

Chapter 1

ICTs for Business

Enterprise Mobility: Mobile Communications, Mobility and the Creation of Sustainable Value

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ABSTRACT

This chapter puts focus on and relates to three central concepts “sustainability”, “mobility”, and “customer value”. The results from two long-term lines of research and two research programs are combined in the chapter. The first focuses on the effects of the use of new wireless communication and information on organizations in terms of changed “mobility” of people and artifacts within and between organizations. The second research area addressed is that of social and environmental enterprise and business. The chapter has the aim and ambition to contribute to a conceptual discussion on sustainability, mobility, and value. Based on the discussion, the chapter presents a set of propositions to help advance research in this relatively new research field. Short empirical examples are presented, followed by a concluding discussion and a set of propositions for further research.

THE VALUE OF MOBILITY FOR SUSTAINABILITY?

How can the spread and use of mobile phones and wireless services impact business and development in poor and developing countries? Is there a link

between increased *mobility* of business enterprises and citizens in developing countries and economic development of these countries? In addition, if we extend the scope, how can enterprise mobility support issues of environmental sustainability and corporate social responsibility? The problem can also be phrased in theoretical terms: what relation, if any, is there between *mobility*, including the

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value of mobility, and *sustainability* (in broad terms)? The business magazine Forbes (11 Aug 2008) reports a London Business School study that states that every time 10 more people out of 100 start using mobiles, GDP growth rises a half percentage point (p.75).

In this chapter, we approach this and similar observations, but from a business (and user/consumer) perspective, looking at the way business processes supported by wireless information and communication technologies (ICTs) can affect and support sustainability and corporate social responsibility. In “business processes” we include both the entrepreneurial SME, Small and Medium size enterprise, type of business that we can find in developing countries, and the activities of foreign multinational corporations, MNCs in such regions. When talking about environmental sustainability we also extend the geographical scope outside of the developing regions of the world.

This chapter puts focus on and relates to three central concepts “sustainability”, “mobility”, and (customer) “value”. The results from two long-term lines of research and two research programs are combined in the chapter. The first focuses on the effects of the use of new wireless (in combination with wire line) communications and information on organizations in terms of changed work operations, changed modes of organizing, and changed business development. – or decreased – “mobility” of people and artifacts within and between organizations. The second research area addressed is that of social and environmental enterprise and business. This research is focusing on sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and addresses the move towards more ethical, environmental and social sustainability in production and consumption. The discussion in this chapter connects both to the general research studies on sustainability and corporate responsibility conducted at SuRe¹ and to the recently started project that address sustainability and innovation in poor and emerging markets. The latter research project connects to an emerging line of research

on business at the “base of the pyramid”, BoP (c.f. Prahalad & Hart, 2002; Prahalad, 2005, Kandachar & Halme, 2008).

Aim and Structure of the Chapter

The chapter has the aim and ambition to contribute to a conceptual discussion. Following the background we elaborate on three central concepts: sustainability, mobility, and value. Based on this discussion, the aim is also to present a set of propositions to help advance research in this relatively new research field. Short empirical examples are presented, followed in the concluding discussion by a set of propositions for further research.

Two Basic Assumptions

This chapter advances two propositions. *Firstly*, the conceptual framework presented assumes that ‘value’ created by wireless technologies and applications that enhance ‘mobility’ can be connected to ‘sustainability’. Organizations’ and consumers’ ‘mobility problems’, i.e. basically information and communication needs that can be partly solved by the use of wireless solutions, vary. Individual consumers in the same segment and enterprise customers in the same industry or ‘user environment’ will value different solutions to their problems differently. The extent to which a mobile solution solves a customer’s communication and information problem(s) is partly a measure of its value to the customer. The chapter attempts to link user value associated with wireless technology to various aspects of sustainability.

Secondly, linking user value of wireless solutions requires understanding that individual suppliers cannot (and most often do not) create mobile solutions and value in isolation. Value from mobility solutions can only be created in constellations of cooperating actors, in various ‘value constellations’ using terms of Normann and Ramirez (1993). To make this linkage clear we adopt a systemic perspective, connecting to

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