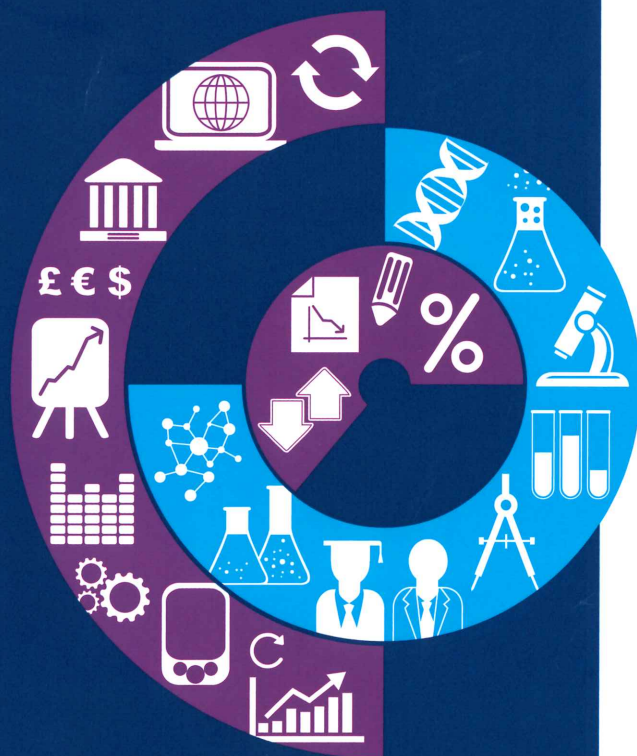


Interactive added value

New innovation models between
industry and science



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A model for strategic innovation of next-generation mobile services

Mobile Life VINN Excellence Centre

Mobile Life serves as a neutral arena for industry partners to meet, discuss, and identify core issues, and then collectively carry out practical and experimental research on these issues – in the domain projects as well as through the Centre’s innovation system. The Centre makes use of innovative ways for securing relevance and participation of all partners in the research. A core issue is also to go beyond the focus of each participating industry in developing its own business models, to look at the role of users as consumers of mobile services, i.e. mobility experience services, which provide better means for exploring and engaging with the world as experienced through various forms of movement. Also, the innovation of the next generation of mobile services with commercial potential will not always follow from the development of new technologies using innovation systems that have historically been prosperous for European industry.

Mobility experience services are considerably more complex than “anytime anywhere” mobile internet applications when it comes to fitting them into the application context. This means traditional methods for evaluation might not be suitable. Instead, studies and evaluations must be done in real-world settings rather than in lab environments.

We argue that designing such services is complex and demanding both from a user experience perspective, as well from a technical point of view. Industry must also develop sustainable business models and market ecologies, in a world where the connection services grow invisible from a usage perspective. Designers must learn to work with an entirely new landscape of materials, developing services that do not just exist ‘in the cloud’ or on phones, but exploit the tight and intricate connection between people and their activities, and places and things. Here industry benefits from collaboration, not only internally, but also from collaboration with academic researchers.

Strengths

The long life span of the Centre is its key feature that distinguishes it from other types of industry-academic collaborations. The Centre will be funded over a 10-year period, which enables first the opportunity to research on long term issues, and second to build long term relations between the partners.

The extended funding period enables the setting up of various forms for industry involvement in the centre. This includes most importantly collaborative projects and internships. In addition, centre partners benefit from their involvement in seminars, hands-on workshops, brainstorming activities, etcetera. Industry partners are given the first option on commercializing centre results. In the Centre there is a natural flow of technology, design insights and infrastructure between all the partners as we build mobile services together in concrete, applied projects. An additional advantage is the close connection between the Centre and the international mobile and ubiquitous computing research community, which allows the Centre to act as an informer and mediator between international cutting-edge research and the Swedish industry.

To ensure successful research results, the Centre involves the highly qualified Swedish researchers in mobile services, as well as highly ranked international researchers, and the research departments in some of the most important telecom companies. It is based at Stockholm University in the Kista area, where there already exist strong educational programmes in many IT areas. This secures the inflow of well-educated master- and Ph.D. students. In Kista we also find KTH’s School of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the Swedish Institute of Computer Science (SICS), and Interactive Institute.



Mobile services will continue to change our future.

Several of the industry partners have advanced research and development departments in Kista.

To ensure that the results provide strategically relevant knowledge, the Centre activities are based on a strong theoretical foundation (embodied interaction), a well-defined methodology (user-centred development) and an important domain with large societal importance and commercial potential (mobile life).

Challenges

The Mobile Life Centre has a set of goals to fulfil. If we look at the funding of the Centre, three stakeholders can be identified. The first is Swedish Society, from the perspective of VINNOVA seeking results from the Centre that will spill over to the society in the form of actual market growth. The metrics for these results a number of spin-offs and patents as well as publications and networking activities. Secondly, university and research partners are seeking results through high quality publications that will reflect on the organisation's academic strength nationally as well as internationally. Finally, the industry partners in the Centre that are looking primarily for more soft and qualitative results such as knowledge transfer, inspiration and possibly spin-ins. They identify results as research that can inspire new product development and, in a long-term perspective, influence the strategic choices made by a company. Therefore, the centre must strive for societal and industrial as well as academic relevance.

At the same time, the management literature teaches us that a company should choose one strategy in order to achieve competitive advantage. A combination of strategies will risk the company 'getting stuck in the middle' and possibly not succeeding with any of them. For an academic centre, we can use the model in a slightly different way: as the centre pulled between serving society, industry, or the academic world.

Our way of avoiding such a problem, which would lead to poor results, chooses a type of focus where the goals of academic results are most aligned with industry's demand for innovation. This is the area of strategic innovation. It is required that the Centre has a major and long-time impact on research in mobile services, the related industry and society as a whole. Therefore we focus on providing strategic innovation to our industry partners over a three to five-year period.

However, as the lifetime is entering its second half decade, it must also start to foster more short-term innovation and exploitation. The focus on strategic innovation fosters a focus on strategically relevant research prototypes, that provoke ideas and allow us to explore novel usage models, which are not always viable products in themselves. Very often, these provoke ideas that are simpler, more ready-to-market, and worthy of promotion as commercial products, but cannot be pursued further as strategic research activities. The Centre needs a way to support the development of such ideas into something akin to a commercial beta version. It is only when the idea is at the beta stage that it is ready to take the next step, and can be presented or put on the market. It is in this early stage of idea development and implementation that we have identified a gap in our innovation system, which hampers medium and short term innovation. Here we will develop the Centre's innovation system by extending our innovation models using organisational features that combine long-term activities with medium and short-term ones.

www.mobilelifecentre.org

VINN Excellence Centres

VINNOVA is a Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems. The aim of this innovation agency (established in 2001) is to increase the competitiveness of Swedish researchers and companies by investing in needs-driven research and the development of effective innovation systems. Each year VINNOVA invests 220 million euro. Each investment by VINNOVA generally requires co-financing, which doubles the annual investments to around 440 million euro.

An important part of VINNOVA's activities consists of increasing university – industry cooperation in the Swedish innovation system. The VINN Excellence Centers are one funding initiative to serve this objective. It provides a forum for collaboration between the private and public sectors, universities and colleges, research institutes and other organizations that conduct research. The Centres deal with both basic and applied research and they work to ensure that new knowledge and new technological developments lead to new products, processes and services. Today VINNOVA is funding 18 VINN Excellence Centers among them the Mobile Life Centre.