

THE E-BUSINESS RESEARCH NETWORK
SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE DUTCH PILOT SURVEY
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BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA AND CLASSIFICATIONS		
Abstract	<p>A project has been started with the intention to develop an E-Business Research Network on E-business related research in business and management. The initiative has been taken in co-operation between Erasmus University and UMIST to develop a project in which the first stage concerns the development of a database of researchers and their activities in e-business related research in business and management. The next stage will be to investigate the needs in companies in relation to e-business. It is hoped that an Internet-based database will stimulate interaction and communication between the supply and demand sides of e-business related research. This assumption is based on our previous research in Quality Management conducted in the early to mid 1990's.</p> <p>This paper describes the project and also summarises the results of the first pilot questionnaire based on responses from researchers at universities in The Netherlands.</p>	
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	5546-5548.6	Office Organization and Management
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Journal of Economic Literature (JEL)	M	Business Administration and Business Economics
	M 10	Business Administration: general
	L 2	Firm Objectives, Organization and Behaviour
	M 19	Business Administration: Other
European Business Schools Library Group (EBSLG)	85 A	Business General
	100B	Organization Theory (general)
	240 B	Information Systems Management
	75 D	University's and MBA's
Gemeenschappelijke Onderwerpsontsluiting (GOO)		
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“The E-Business Research Network”

Summary of the results of the Dutch pilot survey

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Abstract

A project has been started with the intention to develop an E-Business Research Network on E-business related research in business and management. The initiative has been taken in co-operation between Erasmus University and UMIST to develop a project in which the first stage concerns the development of a database of researchers and their activities in e-business related research in business and management. The next stage will be to investigate the needs in companies in relation to e-business. It is hoped that an Internet-based database will stimulate interaction and communication between the supply and demand sides of e-business related research. This assumption is based on our previous research in Quality Management conducted in the early to mid 1990's.

This paper describes the project and also summarises the results of the first pilot questionnaire based on responses from researchers at universities in The Netherlands.

Introduction

E-Business is often presented as an all embracing phenomenon [e.g. Symonds, 1999; Deise et al, 2000]. Its influence on Business and Management research is expected by some [e.g. Gammack and Poon, 2001; Harmon et al, 2001, p.203] to spread across traditional academic disciplines. Therefore, we believe that there is a need to develop a community of researchers interested in aspects of this field and are willing to take part in the cross fertilisation of ideas and experiences across disciplines.

The methodology involves those researchers interested in the possible influence of E-Business on their specialism completing a 19-question questionnaire. By so doing they will help establish this interactive network of like-minded scholars from many different basic disciplines. The questionnaire is available on the Internet:
<<http://www.few.eur.nl/few/people/vanderwiele/questionnaire.htm>> .

The E-Business Research Network will consist initially of all those who have completed the questionnaire. Each respondent will have open access to the survey results, which will be made available via the Internet. In this way they will be able to identify other teachers and researchers whose work may be of particular interest to them. Firstly, directly from the database. Secondly, through access to our analysis showing which items in relation to e-business related research in business and management cluster together- and which respondents score high on which particular cluster.

Once colleagues have been identified who may be of potential interest, it is possible to study their work in some detail since respondents are asked to include details of their relevant publications.

We have rejected all offers of commercial sponsorship for this project. From our discussions it is clear that potential sponsors would not have allowed open access to the results. We feel this is essential to our aims. So far, we are supporting this survey from our own funds.

The paper opens by describing the methodology and organisation of the project and its proposed stages of activities. It then goes on to outline the main findings from the pilot study of 30 respondents in The Netherlands.

‘E-Business Research Network’ project

The project is organised in the following way. There is a project team, which is responsible for the operational aspects. This consists of two researchers [Van der Wiele and Wilson] and a research assistant [Van Iwaarden] who is supporting the activities. There is an advisory board, which currently consists of Professor Williams [EUR] and Professor Dale [MSM] which monitors the progress and provides advice to the project team. There is also the

intention to set up a steering group which comprises members of the project team and the advisory board, and others selected as contact persons and co-ordinators for specific regions in Europe or other areas [Australia, USA etc].

The project team meets on a regular basis to develop and follow the activities that are put in place and the advisory board meets at least twice a year with the project team. It is also planned the complete steering group should meet twice per year.

Project stages

The project will have a lifetime of at least 4 years. Three main areas have to be developed: [a] description of the researchers at universities and their research activities, [b] description of the needs of companies in relation to e-business related research, and [c] building an internet based database that stimulates interaction and communication in the area of e-business related research in business and management. The following stages have so far been identified in the project:

1. Development of a questionnaire aimed at researchers at universities. The questionnaire has been developed and a pilot study conducted in the period June/August 2001 in The Netherlands. The results of the pilot study have been analysed, and improvements made to the questionnaire. It is the pilot study, which is the focus of this paper.
2. Commencing in October 2001, the questionnaire will be distributed to researchers at universities in other European countries.
3. Expanding the mailing list for researchers in e-business research in business and management to Australia and North America [2002/2003]. In this way we hope to build up a global network of interested parties.
4. Development of a questionnaire aimed at companies interested in e-business related research in business and management, and conduct a pilot study [February to June 2002]. Evaluation of the results and make improvements to the questionnaire.
5. Distributing the company questionnaire to companies in Europe [2003].
6. Expanding the mailing list of companies to Australia and North America [2003/2004].
7. Development of the Internet-based database. Starting with the information of the pilot on researchers at Dutch universities a database has been constructed. This will be expanded when more information becomes available. Information on the needs of companies will

then be added to the Internet-based database, first using the pilot data, and later using data that will come available from the larger scale survey.

The information on which the database has been constructed is derived from the questionnaire data. The database covers qualitative information [names of researchers, their publications, the type of their research activities, best publications, best conferences in the field etc] and also quantitative information [extent to which specific aspects of e-business related research are part of their activities; and the extent to which specific e-business aspects form part of researchers activities].

Pilot questionnaire on e-business related research at universities in The Netherlands

Development of the questionnaire

A questionnaire has been developed covering the following items:

- Information about the researcher [name, addresses, university]
- Information about the researchers research [publications, guidance of master and Ph.D. thesis, conference presentations]
- Information about the type of research activities. A list of 77 items [e.g. covering as much as possible areas like finance, marketing, organisation & management, cost accounting, information management] related to e-business research in business and management has been included without any preliminary structuring or ordering. The intention is to develop a typology based on factor analysis on the scores that indicate the extent to which each item is part of the researcher's e-business related research.
- Perceptions of the researchers on e-business related research developments in the future.
- Perceptions of the researchers in relation to the importance and relevance of an e-business research network.
- The views of researchers on the most important publications, conferences, and web sites in relation to e-business related research in business and management.

The questionnaire has been tested and discussed with experts in the field from various disciplines [marketing, business and management, finance, accounting, operational research, information management, information technology] in order to cover the items that are relevant to all disciplines involved in e-business related research.

Mailing list

The first version of the questionnaire was distributed to 168 researchers in The Netherlands.

The mailing list has been built up by making use of various information sources:

- Names of academic researchers through publications in Organisation & Management journals or in E-business related journals or available books;
- Names of researchers through conference programmes;
- Through internet web sites of universities [some universities provide overviews of academic researchers and their research activities or interests];
- By asking colleagues who are active in the field of e-business related research to identify academics
- By contacting the Deans of faculties, and asking them to forward invitations to researchers of whom they know that they are active in this area.

The questionnaire was first sent out electronically and a few days later also in hard copy; three weeks later a reminder was posted. The non-responses were followed up through telephone contact in order to identify what were the major reasons for non-response. These include e.g. no interest; not involved in e-business related research; questionnaire too long; no time to fill out the questionnaire.

Table 1 summarises the data on the response.

Table 1: Questionnaires mailing and responses

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Total sample [mailing list]	168	100.0
Received electronically	21	12.5
Received in hard copy format	6	3.6
Received after reminder	3	1.8
Total response [measured at 4 September 2001]	30	17.9

It has been concluded from the pilot that with the expansion of the project to Europe and further, only electronically questionnaires will be used. Hard copies make the project more expensive and only provoke a small additional response.

Qualitative data

The questionnaire covers a number of issues related to: [a] important conferences in the field of e-business related research in business and management [e.g. ICIS, USA; ECIS, Europe; Bled Electronic Commerce Conferences, Slovenia]; [b] important journals, books, and other information resources [e.g. Cox et al, 2001; Barnes and Hunt, 2001]; and [c] information about masters thesis and dissertations supervised by the respondent which are related to e-business research.

This information will be made available to the participants of the network through the Internet based database, and will be updated every time new respondents add their information to the database. This will give a ranking of conferences and available sources, but it will also highlight material and sources that otherwise might have been missed.

Quantitative information/Descriptives of the pilot data

The main part of the questionnaire is a list of 77 aspects of Business and Management. The list is deliberately not structured into pre-determined categories in order to allow the structure to emerge from statistical analysis. Respondents have been asked to indicate to what degree they think that the aspects of Business and Management are currently or, in the future, will be influenced by the Internet. In Table 2 the top ten aspects of Business and Management are given with the score on a five point scale from no influence [=1] to totally changed [=5]. In Table 3, the bottom ten aspects are given.

Table 2: Top 10 aspects of Business and Management that are or will be strongest influenced by the Internet.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
One to one marketing	26	2	5	4.19	0.80
Virtual organisations	25	2	5	4.08	0.95
Media choice	26	2	5	4.00	0.85
Globalisation	26	3	5	3.96	0.66
Customer relationship marketing	25	2	5	3.96	0.79
Marketing management	26	2	5	3.92	0.80
Sharing of information	25	2	5	3.92	0.91
Market research	25	2	5	3.88	0.97
Information processing technologies	25	2	5	3.84	0.75
Networks and communities	25	2	5	3.80	1.00
5=strongest influence by the Internet 1= weakest influence by the Internet					

Table 3: Bottom 10 aspects of Business and Management that will only weakly be influenced by the Internet.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Capital asset pricing	26	1	4	2.65	1.06
Corporate social responsibility	26	1	5	2.62	1.13
Return on opportunity	25	1	4	2.60	0.91
Human resources management	26	1	5	2.58	1.06
Asset optimisation	26	1	5	2.54	1.17
Capital acquisition	26	1	4	2.50	1.03
Environmental management	26	1	5	2.46	1.03
Leadership	25	1	5	2.40	0.91
Debt management	25	1	4	2.16	0.85
Physical capital	26	1	4	2.08	0.84
5=strongest influence by the Internet 1= weakest influence by the Internet					

From Tables 2 and 3 it can be seen that aspects related to marketing and to information are or are expected to be influenced by the Internet most strongly, whilst the Internet is only expected to have a minimum influence on financial and leadership issues. This might have been biased because of the small sample size of the sample. In the large-scale survey it will be important to ensure there are researchers in these areas to check out this finding.

Overall the scores for the 77 aspects of Business and Management are relatively high, indicating that respondents expect the Internet to exert a strong influence on their research in Business and Management.

The same list of aspects of Business and Management was used to investigate the research fields of the respondents. Respondents were asked to indicate to what degree the aspects directly or indirectly formed part of their current research activities, on a five point scale from no part of research activities [=1] to all research activities [=5]. The top ten and bottom ten aspects are summarised in Tables 4 and 5. Overall the scores are rather low, indicating that respondents don't specialise on specific issues but have a broader research focus. In the top ten aspects we find: organisational design, virtual organisations and information management; in the bottom ten we find: financial issues, accounting and budgeting issues. The same comments made above on the small sample size also apply to this data.

Table 4: Top 10 aspects of Business and Management that are part of respondents research activities

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organisational design & structure	26	1	5	2.58	1.39
Virtual organisations	26	1	5	2.54	1.27
Management information systems	26	1	5	2.54	1.21
Sharing of information	26	1	5	2.54	1.45
Knowledge management	26	1	5	2.54	1.45
Business models	26	1	5	2.42	1.17
Networks and communities	25	1	5	2.32	1.18
Strategic management	26	1	5	2.31	1.23
Marketing management	26	1	5	2.31	1.46
Innovation management	25	1	5	2.28	1.37

Table 5: Bottom 10 aspects of Business and Management that are part of respondents research activities

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Physical capital	25	1	2	1.12	0.33
Asset management	26	1	3	1.12	0.43
Accounting systems	26	1	2	1.12	0.33
Risk management	25	1	2	1.08	0.28
Capital acquisition	25	1	2	1.08	0.28
Budgeting	26	1	2	1.08	0.27
Debt management	26	1	2	1.04	0.20
Initial public offerings	26	1	2	1.04	0.20
Capital asset pricing	25	1	1	1.00	0.00
Taxation issues	26	1	1	1.00	0.00

Respondents were also asked to indicate to what degree 26 pre defined specific e-business aspects formed part of their current research activities. The full list of e-business aspects is ranked in Table 6 according to scores on a five point scale from no part of research activities [=1] to all research activities [=5]. Overall we see relatively low scores for all specific e-business aspects, indicating that at this moment many researchers in business and management are not yet intensively involved in e-business research. However, respondents also indicate that at this point in time they spend on average 57% of their time on e-business related research; and they expect this percentage will grow to 62% in five years time. At the top of the list we see aspects like e-marketing, B2B, B2C, e-business models and e-learning, whilst at the bottom there are aspects of portals, operating systems architecture, e-HRM and B2E.

Table 6: Ranking of specific E-business aspects to the extent that they are part of research activities in the area of business and management

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Electronic marketing	27	1	5	2.70	1.59
B2C [business to consumer]	26	1	5	2.69	1.35
B2B [business to business]	27	1	5	2.48	1.25
e-business models	27	1	5	2.48	1.31
e-learning	27	1	5	2.26	1.48
Web site design/usability	27	1	5	2.11	1.37
Information and data management	27	1	5	2.07	1.04
Intelligent agents	27	1	5	2.04	1.45
B2B marketplaces	27	1	5	2.00	1.27
e-procurement	26	1	5	1.88	1.28
Data warehousing	27	1	5	1.85	1.06
Corporate intranets	27	1	4	1.74	0.86
Data mining	27	1	5	1.74	1.02
Enterprise information portals	27	1	4	1.70	1.10
Internet start ups	27	1	5	1.67	1.00
Intermediation	25	1	4	1.56	0.87
Multi dimensional databases	27	1	5	1.56	1.05
Enterprise application portals	27	1	5	1.56	1.09
B2G [business to government]	26	1	5	1.54	1.24
Business integration portals	27	1	4	1.52	0.89
Trusted third parties	27	1	3	1.48	0.70
Client server infrastructure	26	1	5	1.38	1.10
Operating systems architecture	27	1	5	1.33	0.88
e-HRM	27	1	3	1.33	0.62
B2E [business to employee]	26	1	3	1.31	0.62
Personal/workspace portals	27	1	3	1.19	0.48

Respondents strongly support the development of an Internet based database on formal resources and informal resources, and support the set up of the E-Business Research Network and the development of social networks between people in academia and in business who are interested in e-business related research. On a five point scale from not at all interested [=1] to extensively interested [=5] the responses were respectively 4.08 [database with formal resources]; 4.04 [database with not yet formally published resources]; and 3.84 [social network amongst academics and business people in the area].

Statistical analysis

The intention is to develop a typology of e-business related research areas in business and management. The data related to the list of 77 aspects of business and management is used as a starting point. At this point in time it is difficult to effectively employ factor analysis, because of the small sample. However, it was difficult to resist the temptation and an analysis was run and the factor solution that comes out of the analysis is based on the following procedure:

- With the total database a 13 factor solution, with eigenvalues >1 , emerge;
- Testing out various factor solutions with 7-13 factors gives little changes in the overall solution; a 9 factor solution seems the most stable;
- The next step was to delete all aspects of the list with factor loadings less than .600;
- A factor analysis is repeated on the reduced list and the results are presented in Table 7 with the following factors revealed. It should be noted that there is a complete lack of clarity to the last three factors.
 - F1: management
 - F2: marketing
 - F3: financial/risk management
 - F4: value chain/logistics
 - F5: knowledge/information management
 - F6: ethics, environment and culture
 - F7: legislation
 - F8: accounting
 - F9: negotiating

Table 7: Factor solution with the factor loadings of the items contributing to the nine-factor solution [rotated component matrix]

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Operations management	0.89								
Management control	0.86								
Total quality management	0.85								
Human resources management	0.84								
Asset management	0.82								
Leadership	0.75								
Inventory management	0.67								
Process improvement	0.67								
Branding		0.90							
One to one marketing		0.84							
Marketing management		0.80							
Market research		0.79							
Customer relationship marketing		0.77							
Consumer behaviour		0.74							
Mass customisation		0.69							
Debt management			0.97						
Initial public offerings			0.97						
Asset optimisation			0.88						
Valuation of businesses			0.79						
Capital acquisition			0.72						
Risk management			0.66						
Financial management			0.62						
Value based management				0.85					
Make or buy decisions				0.82					
Reverse logistics				0.81					
Supply chain management				0.76					
Switching costs				0.68					
Globalisation				0.64					
First mover advantage				0.63					
Creating/sharing knowledge assets					0.85				
Extranets					0.77				
Intrapreneurs					0.74				
Customer participation in design					0.72				
Sharing of information					0.71				
Management information systems					0.67				
Knowledge management					0.65				
Environmental management						0.89			
Managerial ethics						0.86			
Corporate social responsibility						0.81			
Multi cultural management						0.80			
Legislation and legal issues							0.86		
Financial transactions & payment							0.77		
procurement							0.62		
Accounting systems								0.89	
Privacy								0.79	
Negotiation									0.82
Econ. of info. ownership/control									0.76

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.

Rotation converged in 8 iterations; All factor loadings < .600 have been deleted; missing values have been replaced by the mean value for these items

These results however, have to be taken with care, because the factor solution does not seem to be very stable yet and the factor matrix is not positively defined.

Conclusions

Some general remarks can be made in relation to the analysis of the Dutch pilot study.

- Few items were added by the respondents to those questions consisting of lists of items. This indicates that the questionnaire is sound.
- Most respondents fill out all the questions, providing evidence on the soundness of the questionnaire.
- Respondents answered questions about their networks in which they operate, indicating a willingness to share information.
- In the main there is a full response to questions about respondent's publications and other outputs in the area of e-business related research. This will deliver a recent/current overview of publications and masters and Ph.D. thesis, which will be useful for other researchers in the field.
- Respondents are providing sufficient information to develop a good and recent/current overview of conferences and interesting web pages.
- Because of the small sample size factor analysis is difficult and does not yet deliver strong stable solutions.

Some of the wider issues include:

- We have to move forward with the questionnaire to Europe and further, and thus developing the mailing list is one of the major priorities.
- We have to develop the web-based database. In the first instance priority will be given to the qualitative information. As soon as more information becomes available the factor analysis will deliver stronger ideas for the typology and this will allow linkages to the quantitative data in the database.
- We have to develop ideas on the business community and how to approach them. If the web based database is in place, this can be offered to them to gain their interest and to test out how contacts can be made between researchers and practitioners.

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Learning by Experience in the Project-Based Organization
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