Chapter IV

Keeping Track of Notes – Implications for Mobile Information and Communication Technology in Homecare Practice

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Abstract

This chapter provides a case and an investigation of how a particular mobile ICT support has been used within an established practice of homecare work. The discussion shows a perspective of how technology and practice coevolves and gets enmeshed together. The importance of seeing the interface of either the mobile devices or the stationary computer as common information spaces is stressed, since the single-user interface the current system offers is not enough support for the collaborative activities the mobile workforce of homecare work is engaged in. The problem resides in this case in the relations to predecessors of the system,
found in diaries and coordination tools. A modest suggestion posed by the author is that an understanding of the work maintaining the role of these predecessors can provide beneficial information for the future design of these technological supports.

Introduction

Research on mobile information and communication technology has, during the few last years, expanded along with its employment in both work and leisure (see, for instance, O’Hara et al., 2001; Esbjörnsson et al., 2002; Hedestig et al., 2002; Weilenman, 2003, Ling, 1997). Weilenmann (2003) argues that there is a lack of studies on the use of mobile technologies in situations where people move and where the activities they are engaged in occur. Until today, studies of mobile work and mobile technology have (1) had a work-oriented focus, (2) given an extra attention to office work, (3) treated some places as bases and finally (4) treated mobility and mobile work as means of transportation (Weilenmann, 2003). One could argue that many of these studies also provide an account for work environments that already are technology intensive. It is easy to accept such organisations as default examples, where technology is taken for granted as one standard component. I will in this chapter emphasise organisations where information and communication technology (ICT) have historically not yet been supporting work at all, and where mobile information and communication systems have become the first encounter. One challenge information technologies need to deal with in these environments is traditional systems that have been shaped by the tradition and culture of practice, especially resources used in collaboration and coordination. One could argue that studying such an environment would be like walking down the memory lane of technology implementation and design, acknowledging that the lessons taught have been learned, and that time would have equipped us with the knowledge to present solutions that account for identified needs. Or perhaps face the opposite, and learn yet another lesson that needs to be told. Homecare work is a field of practice that has a history contradictory to other sectors of healthcare in general. This sector has in the last few years attracted a lot of attention, and homecare work in Sweden is about to meet a huge challenge in the next couple of years. The number of elderly continuously increases in most western countries, and higher demands on performance and
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