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SKEMA BUSINESS SCHOOL

Master in International Marketing & Business Development

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**COLLABORATIVE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
IN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS FIRM'S STRATEGY**

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ABSTRACT

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The objective of this thesis is to study the presence of collaborative customer relationship management in a firm's strategy. In addition the thesis explains specific implementations of collaborative CRM, and CRM in general, by each case company. The sample consists of five Finnish business-to-business companies through applying multiple-case study method. The data is collected through face-to-face interviews with employees knowledgeable of the case company's CRM processes.

The qualitative data is analyzed through coding and shows that two out of five case companies have adopted and are using collaborative CRM in their strategy and operations. These case companies see collaborative CRM as an important driver for the company, through customer focus and market orientation. The rest of the case companies are either in the process of moving towards collaborative CRM or have given little consideration to it. The results show that collaborative CRM is in use, and that each company modifies it to meet their exact aspirations. The major challenge in the process is to fully grasp the importance of a shared vision that can translate into collaborative efforts in CRM and business strategy.

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Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tutkia yhteistyöhön perustuvan asiakashallinnan läsnäoloa yrityksen strategiassa. Tutkielma selittää lisäksi ominaisia yhteistyöhön perustuvan asiakashallinnan, ja CRM:n, toteutuksia kohdeyrityksissä. Yritysten otanta koostuu viidestä suomalaisesta business-to-business yrityksestä ja tutkielma soveltaa monitapaustutkimusta. Materiaali kerätään käyntihaastatteluilla työntekijöiltä, joilla on tietämystä kohdeyrityksen CRM prosesseista.

Kvalitatiivinen materiaali analysoidaan koodaamalla ja ryhmittämällä asioita kokonaisuuksiin. Materiaalista käy ilmi, että kaksi viidestä kohdeyrityksestä on ottanut yhteistyöhön perustuvan asiakashallinnan käyttöön. Nämä kohdeyritykset näkevät yhteistyöhön perustuvan asiakashallinnan tärkeänä innoittajana yritykselle, avustettuna asiakaslähtöisyydellä ja markkinaorientaatiolla. Muut kohdeyritykset ovat joko siirtymässä yhteistyöhön perustuvaa asiakashallintaa kohti tai ovat vain harkinneet sitä. Tulokset näyttävät että yhteistyöhön perustuva asiakashallinta on käytössä ja jokainen yritys muokkaa sen omaan käyttöönsä sopivaksi. Prosessin suurin haaste on ymmärtää kuinka tärkeää on yhteinen visio, joka voi kääntyä yhteistyöksi CRM:ssa ja strategiassa.

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Finally it is my turn to write these words of appreciation. The day has come to finish this thesis, and at last have free weekends again. It is not only the thesis process that is coming to an end, it is also an end to the long constant studying since I entered elementary school 20 years ago, and especially since I began my academic education six years ago. I have learnt many things during these years, and have learnt to use various tools in a way that, I am sure, will serve me and my colleagues well. For this I want to thank all my professors at LUT who have made these past two years tiring, but at the same time amazing and rewarding. Although this is the end of studying for now, I know the learning will never stop.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

Customer relationship management (Jackson, 2005) has become a standard part of any business' strategy but it is still often misunderstood as companies miss the essence of customer relationship management (CRM) and implementation suffers (Nguyen, 2012). As customer relationship management is becoming ever more important and having a market orientation has been proved to have a positive effect on a company's performance (Narver & Slater, 1990; Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008), it is crucial for successful customer relationship management to be an integral part of a company's business strategy (Porter, 1980). Customer relationship management is also evolving into a cross functional task and transforming into collaborative customer relationship management (Kracklauer, Mills & Seifert, 2004; Alavi, Ahuja & Medury, 2012), where CRM is an important part of everyone's job description. This starts from top executives and continues all the way to research and development, marketing and production.

Therefore, this thesis deals with finding out how companies take collaborative customer relationship management, and CRM in general, into account in their business strategy. Yet it is not enough to see only the strategy, but also how such a large element of business strategy is translated and realized on an operational level and ultimately in the company culture.

Up to this day, many managers still perceive CRM simply as a software that magically improves the business performance by solving all problems with customers, and therefore brings better profits (Chen & Popovich, 2003). Although information technology infrastructure remains a critical

factor in customer relationship management (Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005), the focus of this research is on other required aspects for successful CRM.

As customers want more and more customized products and services to match their specific needs and requirements (Nguyen, 2012), the above mentioned approach and misunderstanding CRM simply does not work anymore. It is therefore highly relevant for companies to produce customer focused business strategies and bring them alive in operations and in a transformed company culture. Developing long-term customer relationships is especially important in the business-to-business sector, where a clear and focused strategy and vision are important in order to manage relationships with customer in the most effective manner (Zahay, 2008).

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the customer relationship management and collaborative customer relationship management literature by addressing the issues of collaborative CRM as a part of the business strategy in business-to-business firms. Contribution is also made to business strategy by giving a deeper and increasingly integrated understanding of how to compete in the market. From a managerial perspective, there is a need for companies to understand and fully utilize the overarching influence of marketing (de Swaan Arons, van den Driest & Weed, 2014), and in business-to-business markets the influence of customer relationship management (Avery, Fournier & Wittenbraker, 2014).

On top of this, understanding what, and how, companies are considering and implementing as their customer relationship management can help both academics and practitioners see potential problems between consideration and implementation of collaborative CRM. This gives clear views into why the potential problems are persistent. Companies can understand how to better integrate their customer relationship

management and therefore deliver greater value for their clients and for the clients' client, and ultimately for themselves.

1.2. Literature review

In this section, the underlying literature of market orientation, customer focus, customer relationship management and business strategy are looked at. The concepts are also developed further for the purpose of drawing the concept and perceived implementation of collaborative customer relationship management. Finally, the above mentioned is linked to the context of competitive business strategy.

In order to fully understand customer relationship management, its history needs to be reviewed. Customer relationship management (CRM) is a concept which has its roots in the market-based view, also known as market orientation (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). This base comprises of three main pillars: customer focus, coordinated marketing and profitability (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990), and is manifested as customer orientation, competitor orientation and interdepartmental coordination (Narver & Slater, 1990). It can be seen from this construct that marketing is not just about selling to the customers but about understanding the specific customer needs and wants on a deep organizational level (Pandelica, Pandelica & Dumitru, 2009).

Market orientation has also been proven to have a positive relationship on the firm performance (Narver & Slater, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1994; Sundqvist, 2002; Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008). This makes it even more important for companies to consider market orientation as a means to create and sustain a competitive strategy. This is not an easy task though as the capabilities required for market orientation are not straightforward (Day, 1994).

Developing and maintaining a market orientation is not only a task for marketing, sales and customer service departments as it has been traditionally perceived. Market orientation refers to the organization wide collection, understanding and responsiveness to market information (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). This suggests a customer-focused approach (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Kumar, Venkatesan & Reinartz, 2008), in which the customer is in the center of all company actions. This is especially true for companies which take customer relationship management seriously and with dedication. This view is also known as the customer-centric approach (Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin & Day, 2006).

Market orientation is the topical issue which gave birth to relationship marketing and ultimately to customer relationship management. Relationship marketing is seen as the establishment, maintenance and enhancement of customer and partner relationships in a manner that meets the objectives of all parties involved (Grönroos, 1990; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996; Grönroos 1997; Hunt, Arnett & Madhavaram, 2006). The given definition is close to what is said about market orientation with the focus being on the customer and also partners of the company.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is built on the previous concepts of market orientation and specifically as an implementation method for relationship marketing with distinct focus on customers (Boulding, Staelin, Ehret & Johnston, 2005). It is often seen as the way for companies to respond better to what their customers are looking for and in order to serve separate customers according to their separate needs at all customer touch points (Jackson, 2005; Ngai, 2005; Kotler & Keller, 2012). Customer relationship management is about creating firm and customer value equally and is dependent on the trust, fairness and privacy experienced by the client (Boulding et al., 2005). Boulding et al. (2005) also note that the dual-value creation process described above needs to focus both on present value and future value. The CRM measurements

can turn into rigidities if they are not constantly updated according to customer requirements.

CRM and relationship marketing have been the natural responses to the requirement of being market oriented and customer relationship management specifically is a tool for market orientation. CRM is most often seen as a combination of marketing, sales, services and information technology infrastructure (Winer, 2001; Ngai, 2005). While all of the above mentioned elements are true and necessary, they nevertheless describe only a part of what market orientation and relationship marketing suggest. Customer relationship management has to be interrelated through all functions and strongly linked to the competitive business strategy (Payne & Frow, 2005; Boulding et al., 2005). It also needs to be more thorough in encompassing the organizational side of operation.

As CRM is a means for market orientation in companies, it needs to cover all aspects of what market orientation takes into account. It is not enough to have marketing and sales collect customer information and distribute it to other parts of the organization. As a natural evolution, it is necessary to combine market orientation with customer relationship management into the concept of collaborative customer relationship management (Kracklauer, Mills & Seifert, 2004; Alavi, Ahuja & Medury, 2012). Although collaborative CRM has been initially developed in the context of fast moving consumer goods and retail trade as a way to combine the CRM activities of both retailers and manufacturers (Kracklauer, Mills & Seifert, 2004), yet it can be modified for other purposes as well. Collaborative CRM can serve larger purposes which are generalizable to various organizations and industries.

As a combination of market orientation and CRM, collaborative customer relationship management can be said to be the coordinated cross functional collection, dissemination and response to customer and competitor intelligence. This is done in order to create loyalty and long-

term value for the company and its customers (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver, Slater & Tietje, 1998; Jackson, 2005; Alavi, Ahuja & Medury, 2012). Naturally such a commitment to collaborative CRM from any company, requires and deserves an active part in the business strategy.

Adopting market orientation and customer relationship management as collaborative CRM in a company is a paradigm shift which requires a rethink of the company's business strategy (Porter, 1980; Peelen, 2005, p. 6-7). The strategy of a company needs to be rethought on all levels, from business philosophy to business unit strategy and all the way to operational strategy (Webster Jr., 1992). Since market orientation and therefore collaborative CRM has been proven to have a positive relationship to a company's performance (Narver & Slater, 1990; Sundqvist, 2002; Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008), it is interesting to see how and if companies are including collaborative customer relationship management into their business strategy. Roberts, Liu & Hazard (2005) state that strategy is significant for successful customer relationship management.

Although strategic integration is vital for customer relationship management, the link between the two has not been studied enough. There is research on how CRM can be linked to strategy (Wilson, 2006; Zahay, 2008), and also on how marketing and customer relationship management can become a driving, strategic and influential force in a company (Tapp & Hughes, 2004). However, finding out existing linkages provides deeper understanding for the union of strategy and CRM. On top of this, it is not enough to look only at the business strategy as it is also important to find out how such a big element of business strategy is translated to actual business operations and activities.

1.3. Research questions

The aim of this thesis is figure out how deeply companies take collaborative customer relationship management, and customer relationship management, into account in their competitive business strategy and how does it translate to their actual operations. The research is conducted solely with business-to-business firms. Below are found the research questions which are going to assist in accomplishing this target.

The primary research question is:

How do business-to-business firms take collaborative customer relationship management into account in their business strategy?

The sub-questions are:

1. How customer relationship management is manifested in the company operational business strategy?
2. How is customer focus apparent in the company business strategy?
3. What role does market orientation play in the company's business strategy?
4. Why is customer relationship management important for the company as a business strategy?

1.4. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is depicted in Figure 1. It can be clearly seen from the framework that the focus of thesis is on finding out how collaborative customer relationship management is manifested in, and what role it has in the business strategy. Customer relationship

management, customer focus and market orientation represent the cornerstones on which collaborative CRM is built on. As based on the literature review, many studies have been conducted on the importance of strategy for CRM. Therefore, it is interesting to see in what form this linkage actually exists.

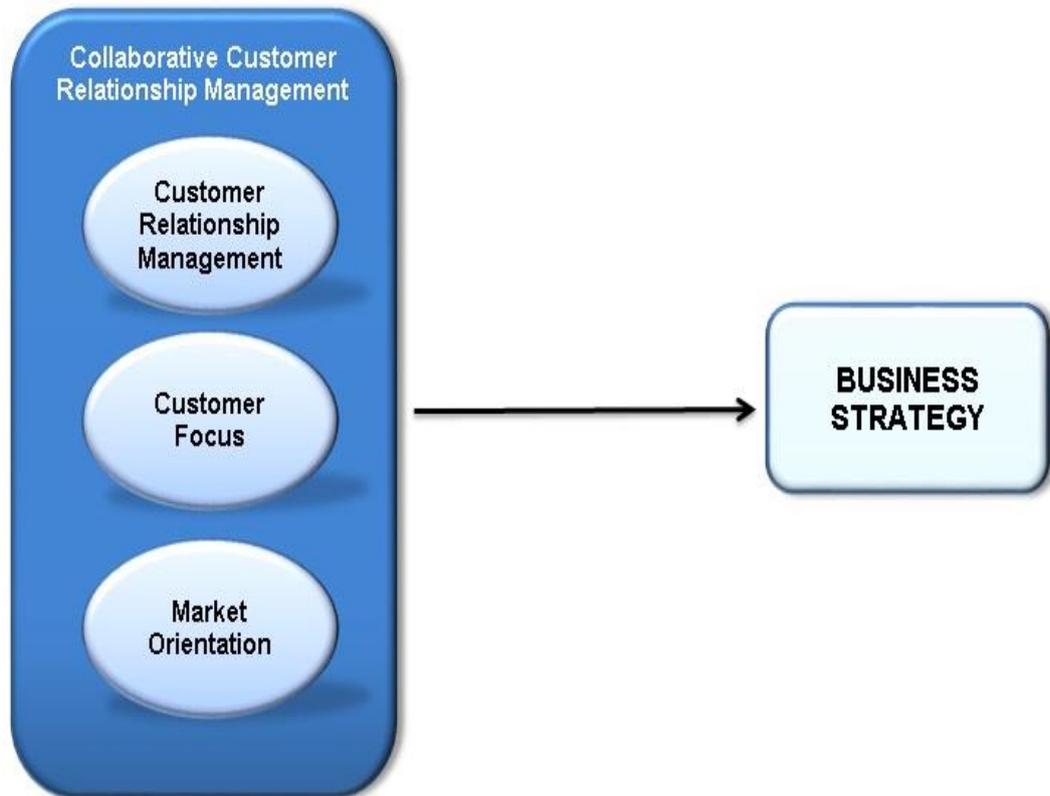


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

In the following chapters, the key concepts of this study are defined, along with the delimitations of the research, and the methodology which will be used to conduct this thesis. Also the structure of this thesis is presented further.

1.5. Key concepts

Collaborative Customer Relationship Management: Collaborative customer relationship management is the coordinated organization wide collection, dissemination and response to customer and competitor

intelligence. This is done in order to create loyalty and long-term value for the company and its customers in all touch points through customer-centric processes (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver, Slater & Tietje, 1998; Jackson, 2005; Alavi, Ahuja & Medury, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 157).

Customer Relationship Management: A business strategy created to manage the development of a company, the acquisition and retention of its customers and to create loyalty and long-term value between the company and its customers in all touch points through customer-centric processes. (Jackson, 2005; Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 157).

Customer Focus: Customer focus comes from creating long-term value first for the customer, and in the process also for the firm (Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr, 1993; Shah et al., 2006).

Market Orientation: Organization wide generation of market information, dissemination of the information across the entire organization and organization wide responsiveness to it through customer and competitor orientation, and assisted with interfunctional coordination (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990).

Business Strategy: Defines the way a company is going to compete, what its goals are and how those goals are reached. It answers the questions: What the company is doing now? What is happening in the environment? What the company should be doing in the future? (Porter, 1980)

1.6. Delimitations

The research is delimited to the relation between collaborative customer relationship management and business strategy and does not take into account the effects on firm performance. This choice is done on purpose

as several studies on the effects on performance have already been conducted, as shown in the literature review.

Moreover, the empirical part and data for the thesis is gathered from business-to-business firms in Finland and business-to-consumer companies are left out on purpose. This is because business-to-business firms are highly suitable for such a sample as business customers generally spend much more and are more profitable than individual consumers (Rauyrueen & Miller, 2007). This suggests a greater importance in developing long-term customer relationships. Finland is chosen as a geographic area due to resource and time limitations.

The research does not cover theoretically the resource-based view of customer relationship management (Zahay, 2008; Nguyen & Waring, 2013), since CRM foundations can clearly be directed to market orientation. This thesis does not directly take into account the organizational learning involved with customer relationship management either (Zahay, 2008). Organizational learning orientation of CRM (Battor & Battour, 2013) is left out in order to maintain a clear focus on the research agenda. Everything mentioned in the above delimitations may cause some issues with generalizing the results of this study in other contexts.

1.7. Methodology

The theoretical base of this thesis is structured around existing literature on market orientation, customer focus, customer relationship management, business strategy and collaborative CRM. The literature is collected from academic books, journals and dissertations.

Empirical data is collected in the form of qualitative research through in-depth interview case studies with people who have experience in business-to-business markets, especially in the areas of sales, marketing and management. The method of in-depth interview multiple-case study

(Yin, 2009, p. 46) is chosen because it gives the possibility to gain a much deeper understanding and knowledge with which to answer the research questions. Names of any interviewees or names of any companies they work for are not mentioned in order to keep the responses confidential and to mitigate interviewee bias (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 326-327).

1.8. Structure of the thesis

This master's thesis consists of five parts which are divided into eight chapters. The thesis begins with an introduction that deals with the background of the thesis and introduces the research questions along with the theoretical framework and key concepts of the study. Delimitations and methodology of the study are also briefly addressed.

The thesis continues into the literature review which is sectioned into three chapters in order to deal with the evolution of customer relationship management from market orientation. Afterwards, these two concepts are combined into collaborative customer relationship management and the notion is linked to competitive business strategy. The empirical part demonstrates the research methodology, with which the research is conducted, in a detailed manner and presents the data collected from informants in selected business-to-business firms.

The collected data is analyzed according to the methods and related to the developed theory in the empirical results. Results are discussed through the structure of the research question and the sub-questions. The sub-questions are answered first and results are concluded with the main research question. The final chapter focuses on the conclusions of the research without forgetting to draw the limitations of the present research. Potential topics for future research stemming from this thesis are also discussed.

2. MARKET ORIENTATION AND CUSTOMER FOCUS

This literature review begins by developing the concept of customer relationship management from its roots in market orientation and customer focus. Relationship marketing is also looked into as a pre-stage of CRM. Towards the end of the literature review, the notion of collaborative customer relationship management is developed from the previous concepts for the purpose of this research. Competitive business strategy is introduced and explained while the relation of collaborative CRM with competitive business strategy is also discussed as a key linkage of the main research question of this study.

2.1. Market orientation

Market orientation is a concept which came to true acknowledgment in the early 1990's through the publication of two influential articles (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990), published in the Journal of Marketing. Nevertheless the true basis of market orientation is in the marketing concept derived by scholars in the 1950's and 1960's and it has appeared in literature before as well (McNamara, 1972). Market orientation has become the prevailing notion and can be seen as a way for companies to create competitive advantages over their rivals, through customer focus.

Kohli & Jaworski (1990) suggest that market orientation has three main pillars: customer focus, coordinated marketing and profitability. As it is important for companies to understand their clients (Pandelica, Pandelica & Dumitru, 2009), providing them with a spotlight is going to help in better recognizing what they want. This applies in both tangible product businesses and on the intangible side of services. Coordinated marketing refers to the notion that market orientation is not simply a task for the

marketing department, or sales for that matter. Market orientation needs to be the coordinated effort of the entire organization. Finally profitability is addressed as mainly to be a consequence of the first two pillars, customer focus and coordinated marketing. (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990)

Narver & Slater (1990) agree to the view of Kohli & Jaworski (1990), and add that market orientation stems from three focus areas of customer orientation, competitor orientation and interfunctional coordination. This entails large sets of actions which need to be understood and implemented organization wide. Such actions include the understanding of customer's revenue and cost dynamics, and also the dynamics of the customer's client, the end-user of a product. According to Narver & Slater (1990), this is the only way to figure out who are the most profitable customers, not only at present but also in the future. This is supported by Kohli & Jaworski (1990) as they state that generating market intelligence from customers and competitors is always the starting point for market orientation. Other environmental factors are also included as they can have an effect on customer preferences. The information has to apply to future information as well as to current customer requirements. Identifying one's key customers and customer groups is a complex task, yet an essential one (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990).

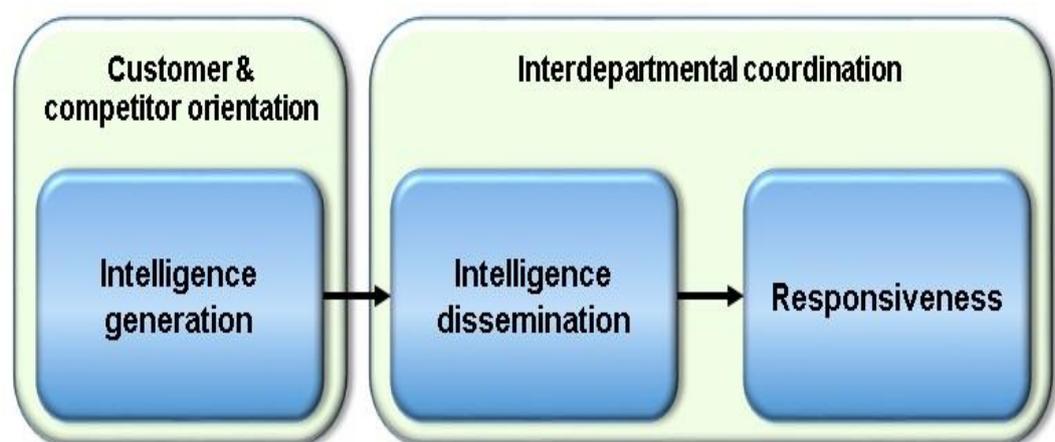


Figure 2. Market orientation (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990; Tuominen, 1997, p. 34)

Market orientation can be seen as the organization wide generation of market information, with the addition of disseminating the information across the organization and responding to it as an entire organization (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). The process is depicted in Figure 2, which can be seen above. Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr. (1993) relate the previous constructs, developed by Kohli & Jaworski (1990) and Narver & Slater (1990), through customer orientation, and develop market orientation by linking it to organizational innovativeness and also to the organizational culture of the company which is a well-established research perspective on market orientation (Gebhardt, Carpenter & Sherry Jr., 2006; Simberova, 2009; McClure, 2010; Pinho, Rodrigues & Dibb, 2014). Market orientation is also investigated from the point-of-view of national culture (Brettel, Engelen, Heinemann & Vadhanasindhu, 2008), not only corporate culture.

The cultural aspects translate into four different types of corporate culture: clan, adhocracy, hierarchy and market culture (Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr., 1993). Various organizations perform in different ways depending on the type of culture adopted. According to Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr. (1993), hierarchical cultures provide the lowest performance as they are focused on maintaining the status quo. Market culture, on the other hand is the most likely solution for superior performance, leaving clan and adhocracy in between these two. Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr. (1993) test their framework on Japanese companies and find their statements to hold true.

Several measurement tools for market orientation have also been developed. Most notably MKTOR (Narver & Slater, 1990), MARKOR (Kohli, Jaworski & Kumar, 1993), and the measures developed for obtaining information from export market orientation (Cadogan, Diamantopoulos & Pahud de Mortanges, 1999). The measurement tools are however outside the relevant scope of this thesis.

Antecedents of market orientation

As important antecedents of market orientation, Jaworski & Kohli (1993) recognize top management support, organizational conflict (McClure, 2010) and connectedness coupled with how the reward system is organized and how risk averse or risk accepting the top management is. The levels of centralized operations are included in the factors having an effect on market orientation (Kirca, Jayachandran & Bearden, 2005; Engelen, Brettel & Heinemann, 2010). Antecedents for market orientation have, on top of these, been studied in an export and international setting (Cadogan, Paul, Salminen, Puumalainen & Sundqvist, 2001; Sundqvist, 2002). The most influential antecedents however, are reward systems, top management support and interdepartmental conflict and connectedness which are presented in Figure 3 (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Kirca, Jayachandran & Bearden, 2005). It is necessary for the top executives of a company to be positive and supportive of market orientation activities and at the same time they need to be able to accept risks. Unless these factors exist, the market orientation activities of information collection, intelligence dissemination and organizational responsiveness will suffer greatly (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993).

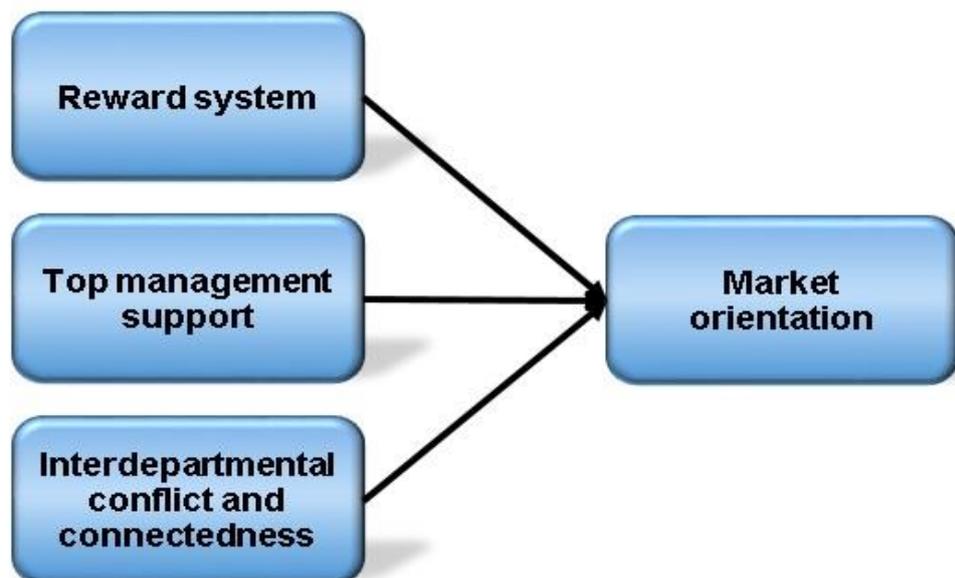


Figure 3. Main antecedents of market orientation

Organizational conflict and connectedness is also one of the measures identified by Jaworski & Kohli (1993) to be an antecedent for market orientation. Especially the part regarding the effect of conflict is also studied by Pulendran, Speed & Widing (2000), and also by McClure (2010) who examines it together with organizational culture. As market orientation requires interfunctional (Narver & Slater, 1990), and therefore interdepartmental, coordination any conflict between employees of departments is bound to reduce the amount and effectiveness of market orientation activities. Therefore, the lower the amount of conflict and larger amounts of connectedness will add to the likelihood of market orientation in a company (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993).

Conflict can be divided into two sub-sets including functional and dysfunctional conflict. The difference being that functional conflict can eventually be resolved and potentially has a positive effect on the organization while dysfunctional remains unresolved (McClure, 2010). The results of McClure's (2010) study show that conflict in the organization moderates market orientation, yet it is dependent on the prevailing organizational culture in a company and certain aspects of this, such as the level of hierarchy, which are within the controls of the organization.

Reward systems are among the most pertinent preconditions and facilitators of market orientation (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Kirca, Jayachandran & Bearden, 2005). This relates to the basis from which managers are rewarded. According to Jaworski & Kohli (1993), reward systems are the single most influential decider of market orientation in companies. Having an exactly correct reward system in place will affect all of the aspects of market orientation, presented in Figure 2. The correct reward system varies from one company to another as organizations are unique.

2.2. Customer focus

Market orientation literature is considerably based on the work of Kohli & Jaworski (1990), and Narver & Slater (1990). Nevertheless, a common area of attention from all market orientation articles (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990; Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr, 1993; Day, 1994; Narver, Slater & Tietje, 1998) is customer focus or customer orientation, the two terms being used interchangeably. Customer focus is also known as customer centricity (Shat et al., 2006). This aspect is seen as the first and most significant element of market orientation and business in general (Peppers & Rodgers, 2004, p. 3).

Having a customer focus means that the organization truly cares for its customers, centers on customer needs and is customer-led (Piercy, 1995). By doing this a company needs to create value first to its customer. Profitability and value for the company will follow as a reward for the customer focused actions (Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr., 1993; Vandermerwe, 2004; Shah et al., 2006; Kumar, Venkatesan & Reinartz, 2008; Bose, 2012). The best way to actually be customer focused is to align the interests of the company with the ones of their customers.

Nevertheless, it is important not to forget the exploration for new knowledge coming from outside the existing markets and customers (Vorhies, Orr & Bush, 2011). This appears to be a very straight forward and easy issue to understand and install into the company, yet many firms have trouble performing up to their potential (Piercy, 1995; Shah et al., 2006). For the companies who do know what their customers really care about, this is no doubt a mighty competitive advantage. Making sure customers also understand this can be even better in providing long-term customer satisfaction and shared value (Piercy, 1995).

As customer focus is an integral part and element of market orientation, similar antecedents work here as well. Having a customer focused starting

point for problem solving starts from the top executives and even from the board room of a company (Piercy, 1995) by creating a sense of strategic excitement regarding the future direction of the company (Vandermerwe, 2004). At the same time, it is important to reward employees for the right things: making sure they treat customers properly and do the things that win customers' minds over and over again through the right engagement, and in an attempt to build a community for the customers (Piercy, 1995; Brooks, Lovett & Creek, 2013, p. 14-46).

On top of this, a key issue is to get employees from various departments to engage with their colleagues effectively (Vandermerwe, 2004). As can be seen, these are no different from the most important antecedents of market orientation, depicted earlier in Figure 3. The main outcome of customer focus is to learn about the customer in such a way that the relationship develops into a deep one, and in the process the company and the customer become mutually dependent (Vandermerwe, 2004; Peppers & Rodgers, 2004).

On an individual level there also exists certain aspect which affect the level of customer centricity. These include gender, age, professional experience and the level of education (Kilic & Dursun, 2007). While the individual antecedents are largely outside the scope of this research, it is nevertheless important to understand their existence and potential influence on the organizational and strategic levels.

Kilic & Dursun (2007) found that especially age and education level of employees have an effect on how customer focused they are, and subsequently the company is. Younger employees who have good education are more inclined to be customer oriented, and such people should be in positions which require constant communication and contact with customers (Kilic & Dursun, 2007). The factor of age is supported to some extent in the organizational level through the organizational life cycle process. This suggests that younger organizations are more likely to adopt

customer focused, and therefore market oriented actions (Engelen, Brettel & Heinemann, 2010).

All of the above, market orientation and customer focus, suggests a considerable commitment of resources from the company, both intangible and tangible ones. Steinman, Deshpandé & Farley (2000) provide a suitable answer to the inevitable question: how much market orientation is enough for a company? According to Steinman, Deshpandé & Farley (2000), the answer is as much as the customer considers be to appropriate. Naturally, this is a much more difficult question to answer than it might seem and at the same time it is an achievable target.

3. RELATIONSHIP MARKETING AND CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Relationship marketing can be seen as a continuum to market orientation and customer focus. First used by Berry (1983), relationship marketing is widely considered to be a separate stream of research from market orientation and the two have developed rather independently. Nevertheless, they share considerable overlap and should be rather considered complementary than separate (Steinman, Deshpandé & Farley, 2000).

In this chapter, the concepts of relationship marketing and customer relationship management are introduced. Relationship marketing is introduced first as it is seen as a pre-stage for customer relationship management. This is done in order to fully understand the roots of CRM, and it also assists in realizing where customer relationship management is going in the future.

3.1. Relationship marketing

Several authors have called for a change in the focus of marketing from a transactional end towards a relationship continuum (Grönroos, 1990; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996; Grönroos, 1997; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Palmer, Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005; Hunt, Arnett & Madhavaram, 2006). Others suggest that relationship marketing needs to be taken into account as an important part and element of the existing marketing focus (Baker, Buttery & Richter-Buttery, 1998). Relationship marketing consists of valuing, enhancing and fortifying relationships between the company, its customers and its partners in a manner which meets the objectives of all involved parties. The aspects of relationship marketing have been studied both in business-to-business (Grönroos, 1990; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996;

Grönroos, 1997; Baker, Buttery & Richter-Buttery, 1998; Hunt, Arnett & Madhavaram, 2006), and business-to-consumer settings (Tsai, 2011; Miquel-Romero, Caplliure-Giner & Adame-Sanchez, 2014) as well as conceptually (Palmer, Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005).

The differences of relationship marketing and the more traditional transactional marketing are described well by Vargo & Lusch (2004). The change of marketing is dealt through eight foundational premises which shed a light on why relationship marketing and services are becoming dominant over the traditional view of simple transactions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The primary unit of exchange has shifted from goods towards people's competences defined in knowledge and skills. This does not mean the disappearance of goods, merely that services and goods together become the value for customers. Customers are co-producers of the company's services and relationship marketing is a process of interaction, instead of merely receiving goods and being targeted by marketing actions of a company. Value of the company's offering is determined by the customer and organizations can only bring out value propositions. In traditional transaction marketing, the value is determined by the producing company and customers are forced to accept this (Vargo & Lusch, 2004.)

A product is always an embodiment of human skills and knowledge turning it into a service, which renders other services where the marketing of the customer relationship is key and information to customers the primary product (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). As information becomes the main product of a company, it puts an emphasis on the customer relationship and stresses the importance of knowing one's customers and their desires. Knowing one's customers thoroughly is the best and most effective way to provide the customer with the information and knowledge which is relevant to them. Such a view of putting customer relationships and relationship marketing first, implies that marketing needs to become the prevailing philosophy for the organization and to provide a leading guidance for a

market-oriented perspective for the core competences of a company (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), and for a market oriented company culture (McClure, 2010). One other difference between traditional transactional and relationship marketing is the potential use of the marketing mix or the 4 P's. Since the 4 P's of product, price, place and promotion originate from the transactional manufacturing age, they need to be rethought from the customers' point-of-view. Lauterborn (1990) introduced the 4 C's as such a development. In the 4 C's, product is replaced by customer wants and needs, price becomes customer's cost to satisfy, while place is transformed to convenience and promotion is considered to be communication (Lauterborn, 1990; Schultz, Tannebaum & Lauterborn, 1993; Puusa, Reijonen, Juuti & Laukkanen, 2012, p. 120).

Vargo & Lusch (2008) extend and refine their research, and foundational premises while explaining some of the original foundational premises in a more thorough manner. Most of the thorough explanations deal with specific wordings of certain foundational premises and with providing additional clarifications. They also clear certain specific misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The most interesting issues are the two additions to the original eight foundational premises. Vargo & Lusch (2008) suggest that all social and economic actors integrate resources, and that value is always determined by the beneficiary, also known as the customer. Although the theoretical developments of Vargo & Lusch (2004; 2008) are considered as the service-dominant logic of marketing, it resembles largely relationship marketing and are used in harmony.

Relationship marketing relies heavily on customer data and especially on the company's ability to transform the data into knowledge regarding their customers. In relationship marketing, this forms the basis for all marketing decision making (Zahay & Peltier, 2008; Reijonen & Laukkanen, 2010). Relationship marketing advocates strongly the thought that marketing in general has to begin with the notion that customers do not buy products and services as such, but solutions which bring added value to their needs

and problems (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Puusa et al., 2012, p. 27). Therefore, companies do not provide merely products and goods for their customers, they also provide the knowledge they have, and more specifically the knowledge which is important and relevant for the specific customer.

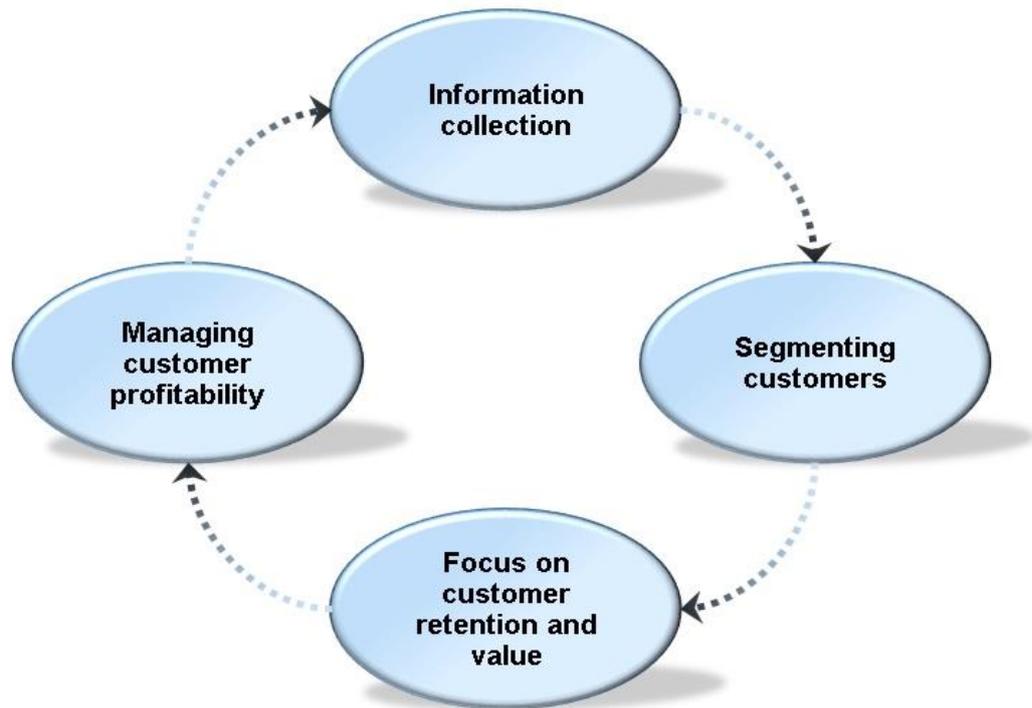


Figure 4. Relationship marketing process (Reijonen & Laukkanen, 2010)

Customer focus and relationship marketing are very overlapping and seem to be almost completely interchangeable, which is understandable given all the similarities. However, there are small differences as in customer focus mainly divides customers into various groups with different products and services offered to different customer groups. Customer opinions are also taken into account and the aim is on increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Puusa et al., 2012, p. 28).

The importance of relationship marketing is on the rise as many industries are moving towards strategic network competition. This means that

companies cooperate within their own networks, or value chains, and at the same time compete against other networks (Hunt, Arnett & Madhavaram, 2006). This increases the importance of strong customer relationships which are aimed at the long-term survival and additional value creation of both customers, and members of the network. At the same time it is important to keep in mind that the relationship approach to business can only work when the customer believes that having a relationship with the company has more benefits than costs (Hunt, Arnett & Madhavaram, 2006). Hunt, Arnett & Madhavaram (2006) also identify some of the benefits and costs that can incur for the customer on top of the obvious financial benefits and costs. This approach is also called customer value management, in where the company needs to constantly assess the effect of their offering to customer's costs and returns (Keränen, 2014). On top of the benefits outweighing the costs, it is essential in business-to-business relationships that the companies can compete better at their marketplace as a consequence of their relationship (Hunt, Arnett & Madhavaram, 2006).

Whether or not relationship marketing strategies and efforts are successful depends on several factors. There are factors which relate to the company's internal capabilities, resources and marketing, other factors that deal with information technology, history and public policy. All of them are important, yet the most important and interesting factors for relationship marketing are the relational factors (Hunt, Arnett & Madhavaram, 2006). These factors include trust (Sividas & Dwyer, 2000), commitment (Day, 1995), cooperation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), keeping promises (Grönroos, 1997), shared values (Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001) and communication (Mohr, Fisher & Nevin, 1996). For the business-to-business relationships to be fruitful, it is necessary to build trust, be committed, cooperate together on every level necessary, be true to one's word, communicate all the time and share the same values and beliefs that guide the mutual action forward (Hunt, Arnett, Madhavaram, 2006).

As relationship marketing concerns a company's strategy, it can also be seen as an underlying business and company culture. Customer relationship management on the other hand, entails the management strategies for handling the relationships with the company's customers. Customer relationship management is explained and looked into in the following subchapter.

3.2. Customer relationship management (CRM)

As mentioned earlier, customer relationship management, or CRM, is the functional side of relationship marketing when it comes to managing the relationships towards the company's customers. CRM also entails many aspects from market orientation and is therefore directly linked to customer centricity. Customer relationship management represents the actual ways in which a company can be more responsive to the needs, wants and hidden desires of its customers (Boulding et al., 2005).

The way customer relationship management is defined can be difficult as there are countless definitions by several authors. A number of them are collected into Table 1. The wide variety of elements in the definitions is very clear, and perhaps the most unique definition comes from Peppers & Rodgers (2004) as they define CRM and relationships in a very practical manner, as a kind of small story. This makes it rather easy to understand the fundamental purpose of developing long-term customer relationships. Yet at the same time, it does not describe the process and elements of business relationships and customer relationship management.

Other than this, the definitions are mainly focused on describing the main processes, elements and goals of customer relationship management in business terms. Nevertheless, they still vary quite significantly. Many of them mention the creation of value, either for the shareholders of the company (Payne & Frow, 2005; Payne, 2006, p. 2) or mutually for the company and its customers (Jackson, 2005; Buttle, 2009, p. 15).

Table 1. Definitions of customer relationship management (CRM)

Author(s)	Definition
Peppers & Rodgers (2004), p. 1	<i>The learning relationship works like this: If you are my customer and I get you to talk to me, and I remember what you tell me, then I get smarter about you. I know something about you my competitors don't know. So I can do things for you my competitors can't do, because they don't know you as well as I do. Before long, you can get something from me you can't get anywhere else, for any price. At the very least, you'd have to start all over somewhere else, but starting over is more costly than staying with me</i>
Jackson (2005), p. 76	<i>CRM is a business strategy evolved to manage the development of a company, the acquisition and retention of its customers and to create long-term value between them</i>
Payne & Frow (2005), p. 168	<i>CRM is a strategic approach that is concerned with creating improved shareholder value through the development of appropriate relationships with key customers and customer segments. CRM unites the potential of relationship marketing strategies and IT to create profitable, long-term relationships with customers and other key stakeholders. CRM provides enhanced opportunities to use data and information to both understand customers and cocreate value with them. This requires a cross-functional integration of processes, people, operations, and marketing capabilities that is enabled through information, technology, and applications</i>
Peelen (2005), p. 4	<i>CRM is an IT enabled business strategy, the outcomes of which optimize profitability, revenue and customer satisfaction by organizing around customer segments, fostering customer-satisfying behaviors and implementing customer-centric processes</i>
Payne (2006), p. 2	<i>CRM is a holistic strategic approach to managing customer relationships in order to create shareholder value</i>
Shumanov & Ewing (2007), p. 71	<i>CRM is a core customer-centric business strategy focused on acquiring and retaining profitable customers</i>
Buttle (2009), p. 15	<i>CRM is the core business strategy that integrates internal processes and functions, and external networks, to create and deliver value to targeted customers at a profit. It is grounded on high quality customer-related data and enabled by information technology</i>
Kotler & Keller (2012), p. 157	<i>Customer relationship management (CRM) is the process of carefully managing detailed information about individual customers and all customer "touch points" to maximize loyalty</i>
Wang & Feng (2012), p. 117	<i>CRM is a cross-functional organizational process that focuses on establishing, maintaining, and enhancing long-term relationships with attractive customers</i>

Others mention customers, and especially customers that have the possibility of being or becoming profitable (Shumanov & Ewing, 2007), or attractive as Wang & Feng (2012) phrase it. Customer centricity and customer-centric actions are also present in some of the definitions which can be seen above in Table 1. Peelen (2005, p. 4) and Shumanov & Ewing (2007) relate CRM to customer focus and more specifically to customer-centric processes and business strategy. Information technology is also brought into play by Payne & Frow (2005), by Peelen (2005, p. 2.), and by Buttle (2009, p. 2).

The linkage of customer relationship management to business strategy is especially important because it demonstrates the importance of strategic actions regarding business relationships and CRM (Jackson, 2005; Peelen, 2005, p. 4; Shumanov & Ewing, 2007; Buttle, 2009, p. 15). Therefore, the definition of customer relationship management adopted for the purposes of this research combines elements from the above mentioned definitions. Customer relationship management is a business strategy created to manage the development of a company, the acquisition and retention of its customers and to create loyalty and long-term value between the company and its customers in all touch points through customer-centric processes. (Jackson, 2005; Peelen, 2005, p. 4; Shumanov & Ewing, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 157).

It is also noteworthy to keep in mind that the above mentioned literature and definitions are merely a glance into the entire customer relationship management literature. The definitions in Table 1 were chosen because they demonstrate the diversity of definitions and their elements. A large amount of articles have been written on the subject and for comprehensive literature reviews, see Ngai (2005), and Kevork & Vrechopoulos (2009).

3.2.1. Customer relationship management antecedents

As can be seen from the adopted definition above, customer relationship management has specific parts, or antecedents which it is consistent of. These parts include acquisition and retention of customers, top management commitment, CRM technology, and strategic alignment. Business strategy and firm development are also a part of CRM and they are dealt with deeper in chapter five.



Figure 5. Antecedents of customer relationship management (Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005; Saini, Grewal, Johnson, 2010; Wang & Feng, 2012)

The acquisition and retention of customers, more notably profitable customers is highly important as the success of any customer relationship management initiative depends largely on this factor (Saini, Grewal & Johnson, 2010). This is due to the fact that the success is most often measured on indicators such as customer acquisition, retention, satisfaction and lifetime value of the customer (Winer, 2001). Top management commitment and support for the CRM initiative is also important as the journey towards a customer focused organization has to start from the top (Purvis, Samabamurthy & Zmud, 2001; Saini, Grewal & Johnson, 2010).

CRM technology is an important issue for any customer relationship management initiative. Information technology as itself does not become a CRM for the company, yet it is a vital enabler of customer relationship management (Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005; Wang & Feng, 2012). CRM is very much driven by the data and information it assimilates. This requires systematic and organized databases for storing and analyzing the information into knowledge about the customer (Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005.)

All antecedents are highly essential, specifically the strategic alignment of a customer relationship management initiative (Wang & Feng, 2012). This is especially true in business-to-business settings as there are some large differences to business-to-consumer markets. Businesses in general purchase larger quantities, and in capital equipment or industrial services making the financial value of orders larger than in consumer markets. Companies are also more likely to be repeat purchasers, or at the very least their buying behavior is more predictable than the one of consumers.

Business buyers are on top of this, more likely to seek and demand long-term suppliers and have a desire to develop relationships (Saini, Grewal & Johnson, 2010). Relationship development comes from driving down costs and from providing steady supply. In this sense, strategic alignment of customer relationship management is more prominent in business-to-business markets as the entire sell/purchase process is more complex than for consumer markets, and businesses gain better advantage from deep service (Palmatier, Scheer, Evans & Arnold, 2008).

Another point stressing on the importance of a strategic view point to customer relationship management is that the financial size of orders is larger and in general there are fewer buyers on the market in business-to-business than in business-to-consumers (Puusa et al., 2012, p. 154). This way it becomes more difficult and more costly to replace customers than in business-to-consumer markets (Saini, Grewal & Johnson, 2010).

Therefore, it is crucial for strategic CRM to bring added value into the business relationships.

Overall, it becomes clear that customer relationship management is about the harmonious union of people, process and technology (Chen & Popovich, 2003). Same view is supported by Jayachandran, Sharma, Kaufman & Raman (2005) as they bind people and process together into relational information processes, and discuss its role together with technology.

3.2.2. CRM as a creator of mutual value

Value creation, and more specifically mutual value creation between the company and its customers is an essential part of customer relationship management. This can already be seen in the definitions of CRM, given in Table 1 and in the definition adopted for the purposes of this research. Value in this context does not mean only the value the company can derive from the customer relationship. Even though this is important and there are specific ways to do it (Noone, Kimes & Renaghan, 2003; Musalem & Joshi, 2009), the value created by CRM refers also, and more importantly, to the customer's perception of value from products or services they receive (Payne, 2006, p. 103; Buttle, 2009, p. 187; Avery, Fournier & Wittenbraker, 2014). There are also ways to determine the value received by customer (Keränen, 2014). In this way, it can be said that the customer acts as an active participant in the creation of value (Golik Klanac, 2008).

The value creation process through customer relationship management is always a two way operation as the value has to be perceived both by company and customer (Payne, 2006, p. 102; Rabadah, Mohd & Ibrahim, 2011). The process is depicted below, in Figure 6. This dual-focused process requires the company to be organized around its customers instead of its products. Many companies have still not realized this

fundamental issue of customer relationship management (Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005).

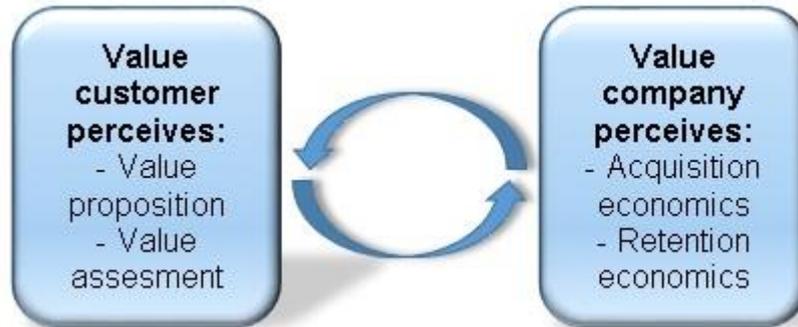


Figure 6. CRM value creation process (Modified from Payne, 2006, p. 102)

As it is established that the value created from customer relationship management needs to be dual-sided, the nature of the perceived values can be discussed. From the customer's point-of-view, value is simply not only what the company produces for them, it is the value perceived in packaging, services, financing and so on (Payne, 2006, p. 104). The amount of value is always relative to specific customers as different solutions bring various levels of value to different customers (Korkman, 2006; Golik Klanac, 2008). One customer appreciates high level of services while another might appreciate good financing assistance more. Korkman (2006) provides a deeper look into customer value while taking the material and social contexts of life into account. Therefore, it can be said that each customer makes their own assessment of the value presented by the company's offer.

In order for the customer relationship management strategy and implementation to be successful, the first thing is to understand what the customer is buying from the company. The customer is not merely buying a product or a service, they derive benefits from the possibility (Payne, 2006, p. 104). Companies can either meet the expected value or surpass them. Naturally, performing below expected benefits is also possible, yet with well-planned CRM strategy and actions this should not be the case in

any company. In all cases, developing a long-term relationship adds its own value to the possibilities presented between company and customer (Payne, 2006, p. 111). Whether this benefit comes in the short-term or long-term needs to be determined on an individual customer basis (Peppers & Rodgers, 2004, p. 299).

This brings out the importance of developing good and proper value propositions (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996; Ryals, 2005) because although business between companies is usually more structured, it is still performed by people and possesses humane characteristics (Golik Klanac, 2008; Puusa et al., 2012, p. 158). In an ideal situation, the value proposition developed by the company will match the customer's expected needs and wanted benefits (Payne, 2006, p. 124). Having a truly well-developed value proposition requires a company to focus on the customer, and design strategy on the value perceived by customer. As noted before, business-to-business markets in general have less customers than business-to-consumer markets (Puusa et al., 2012, p. 154). Therefore, it is important for companies to attract and retain their customers by setting the correct value proposition for the correct customer. By implementing and applying comprehensive customer relationship management, companies can respond to the risen needs and expectations of customers (Puusa et al., 2012, p. 162).

From the company's perspective value is based on two factors, how profitable is the initial acquisition of a customer and how much potential profit there is in the long-term retention of a specific customer or customer group (Payne, 2006, p. 112). Acquiring new customers is always necessary in order to compensate for customer defection rates and to keep the existing customer base or to make the customer pool larger (Buttle, 2009, p. 31). Yet, this is a costly task as acquiring a new customer can be even up to 20 times more expensive than keeping an existing one (Reichheld & Detrick, 2003; Buttle, 2009, p. 33).

As can be seen, acquisition of new customers is necessary but expensive. Therefore, keeping existing customers is highly important for all companies, and especially for companies operating in business-to-business markets. Understanding the complexities of separate customers is the key (Avery, Fournier & Wittenbraker, 2014). This can only be done by listening to what the customer wants (Mueller, 2014). Lower number of customers and large financial value of orders provide reason for customer retention to have a large impact on a company's profitability (Reichheld & Detrick, 2003).

Customer relationship management, customer focus and market orientation are the building blocks for collaborative customer relationship management. As these building blocks were dealt with in the previous chapters of two and three, the focus of the coming chapter is as follows. First the emphasis is on explaining and clarifying collaborative customer relationship management. After this, the focus turns to explaining the levels of strategy, and the linkage between collaborative customer relationship management and business strategy. At the same time the importance of collaborative customer relationship management, and CRM in general, on each level of strategy will be discovered.

4. COLLABORATIVE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: BRINGING CRM AND MARKET ORIENTATION TOGETHER

Collaborative customer relationship management, or collaborative CRM, is a concept which first emerged in the area of fast moving consumer goods. It is a way to represent, organize and bring together the customer relationship management initiatives of retailers and producers of goods (Kracklauer, Mills & Seifert, 2004). Retailers and goods producers would share their information regarding consumers, generate that information into knowledge and develop responses together. Such responses can include new products, for example. Naturally, this approach applies for the collaboration of any enterprises in any value chain (Buttle, 2009, p. 11).

Even though developed for the purposes of retail trade and fast moving consumer goods, collaborative customer relationship management is useful, as a modification, in other industries as well. Another well accepted manner in which to view collaborative CRM is that it manages and coordinates all the customer touch points and communication channels (Geib, Kolbe & Brenner, 2006). Nevertheless, collaborative customer relationship management allows for the efficient teamwork of separate departments, or organizations, in order to serve customers better and to deliver additional value (Buttle, 2009, p. 11).

4.1. Collaborative CRM explained

For the purposes of this research, collaborative customer relationship management is defined as the combination of CRM, customer focus and market orientation. Therefore, collaborative customer relationship management can be said to be the coordinated organization wide collection, dissemination and response to customer and competitor

intelligence. This is done in order to create loyalty and long-term value for the company and its customers in all touch points through customer-centric processes (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver, Slater & Tietje, 1998; Jackson, 2005; Alavi, Ahuja & Medury, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 157).

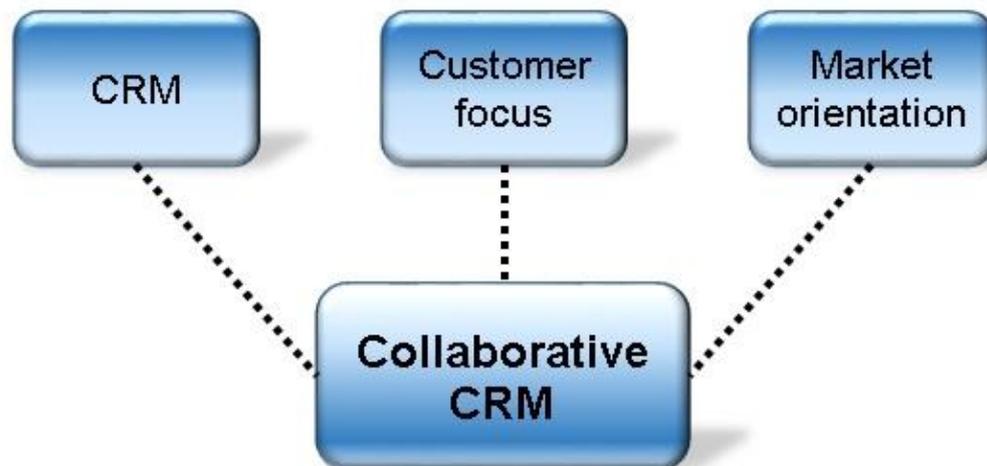


Figure 7. Collaborative customer relationship management (Based on Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Alavi, Ahuja & Medury, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 157)

As market orientation, customer focus and customer relationship management all stem from the same base, the marketing concept, it is only natural to bring them together into collaborative CRM, as presented in Figure 7. Nowadays, it becomes more and more important for companies to be aware of and understand their customers and their needs and wants. Especially with the emergence of the internet and the explosive growth of social media, all employees have the possibility of being in contact with the customer or a representative of the customer (Greenberg, 2010; Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011). This can happen regardless if the contact is intended or accidental. The issue of social media may be more relevant in business-to-consumer markets since social media is mainly directed at individuals. Nevertheless, it is also important in business-to-business areas, where the customer's experience is becoming more and more decisive (Moberg, 2014). This also brings certain challenges and

opportunities. Companies need to be aware that their employees are representing the company everywhere, and reflections of the employee can turn into reflections about the company. It also brings an incredible opportunity in terms of generating customer data and understanding the customer (Greenberg, 2010.) Marketing, and collaborative CRM, has become an organization wide issue and being part of everyone's job description (de Swaan Arons, van den Driest & Weed, 2014). This is the reason and proof for the growing importance of collaborative customer relationship management, as defined in this thesis.

The need for interdepartmental collaboration in customer-facing issues was called for a long time ago (Compton, 2002). Marketing as a function and customer focus as an attitude are to some extent disappearing from companies (Wirtz, Tuzovic & Kuppelwieser, 2014). The question is how to distribute customer-centric processes and customer relationship management across all functions of a company (Webster Jr., Malter & Ganesan, 2005). Marketing and sales skills are becoming more and more dispersed in companies and lay in separate parts of the company (Webster Jr., Malter & Ganesan, 2005). To some extent, this promises well for market orientation, and customer focus in the company. Therefore, this would also make companies more responsive to collaborative customer relationship management. However, without proper and clear definitions of roles, and without a center of excellence for collaborative customer relationship management processes the initiative can fail drastically (Webster Jr., Malter & Ganesan, 2005; Geib, Kolbe & Brenner, 2006).

In order for collaborative customer relationship management to succeed in the future, it is important for companies to develop loyalty networks among their employees. Loyalty networks and loyalty networkers refer to people who are completely committed to the company and its goals, and at the same time promote high levels of collaboration among and between departments and functions (Duffy, Koudal & Pratt, 2004). It is also

important to create a strong link between collaborative customer relationship management and the business strategy of a company.

4.2. Business strategy and its three levels

In order for any collaborative CRM and customer relationship management to be successful in a company, it requires linkages to the business strategy of the organization (Narver, Slater & Tietje, 1998). A business strategy defines the way a company is going to compete, what its goals are and how those goals are reached. It answers the questions: what the company is doing now? What is happening in the environment? What the company should be doing in the future? (Porter, 1980) Answers to these questions must translate to three different levels. The linkages between business strategy and collaborative customer relationship management need to exist on all three levels of strategy: at the corporate level, business unit level and operational level (Webster Jr., 1992). The three levels of strategy are visible on Figure 8, while the links between strategy and collaborative CRM are viewed in subchapter 4.3.

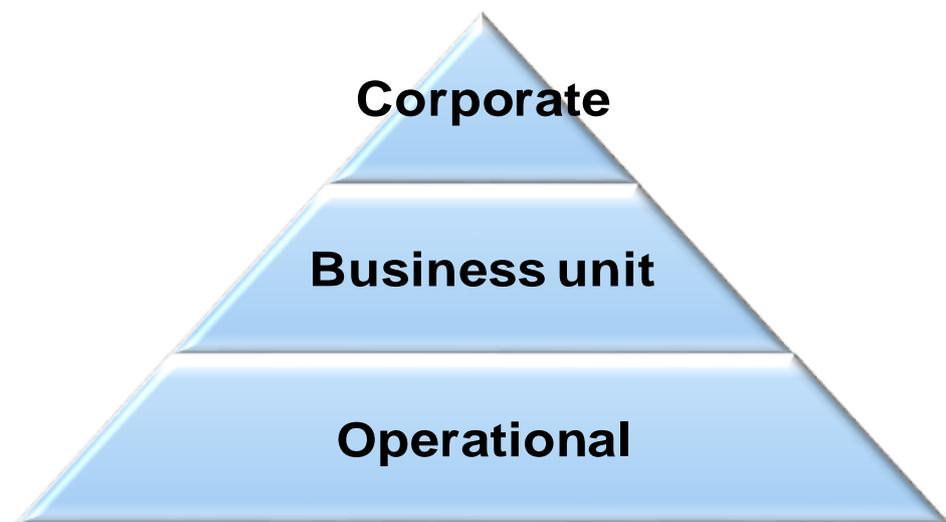


Figure 8. The three levels of strategy (Adapted from Webster Jr., 1992)

As can be seen, the levels are corporate, business unit and operational. Lynch (2012, p. 18) describes the levels in terms of the nature of decisions they entail. Corporate level refers to the context of the business strategy, business unit level is in charge of content, and operational strategy takes care of the process in which the entire strategy is put into action (Lynch, 2012, p. 17-18). On the other hand, Warren (2008, p. 515-517) considers the strategic levels as five strategic decisions, answering the questions of whether to take part, how to take part, what is the future, whether to extend or revise, while considering constant adjustments to strategy. There exist various ways in presenting and dealing with these matters, yet they ultimately relate to the same concepts and issues. No matter what the case, these decision levels need to work together in order to gain the maximum benefits of a strategy, and at the same time avoid creating constraints on each other (Kownatzki, Walter, Floyd & Lechner, 2013).

In general, the corporate level of strategy defines the area of business in which the company participates in, and the future business in which the company takes part in, and how to organize the company's value creating activities in the best possible manner (Fitzgerald, 1981; Bowman & Ambrosini, 2007; Lynch, 2012, p. 7). In other words, it is about the context of the strategy and the company (Hui, 2004; Lynch, 2012, p. 18), and the general setting in which the strategy is to happen. Corporate level strategy has three distinct tasks in defining the corporate mission, setting objectives and financial policy, and monitoring business unit level progress and process (Fitzgerald, 1981). This is not simply stating that the company does A, and next year will do B. It requires an ability to exploit imagination and innovation in a useful manner through strategic frameworks and in order to create long-term sustainability for the company (Santalainen, 2006, p. 27). From the point-of-view of the five questions, this answers whether to take part, how to take part and if the strategy should be expanded or revised (Warren, 2008, p. 515-517). One of the most difficult,

yet profitable ways to do this is by reconfiguring the earning logic of the company into a customer focused business (Santalainen, 2006, p. 62-65).

The business unit level strategy is about the tactic responses and choices that each company makes. To put it in other terms, business unit strategy entails the contents, also known as main actions, of a company's competitive strategy (Lynch, 2012, p. 18). Warren (2008, p. 516) considers business unit level strategy to be in charge of devising the operational path to success. These are the tactics with which the company deals with and battles its competition. For example, the marketing mix, four P's, decisions are done on a business unit level. These decisions are based on the corporate level alignments and the general market information and market analysis that is available; meaning customer, competitor, market trends and others (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 69-76.) Nowadays, it is becoming increasingly important for companies to be able to make business unit level strategic decision faster and with accuracy (Kownatzki et al., 2013).

In general, there are three ways in which the corporate level asserts its power on the strategic business unit. Outcome control suggests that corporate is mainly setting certain goals for the business unit while the actual strategy is decided on the business unit level. Second form of control is behavior control where the headquarters is actively involved in strategy formulation, yet does not impose a strategy on a business unit. The last pattern of control is content control. This suggests a level of control on the substance of strategy by headquarters at the business unit level (Kownatzki et al., 2013.) As can be seen from the descriptions, content control implies high levels of centralization while outcome control is much more decentralized. Behavior control comes in between these two as a formalized form of control between corporate level and business unit level (Kownatzki et al., 2013.)

The third level of strategy, the bottom level in Figure 8, is the operational level or the level of process (Lynch, 2012, p. 18). This is about executing business unit level decision, and at the same time making sure all the company actions fit together with each other and with the possibly changing environment, making sure that the strategies come to life as results (Santalainen, 2006, p. 66; Lynch, 2012, p. 18). In general, there are two different ways in which this strategic planning can be done. There is the prescriptive approach or the emergent approach. As can be derived from the names, prescriptive strategy formulation calls for predetermined strategy, while the emergent strategy formulation is about developing a strategy over the course of its life and the strategy development function overlaps with strategy implementation (Lynch, 2012, p. 19). Naturally, both approaches are needed in order for a company to succeed with its competitive business strategy. The operational strategy is making sure that the entire strategy stays on its course (Warren, 2008, p. 517). Operational strategy is also often called simply operations management (Oltra & Flor, 2010) as it entails keeping the daily issues running.

A complementary method for looking at strategic decision making in companies comes from Bowman & Ambrosini (2007). They define the strategic process as a set of decisions designed to bring additional value for the customer. Some decisions can be, and have to be, integrated with each other, while others can remain rather loose from the rest (Bowman & Ambrosini, 2007.) The five decision areas are as follows: production operations activities, sales activities, procurement activities, research and development activities, and general support and maintenance activities (Bowman & Ambrosini, 2007). The five areas of selection need to be done in accordance to the three strategic levels. The decision making in these key areas needs to be focused on creating value for the customer, and in the process for the company.

4.3. Collaborative CRM and business strategy

Strategy is important for collaborative customer relationship management in order to get the best possible results. On the other hand, collaborative CRM and its various functions are crucial for the successful implementation of a business strategy, and especially the quality of these processes plays a key role (Zahay, 2008). At the corporate level, collaborative customer relationship management represents mainly the attitudes and underlying culture of the company with a certain value chain positioning in mind (Webster Jr., 1992). Such an approach can also be called strategic customer relationship management, where customer orientation fights for its place with the other business logics of product, production and selling orientation (Buttle, 2009, p. 4-5).

This reflects the market orientation aspects of CRM being an organization wide effort (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990), and in having a customer and competitor orientation (Narver & Slater, 1990), which are present in collaborative CRM. Bringing collaborative customer relationship management to the corporate strategy level provides the possibility of realizing its potential in the long-term value creation through trusted relationships with customers (Wilson, 2006). This is important as most business-to-business customers purchase large quantities and in large amounts of money. Managing these relationships strategically brings an opportunity for increased revenues and increasingly satisfied customers through improved and increased relationship quality (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007).



**Figure 9. Levels of strategy and their fit with collaborative CRM
(Adapted from Webster Jr., 1992)**

At the business unit level, collaborative customer relationship management is already represented more by customer focus (Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr, 1993; Shah et al., 2006), and actual customer relationship management activities (Chen & Popovich, 2003; Jackson, 2005). On top of these, the general level decisions of the marketing mix, positioning, segmenting and targeting, belong to the business unit level strategic decision making (Webster Jr., 1992). These collaborative CRM actions have the potential of being powerful tools for companies, as long as data collection from internal and external sources, information storage, analysis and dissemination are done properly (Wilson, 2006). Research suggests that companies should aspire to be liked by their customers in order to install long-term relationship building and even customer referrals (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007). Relating collaborative customer relationship management and business strategy is close to the term of analytical CRM (Foss, Stone & Ekinci, 2008; Buttle, 2009, p. 9-11). Nevertheless, they are not to be mistaken for synonyms as collaborative CRM at the business unit level entails more than simply the activities of analytical customer relationship management.

As an operational strategy, collaborative customer relationship management is the single actions which lead to, and take care of long-term relationships with profitable customers. This is the level in which the key account managers and account managers, and other people in constant contact with customers, get to apply the business strategy into an implementation (Webster Jr., 1992). Although there are certain people who are mainly in contact and responsible for customer relationships, it should not be forgotten that customer service and customer orientation is a job for everyone in a company (Webster Jr., 1992). Especially with technology changing the ways of communication, all units and employees of a company can have contact with customers or the very least, have up-to-date information about them (Tapp & Hughes, 2004). Employees handling with day-to-day operational business will have to have clear processes which are finished with quality because the customer is always at the end of these processes (Peelen, 2005, p. 6). The operational strategy for collaborative customer relationship management can also be called operational CRM to some extent (Peelen, 2005, p. 289; Foss, Stone & Ekinici, 2008; Buttle, 2009, p. 6-9).

Collaborative customer relationship management, CRM, customer focus and market orientation play an increasingly important role for any company. Strategic alignment, learning, change development and teamwork from all people involved are crucial in making collaborative CRM successful (Payne & Frow, 2006; Foss, Stone & Ekinici, 2008). With the assistance of plentiful training (Foss, Stone & Ekinici, 2008), and clear measurement tools such as the balanced scorecard (Kimiloglu & Zarali, 2009) this is an achievable target.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the research design and methods used for this thesis, which adopts the multiple-case study approach (Yin, 2009, p. 46). In order to provide complete coverage and full understanding to the depths of this research, each aspect from sampling criteria to data collection and analysis is explained in detail. On top of this, the reliability and validity of the research are examined. To provide better clarity and relevance for the readability of the thesis, descriptions of the cases are presented in the beginning of chapter six, empirical results.

Having a multiple-case study research design varies only little from the more traditional single-case study design. Mainly it is merely a question of research design choice, yet there are distinct benefits and drawbacks (Yin, 2009, p. 53) which are dealt with next. Multiple-case study design brings more data to the research, often making it more robust and bringing this choice more attractive (Yin, 2009, p. 53). On the other hand, multiple-case studies are harder to conduct and can take considerable time compared to a single-case study (Yin, 2009, p. 53). Moreover, Yin (2009, p. 53-58) suggests that multiple-case studies need to be considered from the point-of-view of replication, as in multiple experiments. By replication, it is meant that the results of one case are replicated in another case with consideration given to certain conditions which are seen as unimportant for the results. In this manner, the results can be considered meaningful (Yin, 2009, p. 54).

This thesis applies the method of qualitative multiple-case study research design through the use of five distinct and separate cases in the form of in-depth interviews. As noted earlier, more description of the cases can be found in chapter six. In this chapter the nature of the research, sample criteria, data collection, coding practices, and reliability and validity of the research are looked through, respectively.

5.1. Nature of the research

Nature of the research refers to the structure of the research dilemma, or problem (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 55-56). It also refers to the approach of the research, when it comes to the relationship with theory (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 124; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 15-16). There exists three main descriptions which together apply for all research problems. These designs are exploratory, descriptive and causal researches (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 138-140; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 56). Exploratory research is best described by flexibility and unstructured problems. As new information arises, the complete direction of a research can shift totally (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 56). On the other hand, descriptive and causal researches have more structured approaches, where the research problem is well understood (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 56-57).

The common research approaches are called inductive and deductive (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 124). Deduction refers to the testing of existing theory. This approach is generally observed as the basic form of scientific research, and can take the form of either quantitative research of testing hypotheses, or qualitative research of seeking deep answers for open-ended questions. In both cases, end result of deductive research is to be able to generalize the found results. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 124-125) On the other hand, an inductive approach to research is concerned with building new theory from the conducted empirical research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 125-126). This research applies the deductive approach with an exploratory research problem (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 124-125; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 56-57).

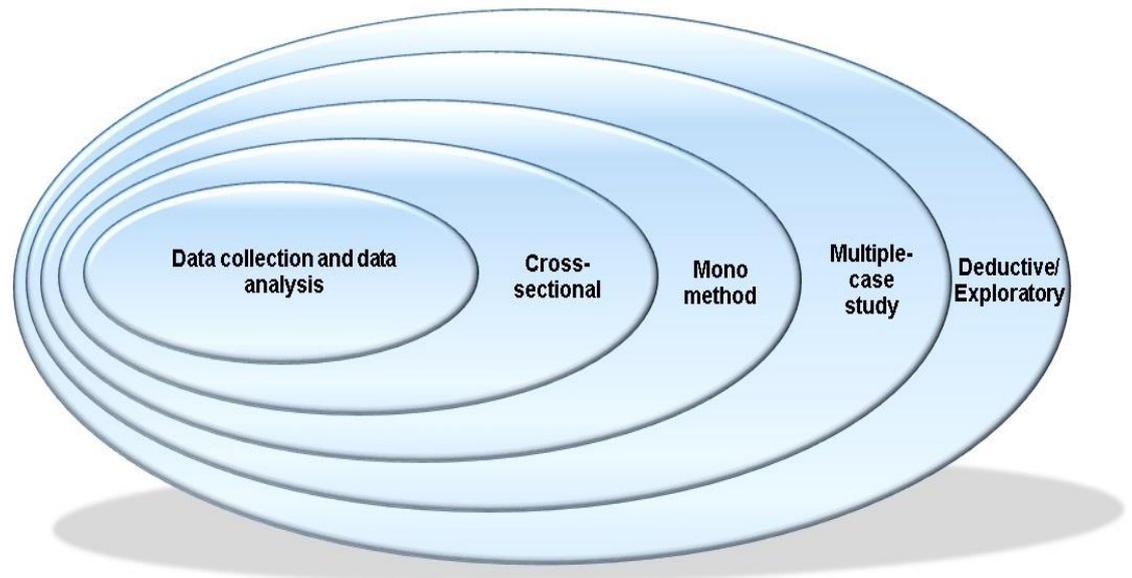


Figure 10. The research onion for this thesis (Modified from Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 108)

The best way to graphically present the methodology of this thesis is through the research onion (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 108), which can be seen above in Figure 10. Through the research onion it can be seen that this thesis adopts deductive and exploratory approaches and applies qualitative multiple-case study research through in-depth interviews. Therefore, the research applies a mono method of research where a single data collection and analysis procedure is used (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 595). Moreover, this thesis has a cross-sectional touch as it provides an image of a specific moment in time instead of a long-term vision (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 590). At the heart of the research onion is the basic data collection and data analysis procedures and practices, which are described in more detail in the following subchapters.

5.2. Sampling and sample criteria

Sampling is an integral element of a research methodology. At the completely best case scenario, it is possible to include the entire sample population (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 211) in the research

being conducted. Unfortunately, this is almost never the case in reality. Therefore, sampling is needed when there are budget and time constraints on the researcher, and when it would simply be very impractical, and impossible, to include the entire population due its vast size (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 212).

The sampling method chosen for the purposes of this thesis is judgment sampling (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 139). With judgment sampling, the researcher simply selects cases, and companies, which are believed to be representative of the entire population. In this thesis, the criteria for selecting case companies are as follows. All selected companies need to operate exclusively in the business-to-business markets and have to be of sufficient size. Size is important in order for the company to have customer relationship management processes in use. Size is determined based on the number of employees, with companies ranging up from 200 employees chosen.

Furthermore, there are other specific conditions for the chosen companies. They need to demonstrate a certain level of customer focus, this mainly being found in the company's vision and mission on the webpage. Expressing customer focus and customer orientation in vision and mission can be read as a degree of collaborative customer relationship management. The webpages of approximately 50 Finnish business-to-business companies' were screened and out of which ten was chosen for the research. Contact information for these companies were obtained from the internet, phonebook, and especially social media. Specifically, people who would appear to have knowledge of the company's customer relationship management, based on their titles, were contacted. Out of the ten contacted persons, five agreed to a maximum one hour long interview regarding their company's CRM processes and how they related to the company's business strategy. Each interview was set up individually at an agreed time and location. Rest of the people contacted were either not knowledgeable of CRM or simply did not want to participate. Nevertheless,

five interviews from five different companies is considered to be enough to develop five cases for the multiple-case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989). The interview process and data collection are explained next in detail.

5.3. Data collection

Data collection is organized by applying the use of in-depth interviews (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 324) following the structure of questions shown in Appendix 1. The questions giving structure for the interviews are designed in such a manner that they provide answers to the sub-questions presented in chapter 1.3. By answering all of the sub questions, it is possible to find an answer to the main research question:

How do business-to-business firms take collaborative customer relationship management into account in their business strategy?

Having in-depth interviews is the most appropriate method for this thesis as it provides deeper insights and makes the interviewees build on their answers (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 324). This also provides the opportunity to discover issues related to collaborative customer relationship management which are not pre-considered by the researcher. Therefore, even though the interviews follow a clear structure, the discussion is not limited to the questions presented and it is possible to explore new dimensions should some emerge.

All interviews were organized in a location chosen by the company representative, in most cases the company's offices. Timing of the interview was also decided by the interviewee. These both decisions were done to make it easier for them to participate and in order not distract their busy schedules too much. None of the interviewees wanted their and their company's name mentioned. Therefore, the cases are referred to as from case A to case E. All five interviews were conducted within the month of

June in 2014 and none of the interviewees have knowledge of who else is interviewed. Every interview had an average duration of one hour and they generated a total of 60 pages of transcripts. Therefore, the interviews were kept within the one hour maximum that was agreed on with the interviewees.

All interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee and the interviews were stored on the private computer of the researcher. At the point when the interview recording were not required anymore for the purposes of this research, they were thoroughly destroyed by the researcher. This is done in order to keep the identities of interviewees safe as agreed on. Destroying of the recordings also prevents them from ending up with people outside the research.

5.4. Coding practices

For the purposes of fully understanding and taking complete advantage of the gathered data, it requires analysis. All interviews are transcribed (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 485-486) on Microsoft Word and classified into separate and distinct categories. In other words, the data is coded (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 492-493). The transcriptions are dissected with a purpose while at the same time keeping the contexts intact and therefore keeping the meaning of words in place (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Computer aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was not used as assistance due to a lack of availability and resources. This presents certain challenges, especially considering time, as the job of transcribing and coding can be slow without CAQDAS.

In its simplicity, the data in the transcripts are clustered into similar groups and assigned with codes and subcodes corresponding to the key concepts and research questions of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57). The used coding method is presented by Miles & Huberman (1994, p. 57-65),

and is thoroughly explained next. A presentation of the coding method and actual coding done for this thesis is available at Appendix 2.

The codes are divided into three categories, descriptive, interpretive and pattern codes. Descriptive codes provide rather general information with little interpretation required, while pattern codes are more explanatory and give more contextual meaning for the data. Interpretive codes on the other hand stay between descriptive and pattern codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57-58.) A presentation of the created codes for the beginning can be seen in Table 2. The codes are based on the key concepts of the research and on the research questions.

Table 2. Start list of codes

Description of codes	Codes	Q & SQ
COLLABORATIVE CRM	CCRM	1
CCRM: ORGANIZATION WIDE EFFORT	CCRM-OWE	1.0.1
CCRM: COORDINATED TASKS	CCRM-CT	1.0.1
clear roles	CCRM-CT-roles	1.0.1/1.1
CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT	CRM	1.1
CRM: IMPORTANCE	CRM-IM	1.4
most important market info from customers	CRM-IM-cinfo	1.1/1.2/1.4
CRM: STRATEGY	CRM-STR	1.1/1.4
CRM: IT	CRM-IT	1.1
acceptance of processes	CRM-IT-apro	1.1/1.4
CRM: CUSTOMER-CENTRIC PROCESSES	CRM-CCP	1.1/1.2
processes designed with customer	CRM-CCP-prode	1.1/1.2
recognize all contacts/touch points	CRM-CCP-tp	1.1/1.2/1.4
CUSTOMER FOCUS	CF	1.2
CF: LONG-TERM VALUE	CF-LTV	1.2
CF: STRATEGY	CF-STR	1.2
starts from top management	CF-STR-exec	1.2/1.0.1
MARKET ORIENTATION	MO	1.3
MO: STRATEGY	MO-STR	1.3
top management emphasis	MO-STR-exec	1.3/1.1
MO: INTELLIGENCE GENERATION	MO-IG	1.3/1.0.1
organizational issue	MO-IG-org	1.3/1.0.1
MO: INTELLIGENCE SHARING	MO-IS	1.3/1.0.1
organizational issue	MO-IS-org	1.3/1.0.1
MO: RESPONSIVENESS	MO-RES	1.3/1.0.1
organizational issue	MO-RES-org	1.3/1.0.1/1.1/1.4
BUSINESS STRATEGY	BS	1/1.1/1.2/1.3/1.4
BS: UNDERSTAND CUSTOMERS	BS-UCUS	1/1.1/1.2/1.3/1.4
see hidden needs and wants	BS-UCUS-nw	1/1.0.1/1.2

Table 2 is to provide explanation for how the coding process is organized and done, which codes are generated and how they are identified by the researcher. When discussing the results and analysis of data, only the description of the codes are used to keep maximum clarity in the work. Naturally, the codes in Table 2 are only a starting point in order to provide structure for the analysis, and entails only descriptive and interpretive codes. Pattern codes emerge from the actual analysis and become clear at the empirical results (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 61).

The column marked as Q & SQ refers to the research question and sub-question to which the specific codes are mainly related to. The numbering of questions goes as follows: 1 and 1.0.1 refers directly to the main research question and numbers 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 relate to the sub-questions in their respective order as presented in chapter 1.3.

5.5. Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are important concepts for research as it is crucial to be able to measure issues accurately, meaning if the received answers are actually the truth and can they be replicated (Shank, 2006, p. 110). Without giving consideration for reliability and validity, the results of any research cannot be taken completely seriously. At the very least, caution needs to be executed when discussing the generalizability of a research (Shank, 2006, p. 112).

Specifically, reliability is in relation to the replication of the interview results. Best way to test for this is to conduct several separate studies with the same results (Shank, 2006, p. 110). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this research there are a number of cases and case interviews. Results of the interviews do not differ from one another greatly and similar themes arise constantly throughout all the interviews. This suggests a level of

repeatability within the answers and provides reason to believe that results would be the same in another research.

Validity on the other hand is concerned with the truth, meaning if the obtained results are actually true and that the interview questions relate the central concepts of the research (Shank, 2006, p. 111). For this thesis, the interview questions were sent to the academic supervisor of the thesis for commentary. Any redundancies and misunderstandings were corrected based on the received feedback. In addition to this, the interviews are conducted in Finnish even though the interview questions are developed in English. This is to avoid potential language problems and misunderstandings as all the interviewees are Finnish.

6. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

This chapter deals with, and presents the empirical results of the cases which were obtained through the in-depth interviews. The individual cases and interviewees are also briefly described and their experience is explored. After this, the empirical results are discussed in light of the theory, which was developed earlier, by answering the research questions.

6.1. Description of the cases

As mentioned already earlier, all case companies are Finnish and operate solely on business-to-business markets. Each of the cases are briefly described in the following. The information may seem to be limited and is restricted to simple descriptive information due to the fact that the informants expressed their desire of not to be named in the research. This desire is covering both company and the actual individual. Nevertheless, in order to provide better reliability for the results of this research a classification of informant experience is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Informant experience

Informant	Experience in CRM (years)
A	20
B	20
C	7
D	5
E	11

As can be seen from Table 3, the informants of this study have several years of experience in customer relationship management. They are therefore more than capable to participate in the interviews. The individual case companies are explained further in the following.

Case company A is a Finnish business-to-business firm which operates in the field of equipment and parts manufacturing. The company employs approximately 3 500 people and possesses a commanding position in the Baltic Sea region. Case company B on the other hand, is also a Finnish business-to-business firm operating in the forest industry. The company has operations in several countries across the world and employs several thousands of people.

Case company C operates solely in the medical and healthcare industry. They employ a total of approximately 200 people. The company also has export operations all around the world and is a Finnish business-to-business firm. Case company D is a Finnish construction and renovation industry supplier. The firm has a workforce of approximately 200 people and operations in the Baltic region. The final company, case company E is also a Finnish business-to-business firm. Company E operates as a subcontractor for the engineering industry. The firm provides employment for more than 2 500 people and operates in several European countries with aggressive expansion aspirations.

6.2. Analysis of data

All the data is analyzed through the practice of coding, which is described in detail in chapter 5 of research methodology. As the list of codes presented in Table 2 is only a start list, the full comprehensive list of codes is available in Table 4. As new codes emerged during several transcriptions, previously coded interviews were re-coded in order to detect for the emergent codes. An actual example of the coding process is available at Appendix 2. In order to reflect the data, it is discussed in light of the theory. The structure of the analysis is divided according to the research question and its sub-questions as follows.

Table 4. Final list of generated codes

Description of codes	Codes	Q & SQ
COLLABORATIVE CRM	CCRM	1
CCRM: ORGANIZATION WIDE EFFORT	CCRM-OWE	1.0.1
CCRM: COORDINATED TASKS	CCRM-CT	1.0.1
clear roles	CCRM-CT-roles	1.0.1/1.1
CCRM: STRATEGY	CCRM-STR	1.0.1
CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT	CRM	1.1
CRM: IMPORTANCE	CRM-IM	1.4
most important market info from customers	CRM-IM-cinfo	1.1/1.2/1.4
importance of executive support	CRM-IM-exec	1.1/1.4
CRM: STRATEGY	CRM-STR	1.1/1.4
importance of CRM strategy	CRM-STR-im	1.4
rewarding systems	CRM-STR-rew	1.1
long-term rewards	CRM-STR-rewlt	1.1
short-term rewards	CRM-STR-rewst	1.1
CRM: IT	CRM-IT	1.1
acceptance of processes	CRM-IT-apro	1.1/1.4
CRM: CUSTOMER-CENTRIC PROCESSES	CRM-CCP	1.1/1.2
processes designed with customer	CRM-CCP-prode	1.1/1.2
recognize all contacts/touch points	CRM-CCP-tp	1.1/1.2/1.4
CRM: TRUST	CRM-TR	1.4
willingness to change	CRM-TR-will	1.4/1.1
CRM: RESOURCES	CRM-RES	1.1
CUSTOMER FOCUS	CF	1.2
CF: LONG-TERM VALUE	CF-LTV	1.2
CF: STRATEGY	CF-STR	1.2
starts from top management	CF-STR-exec	1.2/1.0.1
MARKET ORIENTATION	MO	1.3
MO: STRATEGY	MO-STR	1.3
top management emphasis	MO-STR-exec	1.3/1.1
MO: INTELLIGENCE GENERATION	MO-IG	1.3/1.0.1
organizational issue	MO-IG-org	1.3/1.0.1
MO: INTELLIGENCE SHARING	MO-IS	1.3/1.0.1
organizational issue	MO-IS-org	1.3/1.0.1
MO: RESPONSIVENESS	MO-RES	1.3/1.0.1
organizational issue	MO-RES-org	1.3/1.0.1/1.1/1.4
BUSINESS STRATEGY	BS	1/1.1/1.2/1.3/1.4
BS: UNDERSTAND CUSTOMERS	BS-UCUS	1/1.1/1.2/1.3/1.4
see hidden needs and wants	BS-UCUS-nw	1/1.0.1/1.2
BS: RESULTS & PERFORMANCE	BS-BR	1.4
BS: LONG-TERM VIEW	BS-LT	1
BS: OPERATIONAL	BS-OP	1.1

First of all, the findings and answers of interviewees are discussed in the light of all sub-questions in their respective order. Starting from sub-question one and moving in order all the way to sub-question four. After

these, the main research question is discussed in the light of the findings, and in the light of the answers to the sub-questions. Answers from cases are grouped together to form a cross-case analysis throughout the results.

6.2.1. Customer relationship management in operational business strategies

It is highly important and even crucial for companies to see the importance of customer relationship management, and to understand the big role of top management support on CRM (Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005; Saini, Grewal, Johnson, 2010; Wang & Feng, 2012). When asked of this aspect to customer relationship management, all respondents viewed executive and top management support as crucial for the successful implementation and survival of any CRM project. An interviewee states that the most likely problem for any failure of customer relationship management is due to a lack of understanding, capabilities and support from the top management. This was supported by another respondent in saying that the top management of their company supports the use, and has access to the CRM system and knows what data there is available.

It is also important for the company's executive and management team to be committed to all customer orders. This makes it even more important for them to be using and supporting customer relationship management in the company, according to an interviewee. All of the interviewees note that CRM and having customer relationship management as a companywide strategy has to start from the top. This point is also present in previous researches and theory (Purvis, Samabamurthy & Zmud, 2001; Saini, Grewal & Johnson, 2010). One interviewee concludes the following:

“CRM has to be in connection to the top management. It's one thing to preach about customer focus and so on but nothing happens without top management support and control”.

An aspect of customer relationship management which really stood out in all the interviews was rewarding policies of employees. Proper reward mechanisms can be the integral element which makes employees engaged in their work, and provides success for company's CRM (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Kirca, Jayachandran & Bearden, 2005). Although there were even large differences in how respondents answered regarding the rewarding policies, they all concluded on its importance. In some of the cases, rewarding is seen as a combination of monetary rewards and more intangible rewards. In one of the cases, rewarding is done through the traditional monetary rewards, such as bonuses. On top of this, they use rewards which are less measured in financial terms and are more imminent. These rewards include movie tickets and gym passes for example, depending on the particular person's interests. Simply praising the employees is also used. The less financial compensation is in place to provide faster feedback for employees in order to keep them more focused and involved in their work on a daily basis, according to the respondent. Such practices were also present in another case company, yet to a lesser extent.

"We believe it needs to be a mix of short-term and long-term rewards. Especially at operational level, rewarding needs to be fast and it is fairly simple with movie tickets, gym passes and so on".

In three out of five case companies, only monetary reward and bonus practices were in place. One of these three case companies could consider implementing non-financial and fast compensation if they receive direct and positive feedback from customers. On the other hand, they also mentioned that they believe this would be rather difficult to operationalize to the business activity. One of the interviewees gave the following statement regarding non-financial and faster rewarding systems.

"Well, no. I don't see any sense in it and I am not an advocate of that".

Another interviewee concluded in a similar manner:

“I cannot think of any good ways to reward responsively and fast”.

Slightly surprisingly, none of the respondents thought that employee rewarding should be tied to more qualitative performance indicators such as customer satisfaction. Although several preceding articles and research suggests this (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Kirca, Jayachandran & Bearden, 2005), it is not seen as relevant in any of the cases of this thesis. In all of the cases rewarding is seen to be always based on the company’s financial results, and on how the individual employee influences these results.

Table 5. Main responses to CRM in operational strategy

Customer relationship management (CRM)	Case A	Case B	Case C	Case D	Case E
IT Solution	More than just IT, an underlying strategy	Not only IT, has to a more comprehending strategy	IT tool to help existing processes	Just an IT solution to ease business	Mainly IT to help strategy
Rewarding policies	Both short-term and long-term with the mix depending on position	Both short-term and long-term with a focus on bonuses	Only financial rewards in the long-term	No need for anything else than financial	The only added value is in financial rewards
Processes	Designed to bring value for customers and company alike	Easy processes to support strategy	CRM processes that go in line with other processes	CRM processes cannot interfere other processes	Clearly structured and customer focused CRM processes
Top management emphasis	Absolutely crucial to make CRM work	It all starts from the executives	Has to begin from the top	Will not work without top management	Top management is well involved

When it comes to discussing customer relationship management together with information technology (IT) solutions, it is mentioned as key factor (Payne & Frow, 2005; Peelen, 2005, p. 4; Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005; Buttle, 2009, p. 15; Wang & Feng, 2012). Nevertheless, IT is not considered to be synonymous with customer relationship management. As

can be seen from Table 5, this view is shared in two of the cases with respondents mentioning that IT is not CRM. They also say that customer relationship management is simply not a tool, but more of an underlying strategy which guides the company's decisions. One of the interviewees pointed out the following:

“The entire company philosophy starts from customer relationship management”.

This supported by the following from the other case respondent:

“There is a long list of critical strategic question which we want to answer through CRM”.

In the rest of the cases, CRM is seen mainly as an existing IT tool that supports the chosen strategy and does not interfere with the existing processes. These are also the same cases in which rewarding policies were considered only from a monetary point-of-view. Customer relationship management was also considered to be very sales department oriented. This can be seen from the following comment, when asked about to whom CRM is a part of their job description.

“CRM belongs to sales and top management”.

Such views and statements are slightly surprising given that in all of the cases customer relationship management is said to be in close relations with the underlying business strategy. Nevertheless, even the case companies which responded to CRM merely as an IT tool or solution are moving towards a comprehensive view. One of the interviewees says that the company is all the time trying to expand the number of customer touch points. With customer touch points, the respondent was referring to the amount of employees in contact with a customer. Recognizing and extending the range of touch points is important for a company applying

customer relationship management strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 157).

Regarding the customer facing and internal CRM processes, all case companies have implemented clear tasks and therefore clear roles. Customer relationship management processes are also present in the literature. Peelen (2005, p. 4) and Shumanov & Ewing (2007) conclude that in the end all business processes need to be customer-centric, and especially the CRM processes need to be focused on acquiring and retaining customers and creating long-term mutual value. In all cases, the companies commented that their processes are designed to bring more customers in and keep existing ones. In one of the cases, the company has designed and implemented a step by step process for new customer acquisition:

“Our acquisition process goes from prospects to inquiry to suitability review to negotiation, and to contract finalization. This is completely done through CRM”.

Quite surprisingly in none of the cases customer relationship management processes are seen as a way to create mutual value. Interviewees only mention CRM as a means to bring added value for the company, not for their customers as literature is suggesting.

“CRM needs to bring added value for the company and should be handled only by people who can bring added value to the CRM processes”.

An issue which emerged during all of the interviews was mutual trust between top management and employees, and also between the company and its customers. Trust is also dealt with to some extent by Jayachandran et al. (2005) as they assert that trust is imperative for the development of a strong relationship. According to the interviews this applies to customers and employees.

“Customers sometimes find it difficult to openly tell things to our sales people because they think the sales person will consider it as an order”.

The further was also commented:

“It is important for employees to trust each other and the company so that information can flow easily and change resistance goes lower”.

An important issue which came up in all of the cases is resources and the need to make sure that customer relationship management and customer needs are in line with the company’s resource pool. To some extent this was expected as the resource-based view is an important aspect of customer relationship management literature (Zahay, 2008; Nguyen & Waring, 2013). The amount of CRM resources is also discussed in one of the cases as it becomes apparent that the acquired CRM system has a limited amount of licenses. This restricts the amount of employees who can effectively participate in customer relationship management processes and activities.

Overall, all case companies have clear customer relationship management practices and processes in place in their operational strategies. Nevertheless, there exists quite vast variance in the operational CRM strategies. In some of the cases, CRM is seen more from a collaborative customer relationship management perspective with everyone working together for a common goal, to create mutual value between company and customers. For these case companies, customer relationship management is more of an underlying strategy and even a company culture. On the other hand, other case companies do work for a common goal yet from a different perspective. There the focus of CRM is mainly on assisting existing processes and strategies. Therefore, CRM is mainly seen as an IT tool and solution.

6.2.2. Customer focus in the business and strategy

Customer focus is clearly an important structure for customer relationship management and is one of the key building blocks of collaborative CRM, as can be seen already in Figure 1. This customer centricity (Shah et al., 2006) directs the company in its chosen path to create value for their customers. All of the case companies list customer focus or customer centricity as a key strategic value on their website. This was also one of the criteria for selection into this research.

All case companies recognize customer centricity as a driving force for their business strategy. This customer focus needs to start from the top executives. In one of the cases it is mentioned that top level executives at the company and at customers are very much friends and can share even confidential information in their small circles. Another respondent states that their strategy has been shifting towards a larger customer focus lately and that it is important to keep up with where the customers are heading. This goes hand-in-hand with the issues raised by Avery, Fournier & Wittenbraker (2014) and by de Swaan Arons, van den Driest & Weed (2014). They suggest that it is imperative for a modern company to have customer focused teams with a variety of marketing skills in charge of customer relationship management, and marketing in general. Even though companies claim customer focus, the customers are generally not happy with what the relationships deliver (Avery, Fournier & Wittenbraker, 2014). This seems not to be an issue for the case companies of this thesis. Some of them report the subsequent:

“Customer is the core of our strategic planning”.

“Customers are the very reason we do these products... and the bigger the customer, the more influence they have”.

“We follow how customers use the product so we can predict their future needs”.

Top management emphasis rises also from the discussions when talking about customer focus or customer centricity. It is relevant for the top executives to have internalized a customer centric way of thinking and deliver that to their subordinates. It is also mentioned in one of the cases that the management needs to keep the customer focused approach and not to forget it only for the orations. The respondent also mentions that such an approach will not take the company far, and that is not possible to mask a production oriented strategy as a customer centric one. One of the interviewees says the subsequent:

“Top management needs to be customer focused in order to get the best possible benefits from our strategy formulation processes”.

Another interviewee concludes the following about top management emphasis in customer focus:

“It cannot be separate. It has to be integrated to the entire doing, systems, strategy and processes”.

Another important issue with customer relationship management and with customer focus is to create long-term value for both parties (Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr., 1993; Piercy, 1995; Vandermerwe, 2004; Shah et al., 2006; Kumar, Venkatesan & Reinartz, 2008; Bose, 2012). Delivering long-term value is especially important in order to develop long-term lasting relationships to customers. This brings an added value for the company and naturally for its customers. The creation of long-term value through customer centricity seems to come out quite a bit in all of the cases. In one of the cases, the interviewee says that they want to stay on top of what their customers are doing and where they are heading in the long-term. Another interviewee comments the following:

“We want to make our products according to what the customers want so they will keep using them for a long time. Customers are the ones who use the products all the time on a daily basis, so they definitely see things we might not even think of”.

In another case the interviewee tells that they aim at having deep conversations with their customers about their future. The goal is to understand where the customer wants to be in three years’ time, five years’ time and even ten years’ time from now. This way the company can become a part of those long-term plans and visions, and become one of the essential suppliers of the customer. Such a path is also suggested by Shah et al. (2006) as they present that organizational focus of a company needs to external and on developing the customer relationships. The company also exists to satisfy customers’ needs and to also see advantage opportunities close to the customers (Shah et al., 2006).

Table 6. Customer focus in the case companies

Customer focus	Case A	Case B	Case C	Case D	Case E
Customer focus in the strategy	Customer focus to get full power from strategy	Customer focus comes from within	Integrated with strategy and operations	Creates added value for the strategy	Strategy shift towards customer centricity
Long-term value	Understand customers several years into the future	Long-term analysis of customers	Long-term relationships with major customers	Understand customer behavior for better products	Understand where customers are headed in the future

Table 6 provides a short summary of what case companies consider as the main points regarding customer focus. It is still important to add some points regarding customer centricity and its long-term impacts. In one of the cases, customer focus is seen as a means to bring more value for the company’s strategy.

“Customer focus and customer relationship management should belong only to the employees who can bring added value to it. Otherwise, other people should not be dealing with customer relationships”.

“Customer focus in our company is targeted at companies who buy a lot from us. There really is a difference whether you buy one product or a million products per year”.

In general, customer focus is important in all of the cases but it does not come up as often as literature would suggest it to. As customer focus is seen as the main driver behind market orientation (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990; Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr, 1993; Day, 1994; Narver, Slater & Tietje, 1998; Shah et al., 2006), it could be considered as one of the largest influences on companies. Nevertheless, in all of the cases customer focus is seen as a main instrument of strategy and even company culture. On the other hand, this is where it also seems to remain. Comments on how customer centricity is visible in actual operations are rather non-existent.

6.2.3. Market orientation as a strategic element

Market orientation is measured in the interviews in terms of strategy, intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination, and responsiveness to market and customer information. This goes in line with what market orientation is defined to be and what can be seen already in Figure 2. The organization wide generation of market information, dissemination of the information across the entire organization and organization wide responsiveness to it. This is divided into customer and competitor orientation, and interdepartmental coordination (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990; Tuominen, 1997, p. 34). The exact list of codes relating to market orientation is available in Table 4.

Market orientation is a major component of customer relationship management, and especially in building collaborative CRM. Due to the close nature of market orientation and CRM, market orientation generated plenty of discussion in all of the cases chosen for this research. A lot of conversation revolves around intelligence generation and how to gather information regarding customers. An interviewee states that they collect information about everything from trends, competitors, legal aspects, democracy development and technological advances. They also comment the following:

“From all of this information, we distinguish and filter the information through customer relationship management “lenses”. This way we want to understand what issues are important for us in terms of managing our customer relationships”.

This gives the understanding that gathering information is generally done in order to improve relationships with customers. This way the company can provide their customers with better products and services. According to the interviewee, the key to this lies in the skill of asking the correct questions from the customer.

“We try to ask open-ended questions. That is where the wisdom of our strategy and information gathering lies... we try to use different perspectives, related to our different functions, in our open questions”.

Furthermore, the case company acknowledges that gathering direct customer information with such open questions is difficult, if not impossible at the beginning of a customer relationship. Nevertheless, the respondent also comments that the company has ways with which to begin probing into the customer's strategies and processes. Similar comments are found in another case in that the company aims at having information which is relevant for the company and the customers. The interviewee also says the following regarding efficiency of their information gathering activities:

“Sometimes we have not been so efficient and good with our information and data gathering”.

Information gathering is also seen as a job or a task for everyone in the company and begins from the company’s strategy. The respondent also comments that they do not merely generate data and gather information about customers and markets by themselves, but use also external sources of information to back-up their findings. Such views support the customer and competitor orientation aspects of market orientation, developed by Narver & Slater (1990).

Another case company reports that they collect customer information to one customer relationship management system location. They also gather sometimes quite specific information regarding customer contact persons, even data about their hobbies and birthdays. The company also attempts at promoting information generation by the customer:

“We have on our website, in our extra-system, this kind of a form which we ask our clients to fill in every time they have a new product idea. The form sends a direct message to our product manager”.

The company has also used some automation methods in data collection. In some of the trade fairs, basic contact information was obtained with a business card scanner. In another case, the respondent reports that information from the market is mainly collected when customers have given a request for quotation, a RFQ. This stage can last up to several months in some projects, depending on the how fast the customer wants to deal with issues, says the interviewee. This gives rising emphasis on making sure all data in the customer relationship management systems is up-to-date and in the hands of correct employees.

The respondent also gives certain examples of how information sharing is possible in their organization. All customer information and knowledge is mainly shared through management reporting. It is also possible to copy customer information from the system, and paste it to an email, for example. The interviewee also notes that in their company, the person responsible for all the information updates and sharing is the opportunity owner. Opportunity owner is the person, usually a sales person, who brought the deal into the company. Depending on the case, this person is also the one handling communications towards the prospective customer.

Table 7. Main responses on market orientation in the business

Market orientation	Case A	Case B	Case C	Case D	Case E
Strategy	Elements have importance	All the activities are systematic	All activities tied to strategic goals	Strategy and activities connected and monitored	Everything taken into account for the best possible solutions
Intelligence generation	Market information filtered through CRM	Gather rational information for customers and company	Systematic ways of collection	Gathered through various channels	Information gathered to match customer requests
Intelligence sharing	Important to share only the relevant information	Make use of information in all company functions	Information is processed and prioritized	Sharing needs to be easy	Sharing through CRM system and reporting
Responsiveness	Customer of the entire company	Sales and marketing has lead, assistance from other functions	Customer responses are discussed in the company	Responses depend on the nature of the issue	Correct directions chosen together

Table 7 gives a broad overlook on the aspects of market orientation in the case companies and in relation to their customer relationship management initiatives. One of the most important aspects of market orientation, and therefore of customer relationship management, is information sharing (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Otherwise known as intelligence sharing as can

be seen from Table 7. One of the interviewees states that information and knowledge sharing becomes increasingly important so the knowledge can be utilized in all company activity. Nevertheless, actually getting the information out to all involved participants can sometimes be rather challenging:

“We need to get the information and knowledge out to everyone who needs it. To some extent this is still in a juvenile stage in the company”.

The difficulties of information sharing are partly due to the dispersion of information and knowledge in the case company. This would also suggest that the case company can still improve on its intelligence gathering processes, according to the case respondent. The interviewee also comments that therefore it is important to be able to discuss any issues with and among co-workers. Discussion is crucial also from a theoretical point-of-view, as conflict and connectedness between and among functions are among the main antecedents of market orientation (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). It is also important to provide access to customer and market information for all employees of the company. The interviewee concludes the following:

“It (CRM) affects everything in the company. Starting from strategy to marketing and production. It absolutely needs to be everywhere”.

Similar comments rise in other cases. It is absolutely crucial to provide a concentrated location for all the collected information, is said by one of the respondents. It is important for customer relationship management to direct all actions and activities, especially customer facing ones, says a respondent. One of the major reasons for effective knowledge and information sharing is to make sure the obtained knowledge will not be lost, comments another respondent. Such comments highlight the importance of managing the market orientation activities through the company's underlying culture (Day, 1994). Any loss of knowledge can

happen when an employee leaves the company, according to one of the interviewees of a case. Sharing of knowledge happens mainly through meetings and there is a certain organizationally collaborative touch to this:

“We have common meetings with product managers, research and development, sales and marketing. We do it from time to time”.

The interviewee concludes that it is very important to have all possible customer and market information in a centralized location. This way everyone can find all the knowledge they want and possibly find useful information they would not have thought to ask for. Another respondent reports that it is important to manage the customer information and knowledge, yet at the same time to not let it become overpowering compared to other signals coming from the market.

As a conclusion of market orientation, responsiveness to customer information, especially organizational responsiveness, was discussed. According to Narver & Slater (1990), interfunctional coordination of tasks is the ability to organize company resources in a centralized manner, with a customer focus. Therefore, any function within the company, or in its value chain, has the potential to bring additional value for the customers (Narver & Slater, 1990; Tuominen, 1997, p. 27). In order for this responsiveness to truly happen, every company needs to fully understand their customers on all levels (Pandelica, Pandelica & Dumitru, 2009). These views are supported by respondents of the case companies. One of them comments the consequent:

“As long as we get customers telling us what they want, we will give them exactly that. After that we will give more, more and more, it is a cycle. This way we get some real material to work with”.

The interviewee also adds to this by saying that being able to give customers what they want puts the company in a much better strategic

position. It also gives ease to the mobilization of the organization. In another case, responses are developed utilizing the skills and capabilities of the entire organization. Great development ideas can emerge from innovative people and it is important to gain their participation, says the respondent. Nevertheless, customers are profiled and segmented based on certain criteria. According to the interviewee, this is to generate better and personalized solutions for all customers in all touch points. Even though this agrees with previous research in that market orientation as a form of company culture and actions can bring significant benefits (McClure, 2010), it also proves that market oriented actions need to be in line with financial management of customer opportunities (Day, 1994).

Two other interviewees give similar comments. They both suggest that ideas for further development can come from anywhere in the organization or value chain. It is also crucial to gain the attention of everyone to the customer relationship management process. In both cases, there is an end note that the nature of a customer's request influences whether the entire organization participates in developing a response. For example, a simple change in the order delivery date does not require participation from all employees of the company.

Overall, market orientation and its components from customer and competitor orientation to interfunctional task coordination are well present in the case companies. To an extent this is not surprising since market orientation is a main driver of customer relationship management, and especially of collaborative CRM (Buttle, 2009, p. 11). As can be expected, having clear processes for all steps of intelligence gathering, intelligence sharing and organizational responsiveness comes out strongly in all comments from all five cases. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that market orientation is not adapted to its full measures in any of the case companies.

6.2.4. Importance of customer relationship management for strategic development

When discussing the importance of customer relationship management for the case company's strategy, all conversations with case company interviewees took the direction of how important it is to understand customers in the long-term, even the unrealized needs and wants. This is supported by the possibilities of improving company performance through exploitation and exploration capabilities (Vorhies, Orr & Bush, 2011). These refer to developing new products and services from existing market knowledge, and from knowledge which exceeds current customer and market information (Vorhies, Orr & Bush, 2011). Another crucial point that stood out is to translate this understanding of customers into actual business results and performance. Companies can have frequent problems in matching customer expectations and performance is lower than wanted (Avery, Fournier & Wittenbraker, 2014).

The first comment coming out from an interviewee is that they are able to make profit through customer relationship management. This is completely due to their wide approach to CRM and because of the good operational processes they have. The interviewee also shares their view on strategic planning process of customer relationship management which is visible in Figure 11.

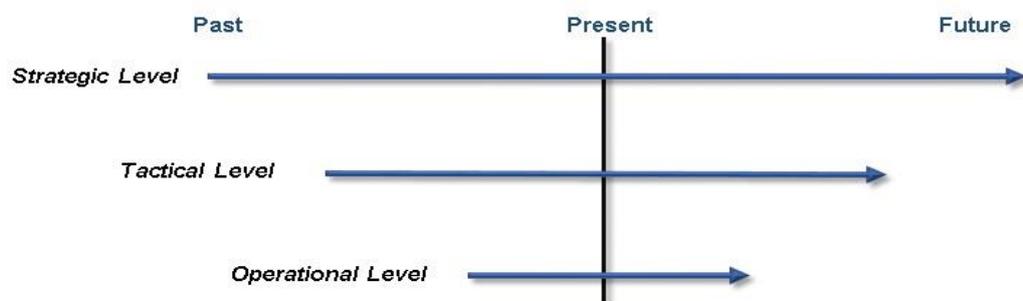


Figure 11. CRM from a strategic planning point-of-view in one of the cases

The different levels of strategy are divided into strategic or corporate level, tactical level, and operational level. The entire process is reflected in a time continuum. This continuum is longer on the corporate level than on tactical and operational levels. According to the interviewee, this represents how large of an outlook into the future is needed at each level. At the strategic level, the outlook on customer relationship management can be several years since it has an impact on the entire company's direction and survival. The interviewee states the following:

“For the strategic level to work properly, we need to know what the strategic problems we have to solve are. This way we will know exactly which questions to pose”.

Tactical and operational level decisions are much faster and usually are not very long-term oriented with simple price adjustments and weekly planning for example. The respondent says that in order to have the best possible material for the strategic level and for building the strategy, a deep and trustful dialogue is needed between the company and customers. To some extent it is a matter of becoming friends with the employees of the customer. These friendships and deep conversations need to go all the way to the board level between the company and its customers and use even sensitive information wisely.

“All the information we get needs to be used in such a way it does not do any harm to our customers. On the contrary, we need to use the knowledge in such a way that we can help our customers. Yet in order for this to become reality, we need to understand what they are doing and what they want from their future”.

Similar comments are continued through all the answers related to the importance of customer relationship management in strategic development. The interviewee concludes on the matter that they aim for long-term perspectives. The better strategy they are able to formulate, the

better premises their customer relationship management has, and vice versa. In another case company, the interviewee reports that they aim at knowing their customers from perspectives that make the most sense for the business relationship. The respondent also says that he believes their company has a rather good understanding of their customers' situations and of their needs and wants. It is also important to link these aspects to the company's performance. One way to do this is to make sure the company stays in its budget, according to the interviewee. Sometimes this can be difficult. The same applies to customer relationship management as a strategy in general. It has its hardships but it can also bring significant advantages, says the respondent.

"Sometimes it is a bit tricky since an individual marketing mix is applied to each major customer and we have to customize a lot".

Table 8. Main responses on the importance of CRM in strategic development

CRM importance in business strategy	Case A	Case B	Case C	Case D	Case E
Understanding of customers	Desire to assist customers in everything needed	Know customers in a meaningful manner	Importance of customer signals	Want to make customers wishes come true	Listen to customer wishes
Long-term view	Understand customer future	Qualitative measures with biggest clients	Customer wants have to fit with company's plans	Strategic planning cycle including CRM	Growth and customer acquisition
Business results	Works through solving the right problems	Financial measures are emphasized	Customer care model	Has to come from agreed strategies and plans	Strategy in order to obtain best results
Operational linkage	Strategy translated to fast tactical decisions	Important to learn from strategic mistakes	Strategy into daily actions and goals	Strategy into personal goals and supervision	Customer wants need to become actual products

In order to link customer relationship management and strategy to operational CRM and operational activities, and to make sure this linkage works as intended, it is important for the company to learn from any mistakes it makes in its customer-facing strategies. Table 8 provides a clear outlook into the general outlines of customer relationship management's importance for strategic development. In one of the case companies it is seen as crucial to keep existing customers happy while acquiring new ones. CRM is the main tool for these activities, according to the interviewee. In order to keep all customers satisfied the company does everything possible to satisfy customer needs and wishes. The respondent says that this should not be mistaken to include absolutely anything. Only wishes which are within the company's reach and fit in are sought to be fulfilled. This way the company can obtain the best results from its customer relationship management strategies and activities, and keep the company profitable. This is an understandable view and agrees with the combination of resource-based view and CRM (Zahay, 2008; Nguyen & Waring, 2013). It could also be suggested that a company should seek to obtain resources which bring value to the customer, not only to the company (Clulow, Barry & Gerstman, 2007).

In two other case companies the comments are similar to the rest. Customer relationship management and strategy has to be linked to daily actions and goals, according to an interviewee. Another respondent speaks of transitioning strategy into individual goals that need to be supervised by management. He comments the following:

"It is crucial for the development of strategy that it is translated to individual level as goals and targets. It also requires constant monitoring of those goals by managers and executives".

It is also seen as important by both case respondents that customer needs and wishes are listened to and made into reality. One of them also adds that not only direct wishes are important, but indirect signals can provide

great advantages as well. The way the case company has linked customer relationship management to its business and financial performance is through a customer care model in which customers are segmented and specific action programs are developed, says the interviewee. On the long-term views of CRM in strategy the interviewee stated the importance of incorporating customer relationship management into the company's strategic planning cycle. In the other case, the interest of creating a long-term fit between customer wants and corporate strategy is emphasized.

As a conclusion, it can be said that customer relationship management plays an important role in all case companies' strategy development. All of them seem to have a clear understanding of how CRM can be useful for them in the long-term. Nevertheless, the actual ways in which customer relationship management is seen as useful have clear variance from each other. Solutions range from making customer wishes come true to knowing the customers in a meaningful manner, and from understanding customer futures to strategic planning cycles with CRM. This proves the importance of customer relationship management. It also gives indication on the dispersion of methods in which it can be applied and adopted, with each company choosing the ways that suit them the best.

6.3. Collaborative customer relationship management in a firm's business strategy

Based on the answers provided for the sub-questions and based on the interviews with the case companies, it is possible to draw some conclusions referring to the main research question. Collaborative customer relationship management refers to the coordinated organization wide collection, dissemination and response to customer and competitor intelligence. This is done in order to create loyalty and long-term value for the company and its customers in all touch points through customer-centric processes (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver, Slater & Tietje, 1998; Jackson, 2005; Alavi, Ahuja & Medury, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2012, p.

157). This definition has become very familiar over the course of this thesis and it does have a role in business-to-business firms' strategy and strategic development.

Case companies A and B show larger tendencies towards actual collaborative customer relationship management, both in their strategic development as well as in the operational side. Especially case company A reports nearly all the aspects of collaborative CRM found in the definition. These aspects come clear from all the answers that are dealt with in the sub-questions. When asked about the relevance of customer relationship management in the organization, it is told to be the job of every employee. The customer is not only a customer of sales and marketing but of the entire company.

"Business and CRM cannot be built solely on the happy folks of sales and marketing. We need other departments and functions in it as well".

This also requires the company to have clear and transparent processes coupled with clear employee roles. This is the best way to engage and motivate people for their jobs, says the interviewee. Case company B also portrays similar aspiration, yet not to the same extent as case company A. Collaborative customer relationship management is present in case company B through coordinated tasks which spread throughout the organization, according to the respondent. He also states that the company's entire philosophy begins from customer relationship management, therefore fortifying the presence of collaborative CRM. Nevertheless, as the company grows larger clear roles for employees are required to avoid overlaps in order to make collaborative customer relationship management efficient.

"Product development and others need to be actively out in the market together with sales and marketing. It is vital for our company because they can see things that sales and marketing do not detect".

For case company C on the other hand, collaborative customer relationship management is less obvious. CRM is seen more as an information technology tool rather than a guiding strategy and culture. Nevertheless, some aspects of collaborative CRM are visible even if the company does not recognize them by themselves. The interviewee stresses on the need of clear CRM roles and responsibilities stretching from sales and marketing to product management, and even business development. Furthermore, the interviewee states that it can be difficult to determine which employees can bring valuable knowledge to customer relationship management functions, therefore slightly deterring collaborative CRM. A clear indication of not applying collaborative customer relationship management is the comment given about CRM and processes:

“Customer relationship management needs to be molded into the existing processes, it has to support them. Otherwise it will not work”.

This gives clear evidence that customer relationship management is not an underlying strategy and culture in the case company, as collaborative CRM would suggest (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Jackson, 2005; Buttle, 2009, p. 11; Alavi, Ahuja & Medury, 2012). Collaborative CRM would call for the customer relationship management processes to redefine company functions and actions, not the other way around. On the other hand, there is a sign suggesting to a growing importance of collaborative customer relationship management in the company. According to the interviewee, the company is constantly attempting to widen its customer interface, meaning the amount and variety of employees in contact with customers.

In case company D, collaborative CRM is also missing to a large extent. According to the case company respondent's comments, the company is only considering the inclusion of collaborative aspects in its customer relationship management. Their actions are much more focused on having

CRM as a simple tool for sales and top management. Widening of CRM processes is dependent on whether or not anyone outside sales and marketing can bring anything useful to customer-facing actions, according to the respondent. Nothing else in the comments from case company D suggests involvement of collaborative customer relationship management or its activities.

Case company E has a fairly similar approach to case companies C and D. CRM is clearly an IT tool which assists the existing strategy. Collaborative aspects to customer relationship management are mainly visible inside the sales department. Product management and product development are a part of the processes to some extent.

“Sales in a way hands over the customer to the project team (production). In reality there is constant communication between the sales person and customer”.

Yet they are reliant on information provided to them by sales and marketing teams. Nevertheless, some small transition towards a more collaborative customer relationship management can be found. The interviewee states that the company is constantly trying to move their strategy and operations into a more and more customer centric direction.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The concluding chapter of this thesis provides a summary on the research results of this thesis on collaborative customer relationship management and on its presence in Finnish business-to-business firm's strategy. Furthermore, the theoretical contributions of the thesis are discussed in the light of the research questions which are presented in the introduction chapter. Managerial implications are also discussed in order to present contemporary issues of consideration when including collaborative customer relationship management in a company's strategy and operations. On top of this, the limitations of the thesis are presented and discussed. As a final conclusion, suggestions for potential future research are discussed.

7.1. Summary of the findings

It is suggested by de Swaan Arons, van den Driest & Weed (2014) that marketing is nowadays too important to be left only for marketers and sales people. Everyone from information technology to logistics needs to be involved in it. Same applies for customer relationship management due to its close linkage with marketing. This statement of having everyone in the company involved goes hand in hand with the arguments of collaborative customer relationship management (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver, Slater & Tietje, 1998; Jackson, 2005; Buttle, p. 11; Alavi, Ahuja & Medury, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 157).

These arguments are also supported by the findings, especially in two of the five cases. These two case companies demonstrate clear and comprehensive understandings of customer relationship management, customer focus and especially of market orientation. All of these are vital elements of collaborative CRM, as presented in Figure 1. Customer relationship management acts as the base for collaborative CRM while

customer centricity and market orientation bring in the collaborative and truly customer facing aspects into the business strategy.

All of the case companies have a clear understanding and usage of customer relationship management. Nevertheless, there are differences between processes in cases, and between how certain preconditions are implemented. This is understandable as every company has different requirements and decides on the purposes of CRM independently. Despite of this, there are certain antecedents which need to be fulfilled in order for customer relationship management to become effective in the company. These antecedents include strategy, technology, top management commitment, and the acquisition and retention of customers (Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005; Saini, Grewal, Johnson, 2010; Wang & Feng, 2012). These preconditions were proven as every case company shows clear signs of incorporating CRM with technology and strategy. They also emphasize the importance of executive support and conclude that their customer relationship management is aimed at acquiring and retaining customers.

Customer relationship management as such does not create any significant differences between the case companies. They all share fairly similar views on CRM with minor differences. The dispersion among the case companies begins to come clear with customer focus, also known as customer centricity (Deshpandé, Farley & Webster Jr, 1993; Piercy, 1995; Shah et al., 2006; Bose, 2012). Understanding of customer centricity is fairly unanimous among the case companies.

Differences start to emerge in how well, and in which way, customer focus is apparent in the company's strategy and operations. In all cases, customer focus is one of the elements of the company's strategy, this being even one of the case selection criteria. For some of the case companies, customer centricity is the main driver of strategy and strategic development. For other case companies it is simply a piece of the entire

strategic framework they apply. It is also important for customer focus to be apparent in the actions of a company's top management (Piercy, 1995; Vandermerwe, 2004). All of the case interviewees report executive support for customer focus in what they say. Top management actions on the other hand are less in line with their words of customer centrality in some of the case companies. Such actions create discrepancies into how lower levels of management and employees feel the importance of focusing on customers.

Furthermore, the real differences between the case companies are in adopting market orientation and the activities related to it (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). Two out of the five case companies show strong signs of having all three elements of collaborative customer relationship management in their strategy and operations. These two companies have clearly adopted collaborative customer relationship management and seem truly enthusiastic of its potential. However, both companies advocate the essence of developing clear roles and tasks for employees on collaborative CRM. It is important to create and communicate a customer focused and collaborative vision. Yet it is also important to let employees make that vision come true. Preferably in the most effective way by making sure everyone is doing what they do best.

The other three case companies do not see any use for the market oriented actions, especially as collaborative processes involving the entire organization. For these companies customer relationship management is mainly about having a customer focused IT solution to assist in daily tasks and planning. Nevertheless, there are signs suggesting to a growing importance of collaborative customer relationship management. These three case companies all report a growing emphasis on customer focus, and on expanding the amount and variety of customer-facing employees.

7.2. Theoretical implications

From a theoretical perspective, the objective of this thesis was to clarify whether business-to-business companies apply and take collaborative customer relationship management into account in their strategy. The objective was also to find out to what extent collaborative customer relationship management is present in a company strategy and operations. In order to achieve this goal, a research question with sub-questions was addressed.

This thesis addresses and contributes to the literature of customer relationship management, customer centricity and market orientation. Conceptually the thesis combined and brought together the concepts of CRM, customer focus and market orientation into collaborative customer relationship management. The thesis shows how Finnish business-to-business firms utilize collaborative CRM and all of its aspects in their strategy formulation processes, and in their day-to-day operations.

More specifically, the research provides insights into what linkages exist, and which are the most important preconditions, between the building blocks of collaborative customer relationship management and the strategy and operations of an exclusively business-to-business company. The importance of organization wide collaboration on marketing and customer relationship management activities has only recently gained more attention in the academic community (de Swaan Arons, van den Driest & Weed, 2014; Avery, Fournier & Wittenbraker, 2014). This shows the theoretical value of the thesis. An interesting and emerging issue in the thesis is related to reward systems. In most cases the companies are looking for ways to reward employees instantaneously to keep them better engaged at their work. This topic has not come up in the context of CRM literature which suggests reward systems to be tied to customer satisfaction and other similar measures (Kirca, Jayachandran & Bearden, 2005; Ben Letaifa & Perrien, 2007; Engelen, Brettel & Heinemann, 2010).

As for the main research question of whether, and how, companies take collaborative customer relationship management into account in their business strategies, the answer is yes. Although the means of collaborating on customer relationship management vary between case companies.

7.3. Managerial implications

The objective of this study in terms of managerial implications was to provide practitioners with starting points on how to adopt and improve the use of collaborative customer relationship management. This is an especially important topic with the growing rise of internet technologies and social media (McKee, 2012), which increase the potential customer touch points almost up to limitless amounts. This is why it is highly important for companies to communicate a clear vision in all touch points, yet first it needs to be internally coordinated throughout the organization by inspiring employees to share this vision (Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005; de Swaan Arons, van den Driest & Weed, 2014). Only after this it can be communicated outside to involve customers and eventually have them communicate the vision for the company.

Customer relationship management has traditionally been focused as mainly a sales and marketing tool. It has been driven especially by information technology and by the revolution of the internet (Jayachandran et al., 2005). This study and collaborative customer relationship management give practitioners, and especially management, some food for thought on how to make their customer relationship management and customer-facing activities truly efficient. This is possible through the removal of internal boundaries and through making sure everyone understands the importance of customer focus.

The study also shows that in order for a company to become customer centric and even customer-led, it is not enough to simply change CRM processes. The company needs to go through a complete overhaul in underlying corporate values and culture. Such communication and focus on a common corporate goal, and having a shared vision has the potential to drive in employees who are motivated for the cause. They identify themselves with the company and its values, creating a capacity for better corporate performance. It also comes apparent from the study that a transition towards collaborative customer relationship management can take considerable time to implement (Roberts, Liu & Hazard, 2005), as there is always change resistance present among the employees. It can be the most difficult part in the transition towards collaborative CRM.

7.4. Limitations of the study

A considerable limiting factor of this research was that due to resource and time constraints, the researcher was able to study the presence of collaborative customer relationship management only in the context of Finnish business-to-business companies. The thesis was further constrained by the limited initial information on case companies from publicly available sources. More extensive knowledge of case company's customer relationship management activities could have made the process of case company selection easier and faster. This would have allowed for more time to be spent on the actual analysis of the obtained interview data.

Furthermore, applying the multiple-case study method gives a relatively small sample for the research and this has an effect on the reliability and generalizability of the thesis results. Nevertheless, multiple-case study method was chosen because it provides the best possibility for deeper insights to the phenomena of collaborative customer relationship management. Also the geographic selection of having Finnish business-to-business companies creates limitations for the research. Finland was

chosen because the researcher wanted to have face-to-face interviews with the interviewees. Therefore, budget and time constraints limited out companies in other countries.

A purposeful choice was also made in choosing only business-to-business companies for the study. This enables a clear focus for the research. However, including also business-to-consumer companies would have brought a wider sample to the thesis and improved the generalizability of the results. Also the choice of having only one interviewee per case company creates a bias to the results. Including several interviewees from multiple levels in a company generally provides better results in terms of reliability of data. Due to time constraints of case companies' to participate in the study this was not possible.

Included theory also brings limitations as some major directions of customer relationship management research were knowingly left out. These include the resource-based view of CRM and the organizational learning view on customer relationship management. It is not possible to include all research streams into the literature as CRM as a research topic is widely dispersed. Nevertheless, it is important to understand their existence.

Finally, the actual research approach of qualitative research brings certain limitations for the generalizability of the findings. Qualitative research by its nature can be difficult to generalize as it is highly case sensitive and is often difficult to replicate with satisfying outcomes. The researcher has attempted to present every part of the research as openly and explicitly as possible to mitigate misunderstandings. Had resources and time allowed, a quantitative research could have been conducted to verify the research results. This method of data triangulation would have brought significant improvements to the reliability and validity of the results.

7.5. Suggestions for future research

The entire field of research of customer relationship management, and therefore collaborative customer relationship management, is very wide and extensive. There are many theoretical directions for collaborative CRM which need to be further examined. Such directions include the linkages with the resource-based view (Zahay, 2008; Nguyen & Waring, 2013) and the research stream on CRM and organizational learning (Zahay, 2008; Battor & Battour, 2013), for example. These directions would provide needed depth to the research on collaborative customer relationship management.

Moreover, there is need for research linking collaborative CRM with actual business performance. This thesis provides understanding on the various existence of the concept, yet the actual and measurable effects on quantitative and qualitative performance measures is an area in need of research. Moreover, there is need to extend further studies outside the geographic focus of Finland in order to account for cultural implications and variations in collaborative customer relationship management.

This thesis focused solely on business-to-business companies in order to bring a clear focus and to improve the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, there is a clear need to conduct studies about collaborative CRM in business-to-consumer contexts in order to gain better understanding of the phenomena's wider reach. Furthermore, industry specific studies on the topic are required as they shed light on the relationships between unique industry characteristics and collaborative CRM. Also a more detailed study regarding the creation process of collaborative customer relationship management is needed. Such a research would bring clarification to the required steps with which to reach collaborative CRM.

Finally, it is necessary to conduct a wider research on the existence of collaborative customer relationship management, using quantitative measures and methods. Such a study would clearly clarify wider acceptance of collaborative CRM and bring forward the various relationships between collaborative customer relationship management, its antecedents, and performance indicators. This requires the development of an accurate measurement tool for collaborative customer relationship management.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Structured question for the interviews

1. What is your perception of CRM?
2. What is/was the role of CRM in the company and in its business strategy?
3. How is CRM and customer focus visible in top management actions and words?
4. To what extent does top management use CRM?
5. How risk averse/risk taking is the company? Why?
6. What is the reception on failure?
7. What are the measures on which reward mechanisms are based on?
8. How would you describe the relationships and contact between departments?
9. What is the overall atmosphere in the company?

(Continued)

(Appendix 1, continued)

10. To whom is CRM a part of their job description?
11. How well are CRM processes accepted in the organization?
12. Why CRM is/isn't a collective effort of the organization?
13. How is data collection organized?
14. How people's IT skills have developed with CRM processes?
15. What data is being collected?
16. Who has access to this data?
17. How is data shared and managed in the organization?
18. How are responses to market information developed? Separately or
in collaboration between departments?
19. To what extent does market information assist decision making?
20. Why is market information important for you as a company?
21. How satisfied are you with your CRM and how do you want to see it
develop?

Appendix 2. Extract from the coding process

BS-LT
CF-LTV
BS-BR

en sit tiä onko varsinaisesti riskejä, no semmosia tietysti on että voi olla joku tuote tai asiakas ja asiakkaalla joku tietty tuote tai osa heidän bisnestään. Että mietitään että kannattaako siihen lähteä ollenkaan mukaan. Mutta jos me nähdään siellä isompi potentiaali takana niin se riski kannattaa ottaa. Se riski ei oo välttämättä siihen että ei saada laadukasta tuotetta maailmalle tai näin. Ehkä se on enemmänkin siitä että saadaan tuotteet ulos tehtaasta. Mutta tota sitten meillä sitoutuu siihen resursseja, rahaa niin paljon että se ei kumminkaan oo periaatteessa kannattavaa.

BS-LT ja CF-LTV sahaassa kommentissa

H: Se on ehkä enemmänkin mahdollisuus kuin riski?

J: Niin, kyllä.

H: Miten se tiedonkeruu teillä järjestetään? Eli naputtaako myyjät ja myyntipäälliköt sen datan ihan tietokoneen kautta vai voiko he kerätä sen tiedon muitakin reittejä?

CRM-IT
MO-STR
MO-IS
MO-IG
MO-IS

J: No lähtökohtaisesti kun me tätä CRM järjestelmää rakennettiin IT-työkaluna. Niin kun tiedot oli historia siinä ja oli tää sama CRM käytössä niin sieltä ajettiin perusdatat kaikki mitä oli ehtinyt kertyä, niin tähän systeemiin. Ja se oli niinkun pohja kaikelle. Eli asiakkuudet sitten, henkilöt, kaikki muistiöt, historiat ja muut tuli sitä kautta. Mutta sitten muuten nyt kun sitten käytetään järjestelmää niin useimmat asiakkaathan on siellä olemassa jo. Että sitten kun on liiketoimintamahdollisuuksia niin sitten lisätään uus mahdollisuus kyseiselle asiakkaalle. Se on sen, kun puhutaan opportunity owner, eli se joka omistaa sen mahdollisuuden. Niin se sitten täyttää ne sinne. Tai sitten voi olla jos sanotaan että lähetään miettiin vähän uudenlaisia tuotteita niin saattaakin olla että tulee uus asiakas vastaan. Se vaan pitää sitten perustaa sinne järjestelmään ja laittaa manuaalisesti riittävä data sinne. Että meillä ei oo mitään keskitettyä datamagneettia.

työtään tiedot ja myös jakea

MO-IG ja MO-IS sulautuu yhteen

H: Onko sitten mahdollista päästä siihen CRM järjestelmään mobiililaitteista?

CRM-IT J: Joo, kyllä periaatteessa. En oo henkilökohtaisesti käyttänyt, mutta siis.

H: Kumminkin asiakkaat on tuolla jossain niin tienkin päällä on hyvä päästä.

CRM-IT
MO-IS

J: No joo, ehkä se on enemmän niinkun ei niin online järjestelmä. Tai järjestelmänä varmasti on tämmönen, mutta ei niin käytössä oo siinä suhteessa. Enemmän tavallaan jälkikäteen sitä dokumentaatiota ja kirjottaa jotain.

H: Varmaan jo tulikin tossa mutta kysytään nyt vielä. Eli miksi se asiakastieto on teille tärkeää?

CRM-IT
CF-LTV
BS-LT
BS-BR

J: No tosiaan kyllä meillä pitää olla asiakastietoa että pystytään kehittämään liiketoimintasuhdetta. No tää on ehkä enemmän tämmöstä niinkun, ei numerotietoa, mutta se numerotiedot eli myynnit ja kannattavuudet ja muut niin se on tietysti ihan itsestään selvä et se pitää olla. Mutta ne ei oo tietysti täällä CRM järjestelmässä.

H: No kuinka tyytyväinen sä oot siihen teidän CRM ja asiakashallintaan ja mihin sitä sun mielestä pitäis kehittää?

All company names are removed from the example.