
Editorial

Marco Cantamessa and Emilio Paolucci

Politecnico di Torino,
Corso Duca degli Abruzzi 24,
10129 Torino, Italy
E-mail: marco.cantamessa@polito.it
E-mail: emilio.paolucci@polito.it

Biographical notes: Marco Cantamessa is an Associate Professor at the Politecnico di Torino, Italy, where he teaches Management of Innovation and Product Development. His research interests are mainly in the field of product and service development. He is author or co-author of more than 70 scientific papers, of which 18 have appeared in international refereed journals. He has served on the Management Board of The Design Society, an international scholarly organisation and on the Scientific Boards of a number of international conferences.

Emilio Paolucci is an Associate Professor at the Politecnico di Torino, Italy, where he teaches 'Information Systems' and 'Organizational Design'. His research areas include the relationship between ICT and organisational models, ICT governance and its effects on productivity, patterns of ICT adoption in the Information Society and digital divide dynamics; he is involved in national and international research programs, funded by public institutions and private companies. His academic interests also concern topics related to entrepreneurship and the creation of new hi-tech companies in the ICT field. He has published many articles in international journals.

The topics of e-business and e-government are generally viewed by scholars as two phenomena that are quite similar in nature, yet occur independently of one another.

Existing research is mainly focused on determining aspects like the economic impact and the effects on competition for e-business and – in the case of e-government – on assessing the emergence of new services for citizens, and of new forms of participation, on political decision. Such sharp borders often miss consideration of how the pervasiveness of Information and Communication Technologies is contributing to the reinforcement and increase of connections and interdependencies between businesses, public institutions and citizens who form the economic fabric of any given region or nation. For example, projects aimed at creating a communication network among municipalities and other public institutions have had positive effects on the availability of the high speed infrastructure that is needed for the mature adoption of e-business. In the same way, the growing use of ICT in the workplace is going to increase the number of citizens who are able to access the online services offered by public institutions. Finally, e-government activities often mix and interact with e-business when public bodies act as either customers or as service providers, though this role is played in a peculiar way, due to their very nature of agents who are non-profit-making and societal

welfare-maximising. Failing to acknowledge these positive externalities may slow down the diffusion process of e-business and e-government, thus delaying the benefits for society as a whole. From the side of academia, the separation between research in e-business and e-government can limit the occurrence of important knowledge spillovers from which both fields of research could greatly benefit.

The study of the complementarities between e-business and e-government requires adopting approaches capable of tackling the complexity generated by the continuous interaction of aspects related to technology, management and public policy. This special issue intends to be a first step in the direction of stimulating work of this kind. The papers published in this special issue tackle some interesting aspects about spillovers and complementary investments in these two fields. The authors concentrate their empirical and theoretical contributions around three main themes: the role and impact of public-private partnerships, the dynamics of diffusion of ICT-related services, and frameworks for the assessment of the degree of integration of front-end interfaces used by corporations and public administrations.

The first topic is covered by two studies by Langford and Roy, Kumar and Peng who focus on the relationships between private sector vendors of IT solutions and public e-government service providers. Such relationships have economic and technology-related motivations and are more and more playing a strategic role for both parties. In this framework, the service transformation dimension that is characterising e-government activities has been found to be an important driver of relational activity between public and private sector organisations.

The second set of papers by Ferro and Weixin has focused its attention on the diffusion dynamics of ICT-related services (and especially broadband access and e-commerce). The situations analysed in both studies show a significant level of immaturity of demand and, therefore, that diffusion phenomena still are in their infancy. In the case of broadband, these papers show how a pivotal role may be played by policies aimed at fostering either a higher level of competition among telecommunication operators, or by supporting demand (for instance, by promoting telework practices), thereby enabling economies of scale.

Finally, the last group of contributions concentrates on assessing how private corporations and public administrations have adopted Information and Communication Technologies to create virtual front-end interfaces. Findings by Premkumar, Ho, Chakraborty, Soto-Acosta and Meroño-Cerdan show that the lack of profit orientation, that is typical of the public sector, leads to the delivery of information services aimed at building a 'community' dimension, which is clearly different from private corporations' focus on commerce.

We hope that the papers in this special issue will be seen as starting points for more mature and robust research activity on the topic of interaction between e-business and e-government. Further advances are needed at both the empirical and theoretical levels. Concerning the former, the papers in the special issue do present fresh evidence about recent phenomena that have not yet been studied in depth. However, on reading them it becomes clear that it is necessary to pursue further research for collecting high-quality and comprehensive information, enabling generalisations and comparisons across different countries. Concerning the latter, while these papers present a significant amount of empirical evidence, it is at the same time quite clear that the findings need to be supported by a robust theoretical basis. This implies that the theoretical foundations that are established in the field of business studies (and e-business in particular) will need to

be extended in order to deal with the peculiar nature of e-government operations. The economic relevance of the topic and the need for further research make us confident that more empirical and theoretical work will be seen in the next few years.

As we complete this special issue, it is our privilege and distinct pleasure to thank our readers, authors, reviewers, and the members of the Editorial Board of the Journal.