Chapter XLI
Business Process Mobility

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the concept of business process mobility. Mobility in this case refers to the ability of a human resource to work from multiple locations and in non-office environments; business process mobility involves enabling that resource to carry out specific aspects of a business process while mobile. It attempts to explain where and how mobile enabling processes and systems can benefit. The chapter argues the need for redesigning business processes to support mobility instead of simply adding mobile systems. It further attempts to explore the approach for analyzing and redesigning processes to support mobility. The author also hopes to provide an understanding of mobile systems and their role in enterprise mobility. The chapter touches upon the essentials of mobility strategy and concludes by discussing key contents for a business case for mobile enabling business processes.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, advancements in technology, particularly the Internet and electronic commerce, have changed the way people work and live. Technology has helped businesses around the globe to bring about drastic improvements in the how they conduct business, and helped them produce new products and services faster than ever. Some of these products and services have changed the face of industry completely, for instance Internet banking.

Mobile technologies have been at the forefront of all technological developments in recent years. The growing number and use of mobile phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs) is a good indicator of overall potential of mobile applications. Globally, the number of mobile phone users reached 1.5 billion in June 2004 (IT Facts, 2005). Mobile phone sales in

2004 increased by 30% to 674 million units compared to the sales in 2003, while the sales growth in 2003 compared to 2002 was only 20.5%. The increasing sales of mobile phones also include replacements or upgrades. A wide range of mobile devices and applications are available in the market, including laptops, handheld computers, tablet PCs, PDAs, and mobile phones with PDA capabilities. Some of the leading names in PDAs are PalmOne, HP, RIM, and Dell. A number of devices having wireless capability is rapidly increasing. In 2004, 44% of PDA devices offered integrated wireless network support (IT Facts, 2005). Some of the popular mobile applications are personal information management applications such as contacts, calendars, and more recently wireless e-mail. Short Messaging Service, popularly known as SMS or "texting", is still the most widely used mobile application. Convergence of Internet and wireless technologies—also known as "wireless Internet"—is considered the fastest growth area in technology industry. The possibilities offered by this convergence are virtually unlimited. Large-scale use of mobile technologies is expected to have a large impact on business and consumers in the coming years.

This chapter focuses on the use of mobile applications in core business processes across an enterprise. It is an attempt to understand how mobile applications can be used to provide mobility to business processes and extend the philosophy of mobility to build a mobile enterprise.

The following topics will be discussed in detail:

- Evolution of mobile business applications
- The concept of mobile business process
- Motivation for mobile enabling business processes
- Enterprise mobility and enterprise mobile systems
- Redesigning for mobility
- Enterprise mobility strategy
- Business case for mobile enabling

EVOLUTION OF MOBILE BUSINESS APPLICATIONS

The first generation of mobile applications worked in a disconnected or off-line mode: they were synchronised with a desktop computer by physically connecting using a USB or serial port connection. Applications available on compact mobile devices ranged from personal information management (PIM), basic word processing, and spreadsheets, while laptop computers offered almost the same capabilities as desktop computers, but without mobile connectivity. The first generation of applications helped to some extent in improving individual productivity by providing users with the ability to do basic tasks even when away from the workplace. This only worked well with personal information such as contacts and calendars, as data integrity was not at risk.

With the next level of evolution in mobile communications, it became possible to build and implement mobile applications that operate in near real time. The second generation of applications worked in an online, but not always-on mode, and could transfer data in near real time. These applications were basic in functionality due to limitations of mobile connectivity, hardware capability, and data transfers, and relied primarily on wireless application protocol (WAP) and Short Messaging Service. Such applications included checking account balances via mobile phones, receiving alerts/notifications, and checking order status. These applications mostly obtained data from the Internet or a specific server and presented it in a suitable format on mobile devices by means of device-specific user interfaces. Such

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