ERP AS A FUNCTIONAL AREA OF BUSINESS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

An Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system is a packaged business software system that enables a company to manage the efficient and effective use of resources by providing a total, integrated solution for the organization’s information-processing needs. The objectives of the study is to measure the user’s satisfaction on ERP system already implemented in selected organization. A structured questionnaire consisting of variables such as System Quality, Information Quality, Ease of Use, Individual Impact, Organizational Impact and User Satisfaction was used to gather responses from the sample of 210 employees in the cadre of Managers, Engineers and Technicians who are working in ERP system. Based on literature review, Research model was drawn and the researcher made an attempt to validate the model using Partial Least Square- Path Modelling (PLS-PM). The analysis revealed that the quality of ERP system built has a positive impact on the usage behaviour of ERP system. Besides, it is noted that the performance of users and firm performance are being influenced by the quality of ERP system which leads to overall satisfaction of ERP system users in the organization.

Keywords: Enterprise Resource Planning, Organizational Performance, Partial Least Square – Path Modelling (PLS-PM).
BACKGROUND

In today’s challenging economic environment, companies are faced with having to cut costs and improve efficiency within their organizations. Enterprise resource planning (ERP) has become a solution many companies use to integrate internal and external management information across organizations. The purpose is to simplify and expedite information flow to all areas within a business to improve efficiencies. Information availability can play a vital role in monitoring the business. A research done by a consulting firm tells suggests that more than six out of 10 companies (63.8%) firms implement ERP to improve efficiencies. Other reasons for implementation include better integration of systems across multiple locations and standardization of global business operations. Though the end result of any ERP implementation project is to reduce costs and improve time spent on business functions; ERP implementations are lengthy by nature and require due diligence in accurate the documentation of requirements, business process blueprinting and organizational change management. ERP implementation is not a one-time process but a lifelong process as changes need to be accommodated with changing times or business scenarios/needs. ERP software are costly and the return on investment can be measured by the benefits obtained. The direct advantages include improved efficiency, information integration for better decision making faster response time to customer queries etc. The indirect benefits include better corporate image, improved customer satisfaction, improved relations between departments, better transparency, improved communication, etc.

The success of ERP implementation can be measured by various factors. These include the acceptance of the system by the users, the training provided, the knowledge of the end-user, the support extended by the core team in resolving issues, user friendliness of the software, key benefits obtained after implementation, information quality and availability, improvement in the key performance areas, readiness to upgrade for future requirement etc. The benchmark would be to compare with the process improvements or savings in time or money after implementation of ERP.

SAP

SAP AG is a leading ERP vendor. SAP stands for Systems Applications and Products in data Processing. SAP saw the future potential for the delivery of information to the end-user via the PC, so SAP reinvented and developed their product further by developing a business solution for the client/server architecture environment; this became known as R/3 and was released in 1992. In the 1990s SAP and its R/3 solution would go on to become the dominant ERP solution, and also become one of the world’s biggest software houses. SAP R/3 applications are a range of software modules. They can be used either alone or combined to form business solutions. SAP state that their R/3 applications offer comprehensive functionality for all standard business needs within an enterprise. SAP R/3 uses a programming language called advanced business application programming (ABAP). The R stands for real-time and 3 stands for three-step system architecture i.e. Database server, Application server and Graphical User Interface (PC’s user interface).

The following are SAP R3’s application modules: financial accounting, treasury, controlling, enterprise controlling, investment management, production planning, materials management, quality management, project system, human resource management, sales and distribution, and plant maintenance and service management.
NEED FOR ERP

In today’s competitive environment success depends on speed. Speed in product development, speed in assembly/packaging and speed in delivery and service to dealers and customers. To stay on the fast track to success, integration of OEMs, suppliers, dealers, and customers is essential. By implementing an ERP solution, the following benefits can be realized:

- Provides the opportunity to examine and adopt the Best Practices from cross industries
- Increased Accuracy & Elimination of Duplicity
- Increased Information Availability
- Integration of various Functions
- Reduction in Inventory
- Reduction in Cycle Times

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The Problem of the study is to ascertain the advantages obtained by implementing ERP and to study the effectiveness of ERP implemented. Further the study tries to measure any bottlenecks that may exists and suggest measures for improvement.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To critically evaluate the impact of ERP implementation in selected Organization.
- To measure the level of satisfaction among the end-users in ERP package.
- To identify the benefits obtained after implementation of ERP.
- To identify any specific areas of concerns and suggest solutions for the same.

CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH MODEL

![Conceptual Research Model](image-url)

Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model
LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature is undertaken to learn and understand from the experience and knowledge of others who have done worked on similar areas. Publications by various authors helped in identifying the critical success factors that define success in an ERP implementation.

EXPECTED BENEFITS FROM ERP SYSTEMS IMPLEMENTATION

ERPs are designed to help manage organizational resources in an integrated manner. The primary benefits that are expected to result from their implementation are closely related to the level of integration that is promoted across functions in an enterprise. The professional literature has been proactive in determining the types of benefits that companies might anticipate from their ERP systems and to what extent organizations had actually attained those benefits on a post-implementation basis.

Expectations for improved business performance after adoption may result from both operational and strategic benefits. The most significant intangible benefits related to internal integration, improved information and processes, and improved customer service, while tangible benefits related to cost efficiencies in inventory, personnel, procurement and the time needed to close books, as well as improvements in productivity, cash/order management, and overall profitability. In assessing the extent to which they had actually attained those benefits, however, on a post-implementation basis, it was evident that they were not able to improve profitability or lower personnel, inventories, or system maintenance costs as much as they had hoped.

On the other hand, respondents noted better-than-expected results in overall productivity and in order-management cycle time, as well as procurement, on-time delivery, and the ability to close financial cycles.

The tangible and intangible benefits are given below:

- Reduced planning cycle time
- Reduced manufacturing cycle time.
- Improved customer service- Customer satisfaction means meeting or exceeding the customers requirement for product or services. ERP systems have proved that they can produce goods at flexibility of Made to order approach without losing the cost & time benefits of made to order operations means that each customer will get individual attention & feature that he/she wants. Also with the introduction of web enabled ERP systems, the customers can place orders, track the status of order & make payment sitting at home.

Decreased lead time - The time elapsed between placing an order & receiving it is known as lead time. If a stock is not available on time, problems like missing a delivery schedule, losing the customer goodwill due to delayed delivery or losing the customer completely occur. In order to avoid this, large buffer stock is maintained or a high reorder level is maintained which leads to high inventory costs.

Reduced cost: The implementation of ERP eliminates clerical tasks. Hence resources could be better deployed. The control and monitoring facility helps in cost reduction. Manpower
reductions, lesser inventories, lesser quality costs are reduce costs.

**Reduced inventory:** By having a real-time information and visibility, inventory management is made very easier with ERP. Reduced error in ordering, Increased throughput, Increase in sales volume, Improved competitive position, Better coordination between managers, Improved forecasting, Reduced information delay: Information is available at the click of a button, There exists no dependency on others to get the required information.

Improved decision making: Because of the ease of analysis of information of various different sectors of a organization and by ready to use comprehensive overview of the things in general ERP systems greatly help in decision making which becomes often tedious & time consuming otherwise. Information accuracy also assures that the decisions which are made are accurate enough & commercially viable, Streamline the business processes, Improved competitive position,

Improved communication: There exists no chance of hiding of information, Features like SAP Mail available in SAP enhance the communication, allowing users to share information instantly.

**KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS OF ERP IMPLEMENTATION**

Effectiveness of an ERP implementation can be somewhat gauged by Key Performance Metrics/Indicators (KPIs) of business processes. KPIs are benchmarks with quantitative or qualitative values that help an organization assess the success and effectiveness of the processes that have been implemented in the ERP. However it may not be appropriate to expect significant improvement in these values immediately after the implementation. An organization needs to give itself the time to absorb and imbibe the changes brought about in by the ERP to realistically achieve the KPI targets.

Examples of these metrics are as follows:

**Financial Perspective:** The cost savings, budgetary compliance etc.

**Customer Perspective:** The internal and external customers are included. The metrics could be in form of percentage reduction in billing errors, percentage of transactions finished on schedule, percentage increase in the on-time shipments.

**Internal Process Perspective:** These include reducing the operational problems. Process improvements caused due to ERP implementation etc are also covered here.

**Human Resource Perspective:** Examples include the level of user satisfaction, time spent on training, etc.

Business benefits aside, ERP gives an information system three important capabilities: consistency and reliability of data across the organization, streamlined transaction processing, and provides operations level reporting. These capabilities, basic and important as they are, ensure that companies are ready for specific solutions that enhance performance.

Improvements measured as a result of ERP implementation (Study by Aberdeen Group) shows some interesting findings. There has been 20% reduction in operating costs, 18% reduction in
administrative costs, 22% reduction in inventory costs, 17% improvement in on-time shipments, 48% better utilization of resources, 40% reduced time to decision making, 55% reduction/redeployment in headcount and a very good increase in sales and profit.

DOWNSIDES OF ERP

ERP systems are generally very costly in terms of initial investment. They also come with many hidden charges in the form of license fees, upgradation charges, consultation fees, training costs etc. Some of the downsides of ERP systems include

- Dependence on vendor for upgrades
- Expensive customization
- Staff leaving for better salaries

ERP may be a panacea but a panacea after all needs to be administered with finesse and professionalism. The hurdles in the path of a successful ERP implementation in the Indian Mid Market context are:

Expectations from ERP: There is a feeling that ERP is an intelligent wand that solves all business problems. The fact is that it is an application framework which has to be tuned to the organization’s requirement and run by humans who make the decisions.

On the flip side ERP is often classified with an off the shelf accounting package whereas the fact remains that an ERP is an integrated framework that addresses most of the organization’s business functions.

Unstructured Processes: A majority of the mid market segment organizations are closely held businesses where the business processes have evolved over years. Realigning of these business processes and streamlining of data to suite the ERP requirement is a major exercise where the participation of the clients is critical.

Commitment from Management: Any ERP implementation is phased over a period of time. In quite a few cases it has been observed that there is a wane in the interest and commitment of the management during the implementation process. This result is cost and time overrun and in some cases the process gets nipped in the bud.

Cost Benefit Utopia: A common expectation is to get the “skies for nothing”. Although there have been efforts to optimize the total cost of ownership, the fact remains that value which one can expect is proportional to the investment. An imbalance in terms of trying to derive more can lead to skewed delivery in turn the Quality suffers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is considered as the framework or plan for the study that guides as well as helps the data collection and analysis of data. The research design may exploratory, descriptive and experimental for the view of the consumer were collected so as to some strategies. A descriptive
study is to obtain a complete and accurate description of the situation. Descriptive research for the study was based on clear cut objectives and formal questionnaire.

NATURE OF DATA

The sources of primary and secondary data were used for the collection of information for the study. Primary data was collected through questionnaire and secondary data from Articles have been sourced from magazines and journals dealing with current issues in ERP. Internet resources, research publications & text books related to ERP have been a major secondary source for the extraction of the expert’s opinion.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Part I consists of questions seeking information about demographics (such as age, gender, qualification, Designation, Department, Experience, Income Level, Level of SAP User, Level of Computer Literacy and Frequency of SAP usage). The part II includes questions that aim at obtaining details such as System Quality, Information Quality, Ease of Use, Individual Impact, Organizational Impact and User Satisfaction. Most questions placed in the questionnaire required the respondents to assign a score rating on five point Likert scale.

VARIABLES MEASURED

- **Individual Impact**: This is defined as the extent to which the ERP has personally benefited the user in terms of enhancing learning and capabilities in the organizational context.
- **Organizational impact**: measures the extent to which the ERP has contributed to improvement in organizational results and capabilities.
- **Information Quality**: measures the quality of the information outputs of the ERP - the accuracy, timeliness and usefulness of the information.
- **System Quality**: a measure of the technical performance of the ERP artefact in terms of design, robustness recoverability in case of crash etc.
- **Ease of Use**: measures the “degree to which an individual believes that using a particular system would be free of mental and physical effort” (Davis 1993 pp477)

POPULATION & SAMPLE SIZE

The total populations of the study in the selected organisation are the 300. A Sample of 210 employees was drawn. Simple random sampling was adopted. Besides, the study had employed Partial Least Square – Path Modelling. (PLS-PM).

LIMITATIONS

It is possible that this research may not have captured all those factors even though an extensive literature review was conducted and experts in the area were consulted for inputs. This study is limited to the users of ERP in selected organisation. Some of the benefits of ERP implementation cannot be directly measured and are visible only in the long run.
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Reliability & Validity

The table 1 revealed that all the constructs namely System Quality, Information Quality, Ease of Use, Individual Impact, Organizational Impact and User Satisfaction exhibit adequate reliability with internal consistency values 0.76, 0.89, 0.71, 0.84, 0.91 and 0.77 respectively which is greater than an alpha value of 0.60 (Nunnally, J.C., & Berntein, I.H.1994).

Table 1: Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Alpha value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System Quality</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Quality</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of Use</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Impact</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Impact</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Satisfaction</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Convergent validity of all the constructs was examined using the measure of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) that is the average variance shared between a construct and its items (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). A construct with an AVE of over 0.5 is expected to have adequate convergent validity. In some cases, values up to 0.40 of AVE are also considered to be acceptable if they are central to the model (Chin et al 1999 & 2003). The AVE of each of the study constructs is presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Convergent Validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>AVE Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System Quality</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Quality</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of Use</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Impact</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Impact</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Satisfaction</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VALIDATION OF MODEL THROUGH PLS-PM

Table 3: Construct Level correlation of Research Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>System Quality(SQ)</td>
<td>Ease of Use</td>
<td>0.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Information Quality(IQ)</td>
<td>Individual Impact</td>
<td>0.734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Ease of Use(EOU)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>Ease of Use</td>
<td>Organizational Impact</td>
<td>0.649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>Individual Impact(II)</td>
<td>User satisfaction(US)</td>
<td>0.785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>Organizational Impact(OI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.660</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The hypotheses presented were tested using PLS, which provides beta coefficients that can be interpreted in the same manner as the OLS regression coefficients. Using PLS, the study hypotheses were tested by examining the direction, size and significance of the paths from independent variables to dependent variables. Significance of the paths was examined using Bootstrapping technique. The hypothesized model explained a variance of 51.6% in Ease of use, 63.8% in Individual impact, 59.3% in Organizational impact and 43.6% in user satisfaction. The construct level correlation has been presented in table 3. It exhibits that there exists a positive correlation between SQ and EOU (r=0.718), IQ and II (r=0.734), EOU and II (r=0.717), EOU and OI (r=0.649), II and OI (r=0.785), OI and US(r=0.66).

Table 4: Bootstrap Summary of Research Model and Hypothesis Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Entire Sample estimate /beta</th>
<th>Mean of sub samples</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
<th>R-Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>0.718</td>
<td>0.7189</td>
<td>0.0439</td>
<td>16.358</td>
<td>0.516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>0.517</td>
<td>0.5267</td>
<td>0.0688</td>
<td>7.5126</td>
<td>0.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>0.338</td>
<td>0.3301</td>
<td>0.0765</td>
<td>4.4178</td>
<td>0.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.2198</td>
<td>0.0597</td>
<td>3.7193</td>
<td>0.593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>0.595</td>
<td>0.6004</td>
<td>0.0553</td>
<td>10.755</td>
<td>0.593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>0.660</td>
<td>0.6649</td>
<td>0.0388</td>
<td>17.002</td>
<td>0.436</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HYPOTHESES RESULTS

H1: System Quality has significant effect on Ease of Use.
Since the path linking SQ to EOU was found to be significant at 0.05 level (beta=0.718, t=16.358), indicating System Quality (SQ) has significant effect on Ease of Use. This provided support for H1. Also, this finding supported literature review.
**H2: Information Quality has significant effect on Individual Impact.**

The path between IQ and II was significant at 0.05 level (beta=0.517, t=7.513), indicating Information Quality (IQ) has significant effect on Individual Impact. This provides support for H2. So H2 is accepted.

**H3: Ease of Use has significant effect on Individual Impact.**

The path linking EOU to II was significant at 0.05 level (beta=0.338, t=4.418), indicating Ease of Use (EOU) has significant effect on Individual Impact. This provides support for H3. So H3 is accepted.

**H4: Ease of Use has significant effect on Organizational Impact.**

The path linking EOU to OI was insignificant at 0.05 level (beta= 0.222, t=3.719), indicating Ease of Use (EOU) has significant effect on Organizational Impact. This provides support for H4. So H4 is accepted.

**H5: Individual Impact has significant effect on Organizational Impact.**

The path linking II to OI was significant at 0.05 level (beta= 0.595, t=10.755), indicating Individual Impact (II) has significant effect on Organizational Impact. This provides support for H5. So H5 is accepted.

**H6: Organizational Impact has significant effect on User Satisfaction.**

The path linking OI to US was significant at 0.05 level (beta= 0.660, t=17.002), indicating Organizational Impact (OI) has significant effect on User Satisfaction. This provides support for H6. So H6 is accepted.

**BENEFITS REALIZED AFTER IMPLEMENTATION OF SAP**

**Tracking of records** About 80% of the users agree to the point that ERP implementation has made tracking of records easier. With the documents now available online, tracking them is only a matter of few clicks as compared to earlier system of tracking the files or records. Thus the tedious task has been eliminated. This means savings in time as no more productive time will be wasted in locating a record.
Reduction in paper work When the files are available online and the workflow is managed via the ERP system the amount of paper work may come down. 93% of the users agree that there has been reduction in paper work after ERP. The remaining and 7% remained neutral on this aspect. There has been a 40 percentage reduction in paper and stationary.

Enhancement in Decision Making 90% of the users also felt that ERP has enhanced the real time decision making. This can be contributed to the fact that the information is dynamic and readily available.

Improved cooperation between departments Different departments have different objectives and sometimes a conflicting situation may arise that leads to straining of relations. ERP helps in justifying an action. When the actual needs are understood, the differences are meted out and firm gains by improved cooperation between the departments. According to this study, about 84% of the users say that ERP has led to improved cooperation between the departments, while 16% chose to remain neutral on this aspect.

Quality of Information We understand that ERP implementation has improved the accuracy of data. The old system had its own loopholes or demerits. Once a request is given in physical form, there exist very high chances of it being lost. Besides possibility of duplication and manipulation can cause serious consequences. This is eliminated by use of ERP system. About 93% of the users felt that ERP has improved accuracy of information.

User friendliness of SAP The users were quizzed whether the use of SAP is comfortable with respect to data entry, report generation, location of data fields etc. 77% agree on the fact that the screen and usability of features is satisfactory. There were little concerns of the report generated as the format of these do not match the users’ requirement and hence further modification is required before being finally put to use. In few cases the data after being extracted to an excel sheet was reworked or reorganized to get reports in required format.

Individual Impact By using SAP individual benefit of the SAP users has gone up in control over job and in their learning 52.4% of respondents agree that the control on job is much better. 39% of respondents strongly agree to it. 8.6% of respondents remain neutral and felt no changes.

Organisational Impact 75-80% of the SAP users in TAFE agree that their organisation has been improved tremendously in the area finance, customer acquisition and internal business process by implementing SAP.

FINDINGS

It is found that the system quality in terms of database recovery, database administration, system integration and system response greatly influences usage behaviour of employees. It is also
noted that individual impact such as employees learning, task reduction and effective decision making is greatly influenced by the information quality produced by ERP. The individual impact is also affected by the ease of use of ERP systems such as report customization, system feasibility, and error monitoring. The overall impact in terms of finance, customers and internal business process is greatly influenced by ease of use such as report customization, system feasibility, and error monitoring. The individual impact of ERP user such as Employee learning, task reduction and effective decision making makes the positive contribution towards overall impact of the organisation. Finally the overall impact created by ERP greatly affects and smoothly influences the overall user satisfaction of employees.

SUGGESTIONS

The users felt a need for training in some specific areas like report generation and report customization and etc. Besides considering the fact that the youth of today will be the managers of tomorrow, the organization must train its young workforce. There still exist many persons who do not understand the in-depth or background working of ERP- SAP. Since there exist a fear mentality regarding loss of data in case of crash, users are taking hard copy print as back-ups. This is only a fear arising of non-availability of SAP system in case of an enquiry etc. By allowing users a personal backup facility, consumption of paper can be still reduced. Many users felt that the document management system must be integrated into SAP. This will enable more savings in time and reduce the complexity involved. Currently the drawings are available in other software package and not integrated with SAP. To track the training needs, a feedback mechanism can be put to use which will generate the user’s need and areas to focus. It could be a excel sheet with shared access or system based on employee id put up on the intranet portal. Critical review for redeployment and labor reduction can be undertaken so as to derive benefits of automated workflow. In production department user excepts SAP to be in wifi instead of LAN connected since it cause some difficulties in screening the items

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was the evaluation of the ERP implementation at the selected organisation and to find out the improvements that the ERP has brought. In order to achieve this, various aspects were studied. The questionnaire was used to record user responses on various aspects and discussions were held with the users to gain more knowledge. The study reveals that the company was successful in implementation of ERP. The benefits obtained after implementation of ERP justifies the investment made. On the aspect of satisfaction among the users regarding the use of ERP and training, majority of the users are satisfied with the present system. There have been significant improvements in the performance areas after implementation of SAP. The support from the Top Management has played a vital role in successful implementation. The implementation team was given authority to take decisions independently. The effort by the core team has led to successful ERP implementation. It is due to the dedicated effort of the core team that the ERP system has been tweaked to include even the minute details. The ERP implementation has given the company a competitive advantage.
REFERENCES


