation to the new integrated information system – The process of adapting to an ERP system can be very successful, but it can also be a complicated process that can easily get out of control. The adaptation process requires a lot of effort, work, time, and money, so when planning the budget for acquiring and implementing the ERP system, it is necessary to plan for all these activities to prevent the budget from being exceeded and to avoid halting the ERP system implementation.

ERP systems are increasingly being offered as solutions supported by cloud technology and are known as cloud ERP systems. Cloud ERP systems represent application packages that connect various areas and can be customized to meet

the needs of different users. Given the increasing number of suppliers entering the market, the ERP system market itself is estimated to be worth billions of dollars. Cloud ERP systems have a profound impact on organizations because they change the products that are purchased, the way purchases are made, and the buyers themselves. These integrated information systems integrate various business processes and sectors of the organization into a unified whole. This way, the management of the company has the opportunity to access data from all business units. Although cloud ERP systems provide numerous benefits to the entities that use them, the biggest challenge faced by companies that choose to implement such an integrated information system is data security, confidentiality, and ownership. The security of the data handled by the cloud ERP system is the responsibility of the cloud ERP system provider, from which it can be concluded that absolute data security cannot be guaranteed (Vuk Vuković, Nebojša Gagić, Nebojša Taušan, Lazar Raković, Slobodan Marić, 2024).

Opportunities offered to users of cloud ERP systems are (Modamed A. Abd Elmonem, Eman S. Nasr, Mervat H. Geith, 2016):

- Low initial costs – Only access to the cloud via the internet needs to be paid for;
- Low operational costs – The cloud service provider is responsible for delivering and managing cloud services;
- Quick implementation;
- Scalability – Cloud services are flexible, allowing resources to be increased or decreased according to needs;
- Focus on core activities;
- Fast system updates and upgrades;
- Accessibility, mobility, and usability;
- Integration with other cloud services;
- Improved resource access and disaster recovery – Backup, restoration, and recovery after failures and other economically damaging events are enabled;
- Cost transparency;
- Sales automation;
- Security standards;
- Free trial period – Potential clients can try cloud ERP systems before purchase.

Challenges faced by users of cloud ERP systems are (Modamed A. Abd Elmonem, Eman S. Nasr, Mervat H. Geith, 2016):

- Subscription costs for using cloud ERP systems – The services used must be paid periodically as long as they are used;
- Security;
- Limitations in customization and integration;
- Strategic risks – Companies must adhere to defined policies set by the cloud ERP service provider;
- Loss of IT sector expertise – Most of the work is done by the cloud ERP service providers;
- Service Level Agreement issues;
- Sensitivity of information;
- Limited control over the cloud ERP system – Cloud ERP systems are external to the company, while traditional systems are internal;
- Organizational challenges – Involvement of all future users in the implementation process and poor inter-functional communication.

Today, there is a wide variety of ERP software, with different modules and prices. An ERP system can include modules such as: fixed assets, production, employees, company clients, services provided by the company, products manufactured and acquired by the company, product and service sales, book of incoming and outgoing invoices, and many others. Depreciation of fixed assets is a crucial category for any business, and the ERP system facilitates the calculation of depreciation based on the method chosen by the business entity. In order for the depreciation of a fixed asset to be calculated, the asset must be entered into the database. When entering the fixed asset into the database, data about the acquisition, depreciation rate, and the method of depreciation are also entered. Thanks to the ERP system, various reports in PDF format or other formats, depending on the needs related to the depreciation of fixed assets, can be generated (Borislav Drakul, Srđan Damjanović, Predrag Katanić, 2019).
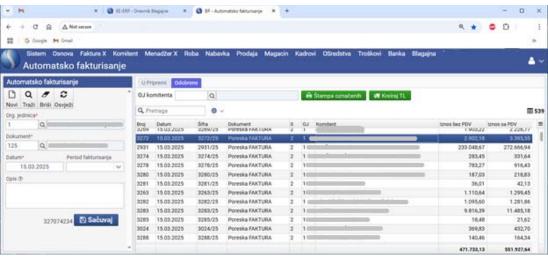
Production is a very complex process in which employees working in production require a lot of information. These pieces of information constantly change depending on the ongoing changes that occur in the company. Information intended for employees must be confidential, so it is necessary to pay attention to access authorization, meaning that only those to whom the information is intended should have access to it. The primary goal is to complete the work quickly and efficiently, with a minimal number of mistakes. Since mistakes in work are inevitable, it is important to determine where they occurred and who is responsible for them to avoid shifting the responsibility for errors to someone who is not at fault. The program allows monitoring of products through the raw materials necessary for their production, as well as the technologies required for their production. In this way, it is possible to track the amount of goods in the warehouse, including raw materials and finished products (Borislav Drakul, Srđan Damjanović, Predrag Katanić, 2018).

5. SINERGIS – INTEGRATED INFORMATION SYSTEM OF EXPRESS COURIERS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA – CASE STUDY

The Integrated Information System "Sinergis" is software used by approximately 70% of courier services in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The system has successfully automated numerous processes using other technologies. Automated processes, such as invoicing for shipment deliveries, have contributed to reducing the time for recording the receipt of shipments, thus increasing data accuracy.

Considering the expansion of numerous online shopping platforms, such as Temu, AliExpress, and other similar platforms, the need for daily delivery of a large number of shipments has arisen. The manual invoicing process would be extremely complicated. Given that around 40,000 shipments are processed daily, it would be nearly impossible to invoice all shipments, considering that invoices are created based on the execution of the delivery service. The solution to this situation was to automate these processes with the help of the integrated information system, and the following text will describe the automatic invoicing process during shipment delivery to the address.

It is important to note that some data has been censored in the images that will be shown below due to the confidentiality of customer information.
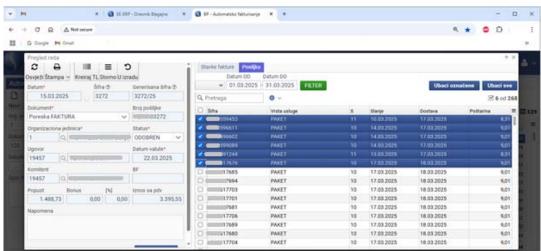

Picture 1: Automatic Invoicing
Source: Integrated information system „Sinergis"

On Picture 1, individual invoicing for each client is displayed. Each of these invoices represents the total amount for all shipments delivered within a specific period. This process could also be performed manually, but it would be an extremely tedious and time-consuming task. For this reason, the integrated information system was developed to speed up the invoicing process for each client using the system.

It is important to note that only shipments for which the courier service has successfully completed the delivery are invoiced.

Each client is entered through the Client drop-down menu, where, in addition to entering new clients, incorrect data for a specific client can be modified or deleted, or an entered client can be completely removed.

Picture 2: Review of Individual Deliveries by a Courier Service

On Picture 2, individual invoices for each courier delivery are displayed. The process by which automatic invoicing is carried out is as follows: when a courier arrives at the recipient's address with a package, they use a mobile application on a smartphone or tablet to record the successful delivery. The delivery information is then stored in a database. The integrated information system retrieves this data and, based on all necessary information, generates an invoice.

All invoice elements are automatically calculated, including amounts with and without VAT. The generated invoice is treated like any other invoice and is suitable for recording in KIF registers. This automation eliminates the need for manual work in creating invoices for each client.

The shipment delivery and invoicing process is as follows:

- The courier arrives at the recipient's address with the shipment.
- If the recipient is not at the address, the mobile application registers that the package was not delivered and will be taken to a local post office. A notification with the package's location is sent via email or phone message.
- If the recipient is present, the package is delivered by scanning the barcode on the shipment or manually entering the tracking number if barcode scanning is not possible.
- After scanning the barcode, the recipient confirms receipt with a signature.
- The successful delivery is recorded in the central database.
- Based on the recorded data, the system retrieves the necessary information to generate an invoice for the shipment delivery.

The invoice is saved in a predefined format (e.g., PDF) and can be printed, recorded in KIF, or electronically stored in the directory where outgoing invoices are tracked.

The automation of invoice management within the ERP system also supports automatic posting to the general ledger, automatic invoice emailing, and automatic invoice-to-shipment conversion for delivery via the courier network in document form.

CONCLUSION

Technological advancement is a process with a clear beginning but no foreseeable end. Innovations in this field occur on a daily basis. In today's business environment, companies no longer have many choices other than to follow technological changes to maintain and improve their operations and market position.

Digital transformation, or the integration of technology into all aspects of business, has become imperative. If companies do not decide to support their operations digitally, it is only a matter of time before they are forced to do so or face the reality that their business has no future. Technology brings both opportunities and challenges; however, when considering the overall impact, the benefits significantly outweigh the drawbacks. While negative effects of technology adoption cannot always be avoided, they can at least be minimized through rational and appropriate use.

The development of technology has created concerns that many jobs will be reduced or even eliminated, leading to fears about how displaced workers will sustain their livelihoods. However, as with every previous technological advancement, when certain jobs become obsolete, a wide range of new job opportunities emerges, often with high demand for skilled workers. This indicates that technological progress encourages continuous education and skill development. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, IoT, machine learning, and integrated information systems create a vast number of new job opportunities necessary for their development and maintenance.

Integrated information systems—ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) systems—have significantly improved the execution of numerous business operations. Implementing an ERP system requires substantial investment, but in the long run, it is highly cost-effective. ERP systems are introduced gradually, allowing companies to improve and digitally transform various business processes step by step. The combination of ERP and cloud technologies has led to the rise of cloud ERP systems, which are becoming increasingly popular.

A case study described in this paper demonstrates how ERP systems can automate numerous business processes that would otherwise be tedious due to their complexity and volume. The ERP system ensures that such processes are accelerated while minimizing errors. After the implementation of the ERP system in the express mail business, tasks that were time-consuming and laborious for the employees who performed them were automated and significantly simplified. The process of automating invoice management within the ERP system enabled automatic posting to the general ledger, automatic sending of invoices by email, and automatic conversion of invoices into shipments for delivery via the courier network in the form of a document. In this way, the probability of errors in the process of creating these important documents and their timely recording was reduced. Like any other technology, ERP systems offer opportunities for business improvement while also presenting challenges that must be overcome. However, access to the right information at the right time and the ability to reduce process execution time motivate companies to embrace and navigate these challenges.

As previously mentioned, maintaining or improving a market position is highly challenging. Consequently, small and medium-sized enterprises are increasingly compelled to adopt digital transformation, a process that requires significant

investment. Initially, there was resistance to innovations and ERP implementation due to a lack of financial resources and IT personnel within companies. Over time, more businesses have embraced digital transformation, and newly established companies are integrating digital technologies from the outset. This leads to the conclusion that digital transformation is no longer an option but a necessity.

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