Current mobile computing and the benefits

Technology, Development

Mobile computing has revolutionized the way we work and interact with others. It has enabled a level of productivity that is no longer confined by time or space. Blackberries and other PDAs, wireless capable laptop computers, cellular telephones, and satellite technologies like global positioning systems and satellite radios have all come together to create a technological and communications network into which people are plugged virtually 24/7. The upshot for today's business has been reduced cost brought about by greater productivity and less need for traditional brick-and-mortar office space. " By allowing employees to work from outside the office and providing access to critical information from remote locations, mobile technology holds the promise of greater efficiency, improved customer service and increased productivity" (Zolkos, 2006, para. 2).

As businesses continue to catch on to these potential benefits, the mobile computing industry is expected to continue its strong growth. " A 2005 survey of large enterprises by Forrester Research found that more firms are providing traditional desktop users with laptops, and analyst firm Gartner forecasts that the mobile computing industry is likely to see double-digit growth over the next few years, with nearly 87 million units expected to be sold in 2007" (Tan, 2006, para. 4). This trend is sure to lead to greater innovation in the future that will further boost mobile productivity and work efficiency.

The laptop is arguably the lynchpin of the mobile computing revolution, and " has empowered the workforce to be as efficient as it would be if it was working from the office, but with the convenience and flexibility of being able to connect at multiple locations" (para. 2). With wireless capable laptops

equipped to do everything from sending and receiving faxes to conducting web based multimedia presentations, the need to incur the expense of traditional office space has become harder to justify. Arguments in favor of maintaining a traditional office have shifted from having access to necessary resources and toward the innovation benefits of communicating and interacting with colleagues face-to-face on a regular basis.

Even this benefit of a traditional office environment has come under pressure, however. Most companies surveyed have identified improved worker collaboration as a key reason to move toward mobile technology. There is not a big perception that collaboration and innovation will suffer in the absence of employees working together in the same physical location. " The clear-cut No. 1 business benefit of mobile computing applications is keeping workers connected. In a Baseline survey of 143 information-technology executives, 81% of respondents cited better communication and collaboration among employees as the key advantage of providing such hardware and software, followed by 69% who said increased responsiveness to customers was a benefit" (Spangler, 2006, para. 2).

Another benefit of mobile computing, which happens to cut both ways, is the encroachment of work time into leisure time, and vice versa. This has offered today's workers the flexibility to manage their own schedules, getting their work done at the most convenient times, including evenings after the kids have been bathed and sent off to bed. It has also enabled them to handle personal matters during traditional work hours, allowing for a work/life valance that was rare only a decade ago. " The advent of mobile computing has further blurred the lines between office and home hours, between work

and play" (Balfour, 2004, para. 25). Unfortunately, there is a downside to less distinct work hours versus personal hours for those who are not self disciplined as far as time management. The risk is work creep, whereby the percentage of time spent working becomes ever larger due to its omnipresence.

Blackberry has been a leading factor in fostering this omnipresence of work in many people's daily lives. The device has enjoyed enormous success in the expanding mobile computing industry, and has arguably been a catalyst for the shift from laptop based mobile computing toward handheld devices. " As the device has evolved from an e-mail pager to a combination computer and telephone in a pocket-sized package, the popularity of mobile computing has grown" (Simone, 2004, para. 3). Blackberry has essentially bridged the gap between the inconvenience of carrying clunky laptops everywhere and the convenience of being able to slip a mobile computing device into one's pocket or attach it to one's belt loop and carry it virtually anywhere.

As tools like Blackberry continue to evolve and integrate various functions such as cell phones, pagers, e-mail and web browsing into a single highly portable medium, mobile computing will become an ever more integral part of daily life. Peripheral devices like Bluetooth have literally enabled people to integrate technology into their physical bodies, thus networking people together in bold new ways. These devices have revolutionized interpersonal communication in ways that have altered the way we work and play.

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