A coevolutionary framework for engaging trading partners in interorganisational e-commerce

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Information Technology, University of Technology Sydney.

2006
Statement of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Bruce McCabe, December 2006
Acknowledgements

The following people must be acknowledged for their contribution to this thesis. The work is as much theirs as mine.

First and foremost, my thanks go to my wife Jane, for her patience, good humour and encouragement throughout the journey, and to my children, Sean and Elise, for their endless inspiration.

Thanks must go to my supervisors, Dr. Robert Kay, Professor Jim Underwood and Professor Louise Young, for not only putting up with me and doing all the things that good supervisors should do, but also be being so generous with their friendship and guidance, and for introducing me to worlds I never knew existed.

Lastly, my thanks go to all the managers, in so many organisations and industries, who gave up hours of their valuable time to be interviewed. Without their generosity and goodwill this research could never have been completed.
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Abstract

The objective of this research was to produce a better understanding of the way trading partners engage in interorganisational e-commerce systems in order to help practitioners.

An interpretive philosophical approach was taken via an empirical study of ten e-commerce interorganisational systems, spanning a variety of technological approaches, trading scenarios and industry settings. Using semi-structured interviews, qualitative data were collected and a thematic analysis undertaken. The results suggested coevolutionary theory as a useful perspective for understanding the context. An in-depth case study was then used to build a detailed coevolutionary interpretation for the history of change, technological development and engagement in a single system.

The resulting framework incorporates social and technological components in a three level coevolutionary hierarchy. The e-commerce system is reconceptualised as a socio-technical trading system, and the move to Internet based trading operations as part of the ongoing evolution of that system. Under this interpretation interdependencies and coevolutionary effects, both between components and between levels, lie at the heart of understanding why trading partners are successfully or unsuccessfully engaged in e-commerce. Successful engagement is characterised by positive feedback loops, and failure is characterised by negative feedback loops and whole-part coevolutionary competition.