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Chapter I

Introduction – The Emerging Interaction Society

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Introduction

Recently it has been argued that there is a need for computer science, and related fields of research, to shift its focus from user tasks, their requirements, applications or computing, to issues concerning interaction, mutual awareness, and ubiquity (e.g., Dourish, 2001). Overall, it is a shift from the *Information Society*, with its focus on information, storage and processing of data and transactions, to the *Interaction Society*, with related issues including, e.g., work as *ongoing and fluid networks of connections* (Sproull & Keisler, 1998) interaction overload (Ljungberg & Sørensen, 2000), interaction management (Whittaker et al., 1997), contact management (Whittaker et al., 2002), session management (Edwards, 1994), time management, etc. This general shift has also highlighted the need to acknowledge issues such as attention management in relation to the fluidity of work (e.g., Hudson et al., 2002; Davenport & Beck, 2001).

As acknowledged by Boden (1994), interaction is really the glue that builds up the modern organisation:

> *"The structuring properties of the interaction order in real-time settings such as meetings have enormous (and as yet largely ignored) consequences for the overall structuring of organizations. Caught in a meeting and connected through a series of interactions across time and space are the people, ideas, decisions, and outcomes that make the organization" (Boden, 1994, p.106).*

With *interaction* and its related issues in mind, several empirical studies have been conducted with a specific focus on the characteristics of informal, lightweight, and opportunistic interaction and its implications for design of technology to support interaction (e.g., Whittaker et al., 1994; Wiberg, 2001a; Dahlberg et al., 2000). Together with the issue of *interaction* there is also the issue of *interruptions* and inappropriate times for interaction. Recent empirical work place studies (e.g., Hudson et al., 2002) have, for example, shown that people spend a lot of their time in settings where their ability to respond to incoming interaction requests are very limited.

The overall objective of this book is to provide its audience with a rich overview of this emerging *Interaction Society* enabled by new information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as mobile phones, PDAs, and pagers, and applications such as email and chat clients, instant messaging systems, video conferencing systems, and different kinds of alert- and notification systems.

A New Computer Supported Society is Emerging

A digital layer on top of our traditional society is emerging, i.e., a digital layer to the extent that modern information technology is used almost everywhere in today's society to support all various kinds of new technology-enabled human activities not possible to perform without the technology. Some researchers in the field have characterized the relation between these human activities and the enabling technologies in terms of IT dependencies where new human actions couldn't have been realized without the new technology (e.g., Nordstrom, 2003). One simple example of technology that has fast become widespread and adopted broadly over the whole human population is the mobile phone. With this small device a person can interact with somebody else independent of the geographic distance between them, and independent of their respective