

5. Conclusion

Let's start by testing our hypotheses. We conducted a random-sampling survey of 1,000 Japanese SMEs, and 168 responded. There were 87 respondent enterprises, less than half the total, that conduct EC in the form of B-to-B or business-to-customer (B-to-C), which is less than we expected given the advances that have been made in telecommunications infrastructure. The top reason why so many enterprises do not conduct EC was that "customers want direct communication with the enterprise." This may be due to inflexible thinking by SMEs that do not conduct EC, however the lack of specialized staff and human resources ("lack of time/money at present to conduct business and EC simultaneously," "lack of human resources inside the enterprise who understand EC (IT)," etc.) is likely the biggest reason. Moreover, the top two effects cited by SMEs were "made business (including clerical affairs) run more smoothly" and "improved employee productivity and business efficiency." In contrast, the number of enterprises that achieved direct effects with respect to management, in terms of "increases sales," "increases the number of customers," and "expands market share," did not show in the top responses. In fact, Table 5 shows that the top responses even in the effects gained by handling various data via EC were "made business (including clerical affairs) run more smoothly" and "improved employee productivity and business efficiency." These results affirm all of the hypotheses in Chapter 2. However, how should we account for the lack of direct positive effects that are pivotal in respect of management? One reason might be that many of the respondent enterprises limit their EC activities to the provision of information about company products in particular (product details, inventory, etc.). To be sure, this does provide a convenience to existing customers, however this has little impact on gaining new customers or luring customers away from competitors. For B-to-B, it is necessary to actively exchange business information among the companies placing orders, such as parts supply information, design drawings, manufactured product specifications, and so on. For B-to-C, if useful information (e.g., information for comparison purposes, such as competitor products) for attracting potential customers can be exchanged, it will lead to further direct effects with respect to management, even if such information is not directly related to the

products. There needs to be an increase in the number of success stories, where enterprises achieve direct effects by conducting EC, in order to increase the number of SMEs that conduct EC on the whole. Barring such a development, we do not see the number of enterprises conducting EC increasing, even if enterprises were to supplement their human resources.

6. References

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