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Inter- Firm Information Sharing in Enterprise Resource Planning Systems: a call for timely but limited access to customer information

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Abstract

Current trends in Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) suggest that supply chain management and tight control over scheduling jobs within the supply chain are key tactical planning issues. Modern ERP software packages, in conjunction with the World Wide Web, allow for automated exchange of information within a company and also between two or more companies (i.e., conveyance of customer information to suppliers) of parts and components) for the purposes of effective planning and control. While ease of information exchange between a customer and supplier is increasingly critical to the success of modern-day planning and control efforts, the issue of information security is also a very real concern. Suppliers can benefit from gaining access to a customer's dispatch list and material requirements plan (MRP) in order to determine real-time priority of jobs in queue at various work centers within their own organization. Other customer information, however, should remain secure and unavailable to supplier firms for competitive reasons such as threat of forward integration. This paper presents a previously tested priority-sequencing rule that explicitly considers downstream shop conditions in determining which job to run next. The rule proves to perform well on mean flow time and lateness as well as on variability of these measures. The rule is extended here to incorporate the case where a downstream work center is outside official corporate boundaries. With the call for free exchange of information comes the threat of other, perhaps proprietary, information being accessed by vendors or others outside the official corporate boundaries. The paper will propose information that should be freely exchanged between customers and suppliers and information that should remain secure. Finally, practical measures to manage access to web-enabled ERP information will be proposed.

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