# Expert Workshop:
# Mobile Business Outlook 2008-2010

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## ABSTRACT

On September 5th, 2005 twenty two international experts of high caliber met in Berne, Switzerland for the annual Mobile Business Forum. For the first time, an academic research workshop under the aegis of Prof. Dr. Stephanie Teufel, iimt, University of Fribourg / Switzerland has been conducted with the aim to shed some light on the future of mobile businesses. The topic and aim of the gathering was "Mobile Outlook 2008-2010 – How will the mobile communication technology of tomorrow shape our attitude and behavior in business, society and politics". The moderated workshop has been structured according to the real time strategic change (RTSC) method of large group interventions (LGI)[1]. In four rounds of changing group compositions, four final theses haven been elaborated. Later on, they were presented to the conference community of mobile business practitioners. The paper firstly gives a detailed account on how the RTSC-method works in an academic environment of mobile communication experts and secondly presents the finings of the expert workshop.

## THE WORKSHOP EVENT: MOBILE BUSINESS FORUM

The event, on which the expert workshop was based, has been the Mobile Business Forum, held annually in Berne, Switzerland since 2001. (Mobile Business Forum, 2005) The aim of the Forum is to promote the diffusion of mobile business applications in Switzerland. To do this, especially practitioners from providers, application- and hardware developers but also from customers gathered two days in Berne. Day one was, as usually, reserved to present the current innovations and success stories of mobile business solutions to the audience; day two focused on the presentation of concrete tangible applications.

For the first time, in 2005, a research workshop under the aegis of Prof. Dr. Stephanie Teufel, iimt, University of Fribourg / Switzerland has been arranged to complete the program. The procedure and the findings of this research day and the expert workshop conducted within, form the core of the future paper.

## THE PARTICIPANTS: 22 TOP TOPNOTCH MOBILE BUSINESS EXPERTS

An international mix of top mobile business experts from academia, business and politics was assembled. The idea of this composition was to introduce as many perspectives on the topic mobile outlook 2008-2010 as possible. The achieved compilation is impressive for a Swiss mobile conference:

- Dr. Fulvio Caccia, former director of the Swiss regulator (ComCom), CH.
- Prof. Antoine Delley, Ecole d'Ingénieurs, telecommunication engineer, CH.
- Prof. Dr. Reiner Eichenberger, University of Fribourg, member of the Swiss Competition Commission, CH.
- Dr. Antonius P.J. Engbersen, IBM Research Lab, electronics researcher USA/DK.
- Andreas Erat, Patrick S. Merten, Thomas Schlienger, Martin Steinert, iimt, University of Fribourg, research assistant, CH.
- Dr. Kerstin Heuwinkel, Fraunhofer Institut für Software und Systemtechnik, application developer, GER.
- Prof. Dr. Lorenz Hilty, EMPA, materials science and technology research institution, ETHZ, CH.
- Dr. Bruno Messmer, Swisscom Innovations, R&D Swiss incumbent, CH.
- Elmar Mock, Creaholic SA, creativity engineer, CH.
- Prof. Dr. Dres. h.c. Arnold Picot, Ludwig Maximilian Universität, GER.
- Christian Sauter, Excelsis Business Technology, CEO, GER.
- Kasimir Schmid, Orange Communications, corporate development, CH.
- Prof. Dr. Axel Sikora, Berufsakademie Loerrach, university of cooperative education – ICT education, GER.
- Prof. Dr. Stephanie Teufel, iimt, University of Fribourg, director iimt and ordinaria chair of ICT management, CH.
- Peter Trachsel, Federal Finance Department, CH.
- Urs von Arx, Federal Office of Communication, head mobile section, CH.
- Dr. Kurt Weiss, SAP, CH.
- Claudia Wentsch, Microsoft, sales, CH.
- Dr. Felix Wunderer, Deutsche Telekom, head of innovation strategy, GER.

## THE METHOD: REAL TIME STRATEGIC CHANGE (RTSC)

The expert workshop followed the academically approved principles of large group interventions (LGI) or more specifically, the real time strategic change (RTSC) method.

### RTSC Background

Created in 1997 by Robert W. Jacobs, RTSC is a LGI technique such as Open Space and Participative Work Design, but unlike the other, rather principle-based than recipe-based. As such, RTSC is a "meta (beyond, transcending, more comprehensive, at higher state of development) LGI method."(Leith & VISTA Consulting Team, 2005) The six principles of RTSC are: (Jacobs, 1997)

1. Empower and Include
2. Think and Act in Real Time
3. Get Clear on your Preferred Future
4. Reality is the Driver
5. Build and Maintain a Common Understanding
6. Create Community

*Real time strategic change compels organizations to think and act as if the future were now – to engage entire organizations in the strategic thinking and action required to create rapid and sustainable change.* (Leith & VISTA Consulting Team, 2005)

Further readings on the pro and cons of RTSC, experiences with RTSC and the organization of an RTSC event may be found at (Bonsen *et al.*, 2003), (Jacobs & McKeown, 2000), (Reid, 1998) and (Rounda & Jr., 1995).

**RTSC Proceeding at the Workshop**

The RTSC workshop contained 4 rounds of approximately 90 min each. During each round, the participants which were separated into five groups were given similar instructions. The composition of the groups changed from round to round:

- **Round I:** predefined, homogeneous
- **Round II:** predefined heterogonous
- **Round III:** predefined heterogeneous
- **Round IV:** composition by individual choice, depending on the topic

To commence with, the experts were confronted with the overall topic of the workshop "Mobile Outlook 2008-2010 – How will the mobile communication technology of tomorrow shape our attitude and behavior in business, society and politics" as well three key aspects:

- Mobile Technology,
- Economic Impact and
- Social Responsibility.

In each of the four rounds, the experts had to analyse, discuss and synthesize their findings, which were presented at the end of each round to the entire participating group. The aim has been to foster new ideas and generate creativity and competition amongst the groups.

In Round I (strength and weaknesses), the experts were asked to analyze the evolution of the mobile business environment so far, with the aim of uncovering past shortfalls and present problems. Since the groups were homogeneous, depending on the individual background, the usual topics were named: legal/security, technology/network, business case/service diffusion etc. The aim of this round was to focus the participants on the problem and to create a motivated and productive environment.

In Round II (opportunities and threats), the groups, now mixed as to include all backgrounds, were asked to state current mega trends of mobile business taking the timeframe of the topic and the three key aspects mentioned previously as well as the results of Round I into account. All groups had to present their results after the first round; as a consequence the scope of each group focused significantly and the discussion in the different groups started to diverge in terms of proposed mobile trends. Some key word examples are:

- **Group 1:** mobile Google, mobile payment, 10 Mbps mobiles, single purpose vs. multipurpose end devices
- **Group 2:** ambiant intelligence à la Star Trek, multifunctional end devices (phone, photo scanner …) and prioritisation of information
- **Group 3:** connectivity as a commodity, mobile voice automation, all IP convergence and infotainment
- **Group 4:** mobile work – convergence of business and privacy, technical and societal security demands, changing communication behaviour
- **Group 5:** economies of scale and network effect, LEGO economy, nomadic worker – global village, increasing demand of semantics, ubiquitous computing

Round III, again mixed in terms of group composition, forced the participants to choose a maximum of three trends and reformulate their ideas into basic theses on the mobile business outlook. After the presentation of each group, 4 theses were chosen democratically by all participants.

In the last Round IV, each participant chose the thesis he/she wanted to further discuss and elaborate. Consequently, the group composition was voluntary.

The entire event was professionally moderated by P. Krummenacher from «frischer wind» whose aim was to generate as much creative force as possible – he prevented the experts from sinking back into and hiding behind traditional roles and paradigms.

**RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The four main theses topics, which prevailed the last round were, in short version:

1. **Emergence of a digital personal life assistant. People will demand a system that supports them in any life-situation.** This mobile system will be: intelligent, interactive, personalized, multifunctional, and always connected. It will complement the life and the identity of the users.
2. **Knowledge and education will emerge as the key personal and economical success factors.** Mobile technology will induce changes in the economic processes and optimize physical logistics while introducing more flexibility and increasing productivity (virtual processes). The resulting social problems must be solved by market forces which will demand industrial societies to change into knowledge societies.
3. **The new life work (un-)balance, due to mobile flexibility, poses new challenges on employers.** Mobile technologies will further alter the social behavior of employees and employers. As a result of the increasing flexibility, existing archetypes will be diluted, inducing social isolation and a new work/life (un)balance. Employers have to counter this evolution with new solutions and procedures, e.g. an increasing output orientation rather than input based gratification.
4. **The evolving transparent society forces us to reform the customer protection.** Information will be available anytime and anywhere. In combination with almost unlimited memory capacity, a transparent society will evolve allowing companies to "target" customers in new and possibly intruding way (e.g. mobile voice spam). A reformed and strengthened customer protection is mandatory.

These four theses were later on presented to the large plenum of the conference participants, creating the desired spirit for concentrating two days on mobile applications, technology and business.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

The academic workshop has been considered a striking success by both, participants and the larger public. Especially the open and constructive discussions between experts from heterogeneous fields have proven very fruitful. This heterogeneity of individual backgrounds, combined with an impartial moderator created the surprisingly broad discussion spectrum. In this sense, the RTSC method proved to be feasible, since it structured and focused the workshop – creating fast and good results in each round - while keeping the minds and thoughts open to other ideas. Based on this, also contradictory opinions emerged, were forcefully defended and if they had proven their worth, embraced.

On the downside it must be mentioned, that an eight hour timeframe is too limited to conduct such a workshop. All participants voluntarily worked during break times and asked for a continuation to further elaborate the four theses. The authors recommend to plan at least two days for a similar RTSC undertaking.

If managers and/or researchers are interested in a mind opening and fruitful discussion on exploratory questions and future trends, the RTSC method has proven its feasibility. The results and shifting tides have been sometimes surprising but never worthless.

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## ENDNOTES

[1]    JEL-Classification: L86, L88, L96.

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