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B2B Sharing as Part of the Sharing Economy Model

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Abstract: Business-to-business (B2B) sharing constitutes a neglected part of the model of the sharing economy. A part which does however have considerable potential as it is a source of positive economic, environmental and social impacts. The aim of the authors of the article is to identify and evaluate areas and types of B2B sharing used by industrial companies and potentially possible types. Seven possible areas of B2B sharing were identified on the basis of systematic literature review and semi-structured interviews with managers from selected industrial companies operating in the Czech Republic. This specifically concerns the area of sharing employees, vehicles, premises, other types of tangible assets, information and knowledge, financial and insurance services and non-financial services. The alternative types of these are identified in the article and discussion is presented of their benefits and possible risks from the point of view of industrial businesses. Some of these types of sharing are widely applied in practice (e.g. sharing lorries and other vehicles, sharing capacities of lorries or carsharing), others are developing (e.g. strategic employee sharing and ad hoc employee sharing) and others again offer possible potential in future (e.g. peer-to-business lending or sharing machinery and material).

Keywords: sharing economy; B2B sharing; business model; sustainable innovation

JEL Classification: L20; M14; M21

1. Introduction

The sharing economy is a phenomenon which has been experiencing an ever-increasing boom, in particular in recent years (Dec & Masiukiewicz, 2018) together with development of information and communication technologies (Lessem et al., 2016). A condition for its effective development is growth in awareness of this phenomenon (Hamari et al., 2016). The need thus arises, in particular from the point of view of companies, to uncover how the model of the sharing economy works and which challenges it poses (Gobble, 2017). Academics and practitioners are devoting an unprecedented level of attention to the topics of peer-to-peer (P2P) and business-to-customer (B2C) sharing (Cheng, 2016). The topic of business-to-business (B2B) sharing is for the time being outside of their field of interest (Antikainen et al., 2018). The sharing economy does however have remarkable potential from the point of view of B2B markets (Antikainen et al., 2018). Participating in B2B sharing allows companies to achieve higher levels of responsiveness and efficiency (Antikainen et al., 2018). It also contributes towards the social responsibility of participating companies. Contribution towards sustainability can, among others, be regarded as the original (Geissinger et al., 2019), key (Habibi, 2019) motive for sharing.

Despite the benefits associated with this phenomenon, no study exists offering comprehensive identification of the possible areas and types of B2B sharing. Several articles are available mentioning the possibility of using B2B sharing during creation of new business models for sustainable innovation – see for example Boons and Lüdeke-Freund (2013) for further details. Studies have also been created discussing selected specific types of B2B sharing (e.g. Bouncken et al., 2020; Eurofound, 2017) or studies mentioning examples of its platforms within the framework of discussion about B2C and P2P platforms (e.g. Paajanen, 2017 or Roma et al., 2019). The aim of the authors of the article is to identify and evaluate areas and types of B2B sharing used by industrial companies and potentially possible types, this using the example of selected companies operating in the Czech Republic.

The sharing economy includes activities such as traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting and swapping (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). Activities within the framework of the sharing economy are in general based on utilisation of idle capacities (Voytenko et al., 2017). According to Guyader and Piscicelli (2019, p. 1061), the sharing economy represents "an umbrella term for business and consumption practices that are based on sharing underutilized resources (e.g., goods, services, and spaces) for free or for a fee, typically enabled by online platforms and peer communities". Sharing may be performed not only using on-line platforms, but also without them (Ertz et al., 2019). The motive for participation in sharing may be profit, compensation of costs, but also philanthropy (Ertz et al., 2019).

Businesses can share employees, tangible and intangible assets or services. Sharing of employees may be based on strategic employee sharing, in terms of which a group of employers creates a network which hires employees who regularly alternate working for the participating employers (Eurofound, 2017). One alternative is ad hoc employee sharing which is used by employers if they are temporarily unable to provide work for their employees, or if a greater need for employees is temporarily created on their part. They then share the surplus/required employees with other organisations (Eurofound, 2017). As far as sharing of assets is concerned, companies can use various types of sharing in the field of transportation, such as sharing of lorries and their capacities (Islam, 2017), ridesharing (Dillahunt et al., 2017) or even carsharing. One interesting option for sharing in the field of transportation is truck platooning. A truck platoon represents a set of virtually linked trucks that drive closely behind one another using automated driving technology (Bhoopalam et al., 2018). Businesses can also share premises, e.g. manufacturing and storage premises (Molinier & Costa, 2019), co-working spaces, i.e. office space together with social areas (Bouncken et al., 2020) or accommodation capacity (Roma et al. 2019). They can also share other types of tangible assets, e.g. resources and production capacity (Antikainen et al., 2018), but also for example furniture (Trip, 2019). Another possibility is sharing of intangible assets in the form of information about future customer demand, extraordinary fluctuations in deliveries/consumption or information about the status of order processing (Patak et al., 2020). They can also share knowledge (Garcia-Perez et al., 2018). From the point of view of financial services, they can use peer-to-business lending from the position of debtor or creditor, the essence of this consisting in investors putting together funds for provision of a

loan to a client via an on-line platform (Amalian & Amalyan, 2019). They can also use equity crowdfunding, thanks to which they gain equity which investors create with their shares (Hornuf & Schwienbacher, 2018). Another option in this field is shared insurance, which differs from insurance provided by traditional insurance companies in that the funds which were not paid out as indemnity are the property of the clients, not the insurance company and if no indemnity is paid out, funds are partially refunded to them (Jinglu, 2016). Businesses can also share non-financial services of a service nature or cloud services which could include infrastructure, development and application platforms, but also software (Garg et al., 2013). They can use cooperative advertising, in terms of which the manufacturer participates together with retailers or even distributors in promotion of a specific product and they jointly share in settlement of costs (Zhang et al., 2019).

2. Methodology

Systematic literature review was the point of departure for the study. Inspired by the works of other authors (e.g. Ertz & Leblanc-Proulx, 2018 or Speldekamp et al., 2019), use was made of the Thomson Reuters Web of Science database. On the basis of defined keywords, which in the first stage were the keywords "B2B sharing" (only 2 publications) OR "sharing economy AND business model", we identified 192 papers. Irrelevant publications were subsequently excluded and we performed in-depth analysis of 96 papers using the snowball method (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010) based on investigation of papers cited in relevant publications.

In the second step, semi-structured interviews were held with managers from selected businesses. A total of 13 interviews were held with representatives of 6 companies from January until April 2020. According to NACE Rev. 2 classification (Eurostat, 2008), this concerned businesses in division 20 – Manufacture of chemicals and chemical products, division 25 – Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment, division 26 – Manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products and division 28 – Manufacture of machinery and equipment. According to the Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003, this concerned both SME and also large enterprises. More detailed characteristics of these businesses is set out in Table 1. The average length of the interview was 90 minutes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on the basis of a questioning scenario prepared in advance which was drawn up on the basis of systematic literature review. The main objective of these semi-structured interviews was to identify applied types

Table 1. Characteristics of the monitored businesses

Characteristics	Specification of characteristics	Business					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
Sector	Engineering			■	■	■	■
	Chemical industry	■	■				
Size	SME		■	■		■	■
	Large enterprise	■			■		
Relationship	Part of group	■		■	■		
Location	Industrial complex common with other	■	■		■		■

of sharing and to evaluate their benefits and limitations as well as to map the attitude of respondents to the phenomenon of the sharing economy. The reason for application of this method of collection of primary data was the fact that this concerns a flexible method which allows for addition (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010) or explanation (Saengpakdeejit & Intaraprasert, 2014) of questions within the pre-determined framework. It was thus possible to identify other forms of B2B sharing not yet mentioned in the professional literature.

3. Results

It is evident from the study performed that within the framework of B2B sharing, industrial companies can share employees, tangible assets in the form of vehicles, premises and other types of tangible asset as well as intangible assets in the form of information and knowledge. They can also share financial and non-financial services. See Table 2 for further details.

The study also shows that sharing of employees represents a developing area of sharing. Companies are starting to utilise the potential of strategic employee sharing and ad hoc employee sharing within the framework of B2B sharing. Strategic employee sharing is above all used by the monitored businesses to ensure service activities such as IT services, accounting, the HR agenda, cleaning and security for buildings. Certain companies occasionally use ad hoc sharing of employees, again for the time being for workers performing service activities, e.g. project managers or IT experts. The above-mentioned types of employee sharing are ensured on the basis of contractual arrangements without use of on-line platforms. The monitored companies use ad hoc employee sharing not only on an intercompany level but also on an in-house level. Respondents regard the main benefit of application of these types of sharing as savings on payroll and other staffing costs. The survey performed also shows that companies are considering job sharing on an in-house level, this being when two or more employees share the workload for one job. Job sharing like this contributes towards ensuring a harmonious work-life balance for employees. Its use for example in the case of employees on parental leave seems expedient.

As far as sharing vehicles is concerned, this is a developed area of sharing. In particular companies based in large industrial complexes use lorry sharing, be this from the position of the party offering this type of sharing or the party enquiring about it, but also sharing of other vehicles such as tractors, mobile cranes or forklift trucks owned by one of the entities based in the given complex. They also share lorry capacity with these and other companies, be this the capacity of their own lorries or the vehicles of various transport companies. In the case of sharing a company's own vehicles and their capacities, certain companies use internal platforms, this being an extremely positive thing. Respondents whose companies only organise vehicle sharing on the basis of communication in person see the fundamental problem of vehicle sharing in the fact that certain vehicles are not available at the given time when they are needed. They also believe that an on-line platform would fundamentally help to resolve this problem. If companies use the services of transport companies, they use the services of platforms, e.g. the international platform TIMOCOM or the national platform ShipVio. The fact is that the scope in which companies are able to apply sharing of lorry

capacities is influenced by the sectors in which they do business. From the point of view of companies operating in the chemical industry, options for sharing lorry capacities are relatively limited, this being due to the specific requirements for transportation of raw materials and products in this sector. The monitored companies regularly use ridesharing. They apply this most often with use of company cars on business trips taken by their employees, but also by the employees of related companies. They use ridesharing mediated via platforms to a lesser extent, usually via the Uber platform, in particular during foreign business trips. Shared bicycles are also used in industrial zones. These can also be used in certain cases by employees for business trips to city centres. The monitored companies also support ridesharing of their employees to work by sharing information about supply and demand via the intranet or company notice boards. None of the monitored companies uses carsharing. Respondents see the main benefit of sharing vehicles in saving of costs relating to ownership (purchase and operation) of a lesser volume of vehicles. They also regard the positive environmental impacts associated with vehicle sharing as an important benefit. In the case of shared bicycles, another advantage is time savings.

As regards sharing of premises, companies which own large industrial complexes offer sharing of temporarily unused manufacturing and storage areas, administrative buildings and parking spaces. The scope of sharing manufacturing and storage space is again influenced by the sector. This is significantly limited by the safety regulations in the chemical industry. These obstacles do not however restrict sharing in engineering. One of the monitored companies thus shares storage space not only with partners, but also with its competitors and they even jointly manage deliveries to their customers. In the field of administrative space, it does happen in practice that the commercial management of companies is based in administrative complexes away from the industrial complexes and uses the services of coworking centres, using not only offices, but also shared meeting and conference rooms. One option for sharing in this area which none of the monitored companies currently uses but which some are considering use of in future is sharing of administrative workplaces. This type of sharing can be used both on an intercompany level and also on an in-house level. The essence of this type of sharing consists in the fact that several workers share one workplace, a work desk with office and IT equipment. The company can thus have a lesser number of workplaces than it has employees. Companies are considering this type of sharing, in particular on an in-house level, on the basis of positive experiences which they gained in relation to the need for people to work from home at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. This type of sharing can be used not only by companies which allow their workers to work from home, but also companies which employ people part-time. Use is made in the monitored companies of sharing parking spaces and areas, in terms of which the participating companies share costs associated with the given spaces (lighting or security etc.). Companies also offer sharing of designated company parking spaces which are left vacant at the end of the working day. According to the respondents, the key benefit of sharing space is saving on costs and generation of revenue from sharing of otherwise unused space. However, certain risks also arise here, e.g. the risk relating to the activities which will be performed on the shared premises and whether internal rules will be

complied with. The risk of accidents also rises due to a greater number of people and vehicles moving around company premises.

Some companies also share capacity in employee hostels, be this as the party offering this capacity or enquiring about it. Respondents perceive this type of sharing as an expression of their social responsibility, extending the offer of employee benefits and contributing towards employee satisfaction. Companies then use sharing of short-term accommodation capacities via platforms for business trips. Respondents see the advantage in this as being the global offer, user-friendliness and availability of rating and reviews of accommodation capacities. The monitored companies most often use the services of the Booking.com and Airbnb platforms.

Sharing of other types of tangible assets can be regarded as a field of sharing which has been neglected so far. None of the monitored companies has so far used sharing of machinery, apparatus, material or equipment. However, sharing of free capacities of machinery and apparatus of engineering companies is supported using public resources. The Kooperace.cz platform was for example created with their support. This matches supply and demand for unused machinery and apparatus. Sharing of material within the framework of the circular economy also has unprecedented potential, in terms of which the waste created by one company may be a resource for another.

Another area with significant potential in future and one which is gradually developing is the field of sharing information and knowledge. Companies already regularly share information about deliveries/orders online. Within the framework of related companies, sharing of business contacts is starting together with references about suppliers and customers. Using online platforms, companies are starting to share data about the opinions of end consumers. Knowledge is regularly shared in the form of case studies for projects which have been implemented, management software, training materials and other findings and experiences. These are shared via varied communication channels, in particular company websites, external on-line platforms (e.g. the PR Club platform allows for sharing of knowledge and experience of PR workers), e-learning courses, webinars, conventional lectures and training courses, consultation or trade fairs. In the opinion of the respondents, the benefit of sharing information is quick and easy access to up-to-date information which contributes towards the quality of decision-making processes of all parties concerned. The main benefit of sharing knowledge is transfer of know-how and also establishment of new business contacts in the case of trade fairs. However, a fundamental risk posed by sharing of information and knowledge is the risk of information being leaked and misused by a third party.

As far as sharing of services is concerned, an area which has so far been completely neglected is sharing of financial and insurance services, this not being used by even one of the monitored companies. The reason for this is a lack of confidence, in particular stemming from insufficient regulation of this business segment. On the contrary, non-financial services are widely used by the monitored companies, this in particular being those companies based in industrial complexes together with other companies. They use shared building security, shared cleaning services, shared maintenance of premises or shared catering. However, they

also use types of B2B sharing such as shared fire protection, shared employee health care services or shared energy and steam supply in industrial complexes. Cloud services can also be regarded as a relatively widespread form of sharing. Cooperative advertising is not currently used by the monitored companies. However, completely new types of services are starting to find application on the B2B sharing market, these until recently having only been typical for the field of P2P sharing. One example of this is shared care for the household and family members of employees using sharing economy platforms. The main effect of sharing services is again a financial effect, i.e. saving on costs as a result of their allocation to a greater number of entities. Works catering, employee health care services and care for the household and family members of employees ensured within the framework of the sharing economy

Table 2. Areas and types of B2B sharing

Area of sharing	Type of sharing	Business					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
Sharing of employees	strategic employee sharing	■		■	■	■	
	ad hoc employee sharing		■		■		
Sharing of vehicles	sharing lorries and other vehicles	■	■	■	■		■
	sharing capacities of lorries	■	■	■	■	■	■
	ridesharing	■	■	■	■		
	carsharing						
	sharing bicycles and scooters	■			■		
Sharing of space	sharing manufacturing space	■				■	
	sharing administrative space	■	■		■	■	■
	sharing administrative workplaces						
	sharing storage space	■	■		■		
	sharing parking spaces	■			■		■
	sharing short-term accommodation capacities	■	■	■	■	■	■
Sharing of other types of tangible assets	sharing machinery and apparatus						
	sharing material						
	sharing furniture and other equipment						
Sharing of information and knowledge	sharing information about deliveries/orders	■	■	■	■	■	■
	sharing business contacts and references	■		■			
	sharing data about consumer opinions	■					
	sharing expert knowledge	■	■	■	■	■	■
Sharing of financial services	peer-to-business lending						
	equity crowdfunding						
	shared insurance						
Sharing of non-financial services	sharing building security	■	■		■	■	■
	sharing fire protection	■					
	sharing cleaning services	■	■	■	■		■
	sharing maintenance of industrial complexes	■	■		■		
	sharing supply of electricity and steam in industrial complexes	■	■				
	sharing works catering	■	■		■		
	sharing provision of employee health care	■					
	cooperative advertising						
	cloud services	■		■		■	■
	care for the household and family members of employees using sharing economy platforms				■		

model then, apart from the financial effect, offers the possibility of fulfilling the concept of social responsibility of companies in the field of employee care.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

It is evident from the study performed that industrial businesses can participate in the B2B sharing model in various areas and in various way (Table 2). Some of these forms of sharing are predestined for groups comprising related companies or supply chains, others can be used by companies located together in industrial complexes. Several types of sharing can however be exercised between companies which are not linked in any way, or can be used on an in-house level, e.g. between strategic business units. Employees, property and services can be shared within the framework of B2B sharing, using online platforms and also without them.

Within the framework of B2B sharing, sharing of employees comes into consideration in the form of strategic employee sharing and ad hoc employee sharing. On an in-house level, businesses can also use sharing of workplaces. Companies can share tangible assets in the form of vehicles, specifically lorries and their capacities, passenger cars (in particular in the form of ridesharing) and other vehicles, but bicycles and scooters can be shared too. Companies can also share administrative, storage, parking or accommodation space. One alternative for sharing of intercompany and in-house space is sharing of administrative workplaces. Businesses can also share machinery, apparatus, material or equipment, e.g. furniture. Sharing of information and knowledge also comes into consideration. Services represent a separate area of sharing. A relatively limited offer of financial and insurance services can be used within the framework of B2B sharing in the form of peer-to-business lending, equity crowdfunding and shared insurance, but also a wide range of non-financial services, e.g. in the form of shared building security, shared cleaning services or shared catering.

Some of these types of sharing are widely applied in practice, others are developing and others again offer possible potential in future. This is to say that it can justifiably be anticipated that the above-mentioned forms of sharing will gradually be used by businesses in a wider scope (Gobble, 2017) and at the same time, it is very likely that new forms of B2B sharing will also emerge. The reason for this is in particular the fact that B2B sharing is associated with significant economic effects, a fact which Antikainen et al. (2018) also draw attention to. The reason for this is that it leads to a reduction in costs and in some cases even generates revenue. In addition to this, these activities can in several instances be regarded as an expression of social responsibility by companies, be this with a positive impact on the environment in the form of saving on resources and reduction of emission volumes, or in the social field in the form of ensuring a harmonious work-life balance or a wider offer of employee benefits, as discussed among others by Tetrevova (2018). Use of services in the sharing economy can thus be regarded as an instrument to increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of companies.

The presented study represents a preliminary study which has made it possible to identify areas and types of B2B sharing which are currently used and also potential ones. This

was accomplished using the example of selected companies in the chemical and engineering sectors operating in the Czech Republic. A limiting factor of this study is that it maps B2B sharing activities performed in two sectors of the national economy, albeit key sectors. Another limiting factor may be regarded as the fact that the study maps the situation from the point of view of a small post-communist economy. The Czech Republic does however in reality represent a relatively developed EU economy (Eurostat, 2020). The presented study creates a basis for further follow-on studies which should map applied and potential areas and types of B2B sharing in other sectors and subsequently also in other countries.

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