Without a doubt mobile technologies have changed our lives. In fact nowadays there are few people who would leave home without their mobile phone, and being reachable (and able to reach others) has actually become a basic need both in one’s personal and professional life.

But while voice communication has taken off at a dizzying rate, data transmission is being adopted at a slower pace. Although during the past year mobile email solutions experienced widespread acceptance among professionals, we have yet to see the popularization of applications that move data and information, both within companies—such as for the sales force or employees out in the field—and between companies and their customers or providers. Along these lines, in the United States about half of all large companies had adopted mobile email applications or acquired a BlackBerry in the first half of 2005, according to estimates by Forrester. However, these levels are not being approached by a long shot when it comes to more sophisticated applications, which in principle have a more clear impact on the costs and productivity of companies.

To understand this paradox it is useful to think in general terms, realizing that there are a number of factors leading to a particular innovation being adopted by the market: presenting a demonstrable economic advantage, developing an ecosystem, being consistent with joint interests and overcoming internal resistance to change.

In the case of mobile technology the economic advantages seem obvious, given that it allows instant access to information, anywhere and anytime. It facilitates and simplifies contact with employees, assets, products and customers in diverse locations. This opens the door to increased productivity, improvements in process planning and a reduction of the indirect costs and shipping costs. Without losing sight of the nonquantifiable benefits, such as improved service, employee and customer satisfaction, and image.

Secondly, adopting innovations requires the creation of an ecosystem, or in other words a stable, secure environment with conditions that are favorable for the development of new
products. In the case of mobile applications, this ecosystem should be integrated by networks with adequate coverage and reliability; a market of functional terminals that do not become obsolete as a result of decisions made by the operator, the manufacturer or the software provider; providers that are capable of consistently offering services and have a reputation for technological expertise; and professionals from Information Systems departments that know how to manage the solutions chosen by the company. This way the investor will know that the technology is stable and that the investment is safe. Although in general it can be said that these conditions exist, it should be pointed out that there are some destabilizing factors, such as the battle for standards in the development of applications—with the various industry players striving for victory of such platforms as JAVA, BREW or .net—which does not exactly create the atmosphere of confidence needed by those adopting mobile applications.

At the same time, development of the particular innovation must be consistent with the joint interests. In theory, it could be said that both manufacturers and operators are very much interested in the proliferation of mobile applications. However to a certain degree some operators end up generating further doubts with moves such as promoting WiFi solutions while at the same time predicting the imminent arrival of WiMax and heralding all of its positive aspects.

Finally, in order for mobile applications to take root in companies it is necessary to be aware of possible resistance to the change. In many cases implementing new applications means that people have to change their work habits and adopt new ways of doing things. For this reason, as is the case with the implementation of any new technology, it is necessary to involve the members of the organization from the planning and design stage to the final launch. This entails a joint effort for identifying opportunities and possible improvements, communication and providing consistent, detailed information to the employees about the progress being made, as well as setting up incentive- and rewards-based programs that ensure organizational coherence. This way proper consideration is given to the human aspects—at both the individual and group levels—that are involved anytime innovations are implemented.