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CUSTOMER UNDERSTANDING IN A CASE COMPANY'S CONTRACT MANUFACTURING BUSINESS

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In pharmaceutical industry the contract manufacturing has been increasing trend over the past decades. Increasing competition and development of technology are the driving forces for outsourcing decisions. Contract manufacturers as service providers and suppliers are offering their capabilities and knowledge for customer as per contractual agreements. Although contract manufacturing is fairly active business area it is still challenging to get customer needs and supplier capabilities to match due to many variables, like capabilities, capacity, product volume, target markets, sales & profit expectations, product maturity etc. Service providers are seeking new business opportunities not only via new customer acquisition, which might be a challenging task due to the previously mentioned reasons, but also via existing customer portfolio.

This research aimed to familiarize with the theory of customer information and knowledge, and how those transform to customer understanding and insight as part of customer relationship management. The aim was the find out what the case company, as a service provider in contract manufacturing, should know about their customers in order to recognize new business opportunities among them and plan their customer care management and sales activities accordingly.

The research was conducted as a qualitative research and feedback from the case company's existing customers was collected through a questionnaire. Customers' needs and expectations towards the case company's services and relationship management were investigated. An understanding on customers' outsourcing strategies was gained, but clear answers on customers' outsourcing needs were not received. Also information on customers' supplier selection criteria was achieved. It showed that different criteria are valued depending on the customer. The feedback from customers showed some variance also on their experience and expectations in information sharing between the parties – some thought that all sufficient and necessary information is available while others thought that nearly none is available. Beneficial information considered to be information on the case company's services and portfolio, and information sharing through meetings and emails. Nominated contacts, service attitude, professional competence and good communication were mentioned as good features in the case company's relationship management. Further development proposals for the case company's relationship management practices were not received.

Suggestions for the case company's customer care plan were based on the literature review and empirical research. Regular F2F meetings and planned contacts through other channels were suggested, but also more informal contacts. Involvement of team members and management representatives in F2F meetings, utilization of CRM application and customer satisfaction survey as a tool were also proposed.

KEYWORDS:

Customer knowledge, customer understanding, customer insight

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ASIAKASYMMÄRRYS KOHDEYRITYKSEN SOPIMUSVALMISTUS-LIIKETOIMINNASSA

Sopimusvalmistus on viime vuosikymmenien ajan ollut nouseva trendi lääketeollisuudessa. Kilpailun kiristyminen ja teknologian kehittyminen ovat ajavat yrityksiä tekemään ulkoistus-päätöksiä. Sopimusvalmistajat tarjoavat palveluntuottajina ja toimittajina kyvykkyyksiään ja osaamistaan asiakkaille erillisten sopimusten mukaisesti. Asiakkaan tarpeiden ja toimittajan kyvykkyyksien kohtaaminen on haaste, vaikka sopimusvalmistus on melko vilkas liiketoiminta-alue. Tähän vaikuttavat monet tekijät, kuten kyvykkyys, kapasiteetti, tuotevolyymi, tavoite-markkinat, myynti- ja kate-odotukset, tuotteen elinkaaren vaihe jne. Palveluntuottajat etsivät uusia liiketoimintamahdollisuuksia sekä uus-asiakashankinnan kautta - joka edellä mainituista syistä voi olla melko haasteellista - mutta myös olemassa olevien asiakkaiden kautta.

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tutustua asiakastietoon ja siihen, miten se muuntuu asiakasymmärrykseksi osana asiakashallintaa. Tavoitteena oli selvittää, mitä kohdeyrityksen sopimusvalmistuksen palveluntuottajana pitäisi tietää asiakkaistaan, jotta se pystyisi tunnistamaan uusia liiketoimintamahdollisuuksia heidän kanssaan ja suunnittelemaan asiakashallinta- ja myynti-toimenpiteensä sen mukaisesti.

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena ja kyselyn avulla kerättiin palautetta kohdeyrityksen nykyisiltä asiakkailta. Asiakkaiden tarpeita ja odotuksia selvitettiin kohdeyrityksen palveluiden ja asiakashallinnan osalta. Asiakkaiden ulkoistus-strategioiden ymmärrystä saatiin lisättyä, mutta selviä vastauksia asiakkaiden ulkoistutarpeiden osalta ei saatu. Myöskin tietoa asiakkaiden toimittajavalinnan kriteereistä saatiin – selvisi, että kriteerien arvotus vaihteli asiakkaista riippuen. Asiakkaiden kokemukset ja odotukset kohdeyrityksen tiedon jakamisen osalta vaihtelivat. Osan mielestä kaikki tarpeellinen tieto oli saatavilla, kun taas osan mielestä lähes mitään tietoa ei ollut saatavilla. Tietoa kohdeyrityksen palveluista ja tuotevalikoimasta ja sen jakamista yhteispalavereissa ja sähköpostien välityksellä pidettiin hyödyllisenä. Kohdeyrityksen asiakashallinnan osalta nimetyt yhteyshenkilöt, palvelu-asenne ja ammatillinen osaaminen ja hyvä viestintä nimettiin hyviksi ominaisuuksiksi. Muita kehitys-ehdotuksia asiakashallinnan osalta ei saatu.

Ehdotus kohdeyrityksen asiakashallinta-suunnitelmaan tehtiin teoriaan ja kokeelliseen osioon perustuen. Säännöllisiä henkilökohtaisia tapaamisia ja suunniteltua yhteydenpitoa muiden kanavien kautta suositeltiin, mutta myöskin epävirallisempaa yhteydenpitoa. Työryhmän jäsenten ja johdon edustusta henkilökohtaisissa tapaamisissa, asiakashallintajärjestelmän käyttöä ja asiakastyytyväisyys-kyselyiden käyttämistä työkaluina suositeltiin.

ASIASANAT:

Asiakastieto, asiakasymmärrys, asiakasnäkemys

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B2B	Business-to-Business
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
EHS	Environment-Health-Safety
F2F	Face-to-Face
SPOC	Single Point of Contact

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about customer understanding and its utilization at the case company serving as a contract manufacturer. The background and objectives of this thesis are presented in this introduction section. Also the case company and its contract manufacturing business are briefly presented. In the last section the structure for the entire thesis is introduced.

1.1 Background

The case company offers pharmaceutical contract manufacturing services for other companies in a highly regulated industry sector. Vast range of laws and regulations govern patenting, manufacturing, testing, safety, efficacy and marketing of the products. Inside the case company contract manufacturing is fairly small business in revenue aspect, but it is considered as one of the important areas to support entire company profitability.

Contract manufacturing has been increasing trend over the past decades in pharmaceutical industry. Contract manufacturing is a supply chain arrangement by which a company outsources some of its manufacturing processes to an outside supplier through a contractual agreement. Services offered by contract manufacturer can include e.g. development, testing, manufacturing and packaging services, amongst other. Increasing competition and development of technology brings pharmaceutical companies into situation where they decide to rely on contract manufacturing services to meet their fundamental needs and specified competencies, along with accomplishing stringent regulations.

It is generally known that finding a suitable contract manufacturer that fits to customer needs might be expensive and time-consuming process as such. Thus the decision to transfer production to external manufacturer is only made after a careful consideration

of benefits and risks. And not forgetting the necessity to share company know-how and expertise with external service provider, which may seem like losing of company's competitive advantage and allowing its potential utilization for service provider's own benefit. Setting up the manufacturing and testing capability into service provider's facility consumes time, money and resources and includes authority approval procedures. In pharmaceutical industry the environment of contract manufacturing is well controlled and high reliability compared to many other industry sectors.

For service provider in B2B environment an understanding on what customer expects is essential to profitable business. Contrary to B2C environment - where service provider might not focus on its current customers nearly as much as acquiring new ones – the existing customer portfolio is more emphasized in B2B environment. It is known that additionally to applying existing customer management practices, not depending whether they are well established or not, service providers should be more proactive in their customer relationships in order to achieve customers' trust on that their functional and emotional needs will be met. Understanding what customers' are expecting, what they value and how they behave can create new opportunities for service provider to improve its relationship management and eventually achieve opportunities for extended or new business. It is said that there is no better way of understanding your customers than by talking to them. The valuable insight into their working week, the teams they work with, the people they report to and their objectives and challenges can be gained only by regularly reaching out the customers and speaking to them.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

The purpose of this research is to get familiar with the theory of customer information and knowledge, and how those transform to customer understanding and insight as part of the customer relationship management process. The aim is to find out what company should know about their customers in order to recognize new business opportunities amongst them and to plan their customer relationship management activities accordingly.

To determine which information/knowledge is needed to form sufficient customer understanding/insight different information sources can be considered. As this research is involved with existing customer relationships, where personal contacts between the case company and customers are already in place, they were utilized as a data sources.

The primary research question is:

- What the case company should know about their customers in order to recognize new business opportunities among them?

The secondary questions to which the answers are looked for are:

- How to better understand customer needs and situation?

- How to recognize new business opportunities in routine relationships?

- What information about customer is needed to be able to understand what services could be offered?

The result of the research would be available to be utilized as part of the customer relationship management process and customer care plan. In practice the research will result proposal on how the case company could improve preparation and planning of customer communication and meetings and could better capture new business potential.

1.3 The case company and its contract manufacturing business

The case company offers pharmaceutical contract manufacturing services for B2B partners, sizing from small virtual to big pharma companies. Current customer base is Y customers. Organizationally contract manufacturing is part of the case company's supply chain operations, and employs five persons being responsible for sales, marketing and customer relationship management. Contract manufacturing services to customers are produced through existing supply chain and quality operations.

Currently service offering is strongly limited to existing production capability and current free production capacity. Contract manufacturing strategy and offering guidance determines the services to offer in more detail. In addition to capability and capacity limitations there are other aspects to be considered in service offering - like product volume, target market, sales & profit expectations, product maturity etc.

New contract manufacturing business is looked for via two main channels - through new customer acquisition and by finding new business possibilities with existing customers. This research is focusing on the latter one, to find new business opportunities with recognized potential customers (prospects) and with existing partners with whom the case company already has a contract manufacturing business relationship in place. It is essential that the working processes are carefully thought and streamlined to support the sales activities. B2B customer relationship management process and customer segmentation is in place for the case company's B2B customers. Additionally there are certain business specific process descriptions, like feasibility evaluation and tendering processes, in use. However there is no agreed procedure on how the customer management should be taken care of to enable the maximum new sales from the prospects or existing partners. What should company know about their customers in order to be able to recognize new business opportunities and allocate sales activities more accurately?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is focusing on customer knowledge and customer understanding in B2B environment. Customer knowledge and customer understanding are essential parts of customer relationship management and they are forming the basis for the empirical part of this research. The literature review is focusing on the topic from the pharmaceutical contract manufacturing perspective, from service provider perspective, where possible. As customer knowledge and customer understanding are subjects to science field of knowledge management, the theory of main field is also reviewed on a general level.

The term "customer knowledge" used in different contexts could mean three different things: knowledge for, from and about customers (Arantola, 2006, Salomann et al. 2005). Knowledge for customer means information about products, markets and suppliers – information that supplier shares to customer (García-Murillo et al. 2002). Knowledge from customer stands for the knowledge that customers have about products, suppliers and market trends – information that supplier can gain from customer and use for e.g. innovation or improving its performance (García-Murillo et al. 2002). Knowledge about customer consists of master data and past transactions, as well as customer's current needs and requirements, future desires, connections, purchasing activity and financial capability (Davenport et al. 2001).

In this literature review the focus is on customer knowledge about customers, encompassing their expectations and needs. As all three knowledge flows play a remarkable role in interaction between a company and its customers they all are though touched as sufficient for the context.

1.1 Knowledge management

Alavi & Leidner (2001) propose the determination for knowledge to be information possessed in the mind of individuals. In other words it is personalized information (which may or may not be new, unique, useful, or accurate) related to facts, procedures, concepts, interpretations, ideas, observations, and judgements.

The following definition of data, information and knowledge is used by Quintas et al. (1997): information is organized facts and data, and knowledge consists of truths and beliefs, perspectives and concepts, judgements and expectations, methodologies and know-how.

Davenport & Prusak (1998) determine knowledge as "a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information". They further state that knowledge is close to action, closer than data and information. The evaluation of knowledge should be based on the decisions or actions to which it leads. Better knowledge may be used e.g. to make wiser decisions about strategy, customers, product and service life cycles. They found out that the companies they worked with were eagerly looking for insights – best practices, new ideas, creative synergies and breakthrough processes. Information as such could not supply those insights regardless of how well it was managed. Solution for gaining insight is knowledge management i.e. making effective use of knowledge which probably already exists in the organization but is not accessible or available when required.

Dalkir (2011) proposes a definition of knowledge management to be: "Knowledge management is the deliberate and systematic coordination of an organization's people, technology, processes, and organizational structure in order to add value through reuse and innovation. This is achieved through the promotion of creating, sharing, and applying knowledge as well as through the feeding of valuable lessons learned and best practices into corporate memory in order to foster continued organizational learning."

Quintas et al. (1997) define knowledge management as "a process of continually managing knowledge of all kinds to meet existing and emerging needs, to identify and exploit existing and acquired knowledge assets and to develop new opportunities". They further state that in an organizational context knowledge management does not mean managing everything that is known, but it more concerns about creating and mobilizing certain knowledge, maybe even something that the organization does not know having, for specific purposes, like competitive advantage or greater efficiency.

Ståhle & Grönroos (2000) introduces knowledge management concept called Dynamic Intellectual Capital™. Its aim is to harness, develop and exploit intangible assets of an organization. The concept puts human beings and their creativity before computers and information technology. They further state that knowledge management is not a project but a process, it is not a method but a deep cultural change. In knowledge management the question is not about technical devices but it is about management.

Alavi & Leidner (2001) describe knowledge management involving four basic knowledge processes: 1) knowledge creation, 2) knowledge storage/retrieval, 3) knowledge transfer, and 4) knowledge application. Processes are distinct but interdependent, and they are considered to be essential to effective organizational knowledge management.

According to Joshi et al. (2014) knowledge management includes the procedures used to categorize and organize personal, unconscious, implicit, tacit, and mined information, as well as distribute it through a network or database system to create an organizational competitive advantage.

Davenport & Prusak (1998) have listed knowledge management principles as follows:

- Knowledge originates and resides in people's minds
- Knowledge sharing requires trust
- Technology enables new knowledge behaviors

- Knowledge sharing must be encouraged and rewarded
- Management support and resources are essential
- Knowledge initiatives should begin with a pilot program
- Quantitative and qualitative measurements are needed to evaluate the initiative
- Knowledge is creative and should be encouraged to develop in unexpected ways

Davenport (1998) states that at the early stage of knowledge management in business it has been addressed at either philosophical or technological level, and there has not been much discussion on how knowledge can be managed and used more effectively. These high-level knowledge principles can be used as a basis for organizations' active management of their knowledge assets. Organizations can create detailed knowledge management approaches and plans once they have decided which principles they agree upon.

Joshi et al. (2014) have studied knowledge management and its relationship to organizational and financial performance. They state that knowledge management initiatives have an influence on performance, both financial and non-financial. Non-financial (organizational) performance indicators include e.g. enhanced productivity, improved quality of products or services, better utilization of existing resources, customer expectations and reduced duplication of efforts. Measures like net profit margin, return on assets and return on capital employed are examples of financial performance indicators.

Study of Joshi et al. (2014) indicated that effective knowledge management mandates the development of capabilities and competencies related to processes, culture, technology, leadership and structure. These capabilities and competencies are the keys to improve performance. Study results further suggest that organizations which are able to demonstrate better knowledge management capabilities are performing better when compared to their counterparts and competitors.

When discussing about the general acceptance of knowledge management within organizations Dalkir (2011) suggests that it is more widely accepted within certain industries than others. During the past years pharmaceutical, energy, aerospace, manufacturing and legal industries have been some of the leaders in knowledge management organizational adoption. Towards the future, the public health and health care fields are certainly well positioned to leverage knowledge throughout the globe.

1.2 Customer knowledge

Peelen (2005) determines customer knowledge through transformation of data and information. Data are details (such as value of latest purchase, payment terms used, customers' contact details) and become information when meaning is assigned to data (results an image of who the customer is). Information transforms to knowledge when action is taken on the basis of the information (to know when and what to offer to customer).

Peelen (2005) states that knowledge of the individual customer is essential when targeting to develop a long-term relationship and to supply customization. The competency or capability to develop individual customer knowledge for a high number of customers shall be developed in companies. Correct and current data should be transformed through analyses into individual customer information. This data should be supplemented by qualitative market research so that more complete image of the customer is achieved. The challenge is to combine customer information originating from different sources, like market research, database and experiences of personnel.

According to Arantola (2006) customer knowledge consists of information of the customer and business environment. Customer information covers e.g. customer's strategy, objectives, competitive position, organization description and key decision makers. Information about business environment is about markets, values, technologies, industry etc. She states that it is essential to differentiate customer knowledge sources (from where knowledge can be gained), contents (which information to be collected) and intention/purposes (which conclusions can be done) from each other. Customer

knowledge converts to customer insight only after when interpretation of knowledge is done and it can be applied for decision making.

By customer knowledge García-Murillo & Annabi (2002) are referring to two different aspects of knowledge: (a) the knowledge that the customer has about the issues relating to the product or service offered and (b) the knowledge that the company should have for assisting the customer when making a purchase decision. This distinction is made because they assume an interactive process of knowledge exchange between the company and the customer. According to García-Murillo & Annabi (2002) there are many sources of customer knowledge. They argue that personal interactions (face-to-face) with customers lead to richer content and can help explaining customer behavior. Transactional data instead can be used to identify problems and preferences, but it is difficult to determine the reasons for customer decisions through it. With personal interactions companies can ask customers directly and have better idea of the source of problems, preferences and needs.

Salojärvi et al. (2010) have studied customer knowledge utilization in the management of the key account relationships. Utilization of customer knowledge could be considered as a driving force of key account management as it establishes the foundation for strategic decision-making in key account relationships. Customer knowledge is needed e.g. for constructing customer profiles, designing account-specific organizational structures and selling processes, identifying new opportunities for customer value creation and making changes in products and services. They note that customer data and information may be processed with computers, but customer knowledge is always related to human activity. Salojärvi et al (2009) though further states that organizations need to learn to know their customers better and proactively aim to identify new opportunities for customer value creation and thus enhancing the relationship further. Their study resulted that the use of teams, top management involvement, formalization of key account management and CRM technology are enhancing the utilization of customer knowledge management of large industrial key account customers.

Korkman & Arantola (2009) state that customer knowledge is important resource for customer relationship management. Knowledge about customers helps to gain understanding of their purchasing and customership behavior and thus developing products and services as per their needs. They further state that customers' actual behavior can be studied even more diversely than their thoughts. When it sometimes is difficult to obtain readily valuable and useful information straight from customers it might be beneficial to review e.g. the data about purchases, invoices and user reports as well as look for the tacit information from customer service personnel.

Company must clearly understand why it wants the knowledge in a first place in order to ensure the success of customer knowledge management. The study of Davenport et al. (2001) revealed that many objectives are in common to the leading companies. They are e.g. segmenting the customer base, prioritizing customers, knowing what customers want to know, engendering customer loyalty, extending products or services and improving success in cross-selling.

Arantola (2006) lists the benefits of customer knowledge utilization as follows:

- Recognition of best prospects (cross-selling, better customer profitability)
- Improvement of customer loyalty (more precise offering)
- Increased sales (improved customer understanding in marketing and distribution channels)

1.3 Customer insight

Customer insight is determined as "a non-obvious understanding of your customers which, if acted upon, has the potential to change their behavior for mutual benefit" by Laughlin (2014).

Arantola (2006) suggests in her book "customer Insight – uusi väline liiketoiminnan kehittämiseen" a model for customer understanding. It describes the linkage between the source, content and utilization of information and how all these views impact on the

establishment of customer understanding. Core questions in customer understanding is what information means - which problems can be solved with that information and what is the value of information for the company business. Suggested model is presented in Figure 1. Information describes either business environment (markets, purchasing power, products and services, competitive position etc.) or customers (their strategy, targets, values, organization, key contact persons, supply chain etc.). Customer understanding forms when quantitative and qualitative information from different sources is combined. Additionally to that there needs to be an idea of what that information actually means and how it shall be applied. Customer information can be utilized in strategy planning, sales, marketing, product and service development.
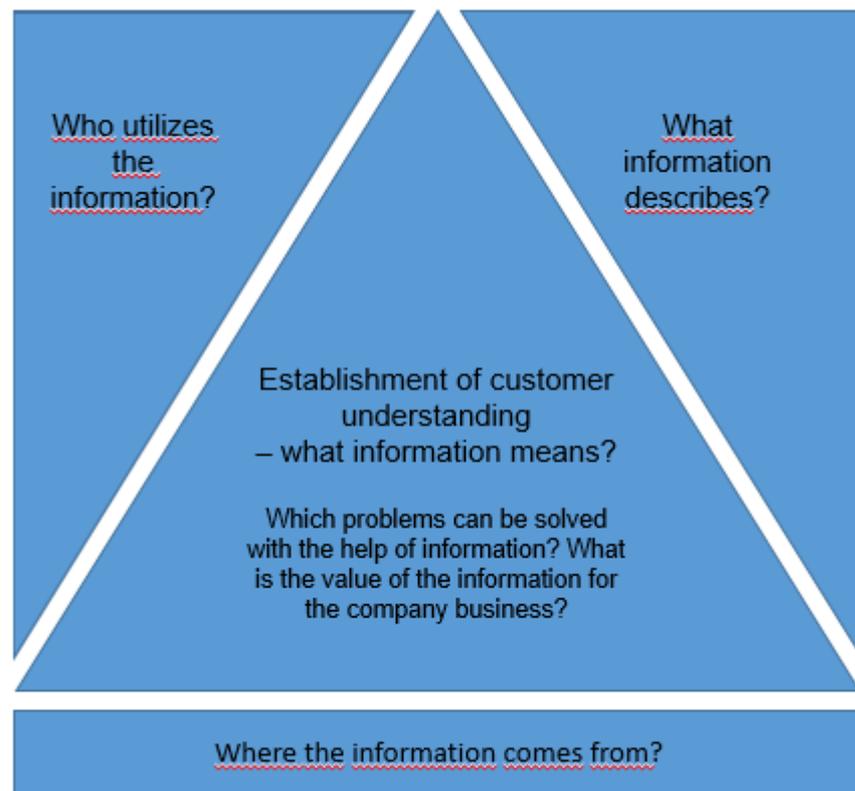
Figure 1 An adaptation of the frame of customer understanding by Arantola (2006)

Arantola (2006) discusses about the importance of customer understanding. It is a part of company's business model, and its role and content may vary from critical to very marginal resource. Arantola states that customer understanding might be essential in order to maintain competitive strengths or even gain further competitive advantage. She

also considers customer understanding being a company capability, which forms through company processes, structures, tools and indicators, and utilizes individuals' know-how and competencies.

Customer insight is defined by Arantola (2006) as a deep understanding of the behavior of customers. It covers customers' behavior over their ability to describe it. Customers' role is essential when producing the understanding. Customer insight is company's action that collects the information concerning customers into a certain place. All the information related to a specific customer is collected from different parts of an organization. For collecting, storing and utilizing customer information well developed technical tools are used. Customer information shall be stored in a place with an easy access for decision making employees. It is nor only one particular employee who possess the understanding of customers but together the whole organization. Additionally, insight must constantly be developed.

Butler (2000) states that "Customers invariably know more about the organizations they do business with than the business knows about its customers. Whilst all businesses recognize that they are nothing without their customers, they rarely fully capitalize on the customer knowledge that their employees informally collect". Butler states that 'customer intimacy' is one of the business strategies that organizations adopt for competitive gains. Customer intimacy focuses on capitalizing on information of customer's needs to improve customer satisfaction and increase buying behavior. She also states that once customer intimacy is achieved and organization is easy to do business with, the customer will avoid the high costs of switching to other businesses.

In regards the company's ability to improve decision making quality it is worth noting that the information that describes what has happened earlier is the first prerequisite to constitute insight. In other words, hindsight is useful when it is carefully evaluated and analyzed – what happened, why, can similar occasions in the future be contributed? Hindsight may lead to insight, and in a best case to foresight. (Arantola, 2006)

Davenport et al. (2001) state in their article "How do they know their customers so well?" that companies have invested a lot to customer data warehouses, but just a small piece of that data ends up into thoughtful analysis of customer needs and preferences. Companies would need more than transactional data to obtain additional insight into their customers. Success of the companies lies behind the translation of data into something meaningful about customers – companies consider that they succeed because they consider the person behind the transaction.

Davenport et al. (2001) also brings up that the leader companies aim for the optimal data mix. Although it is easy to use transactional data, some human data (information obtained when talking with customers) should be added in order to create data mix that supports company objectives. Also they found out many creative solutions used to manage both explicit (documented and accessible) and tacit (understood, but undocumented and non-accessible) knowledge. They also found out that for data storing a fully integrated customer-knowledge environment seems to be more of an intriguing idea than practical reality. It rather seems that even large companies are hesitating to combine hard (transactional-based) knowledge and soft knowledge into a one customer database.

Hult et al. (2016) have investigated managerial ability of companies in understanding how their customers perceive company's products and services. Through data obtained e.g. from customer satisfaction surveys followed by data analysis company gains only limited insight into whether its efforts to get inside their customer's heads is successful. Questions "what" and "why" are necessary pre-conditions, or knowledge, for company being able to configure its resources and capabilities to design, deliver and communicate its offering so that it satisfies the customer. Their study resulted an indication that companies need to put more effort to ensure that their managers understand how their customers perceive their products and services and why. They suggest that the same research approach they used in their study could be utilized as a starting point in increasing the understanding. Based on the method that Hult et al. applied the company may use its customer feedback survey measures and translate those into managerial versions of the same questions and items. Internal managerial responses can then be compared with existing customer data in order to understand the potential gap between

the views. The ability to understand the gap is fundamental in determining the success of marketing efforts.

1.4 Sources of customer knowledge

Mattinen (2006) describes customer information sources to be databases (CRM, customer reports), researches (market research, customer satisfaction surveys, interviews), sales reports, external sources (web pages, press releases) and tacit information sources (weak signals from markets, internal and external discussions). Tacit undocumented information is valuable as it looks to the future and understands customer motivations.

In their book "Kaikki on kiinni asiakkaasta – avaimia asiakasrajapintojen hallintaan" Selin & Selin (2005) are suggesting the starting point questions for customer knowledge/information acquisition:

- Why information is needed?
- What is the intention of the information?
- What information is already available and what additional information is needed?
- For which purpose and how the information will be used?
- Who needs the information?
- How and from where the information is acquired?
- How much information acquisition may cost?

Selin & Selin (2005) states that collecting customer knowledge shall be a well-determined and systematic process that enables company to stay up-to-date on customers' situations and their foreseen changes. They further continue that a fair starting point is to determine which information is already available within the organization and evaluate its currency, accessibility and adequacy. Then the decision on what additional information is needed can be made. Channels for additional information are e.g. listening to customer, collecting feedback from customers, reviewing customer's marketing material and web pages or participating events & conferences.

Doole et al. (2005) state that they've seen there is a lot of information available from diverse sources in organizations, both internal and external, but it only starts to become useful when it adopts a functional approach. That is the stage when information becomes knowledge. They also highlight the importance of continuity in information collection. Customer information system by Doole et al. is presented in Figure 2. The stages of customer information system are linked to each other by arrows.
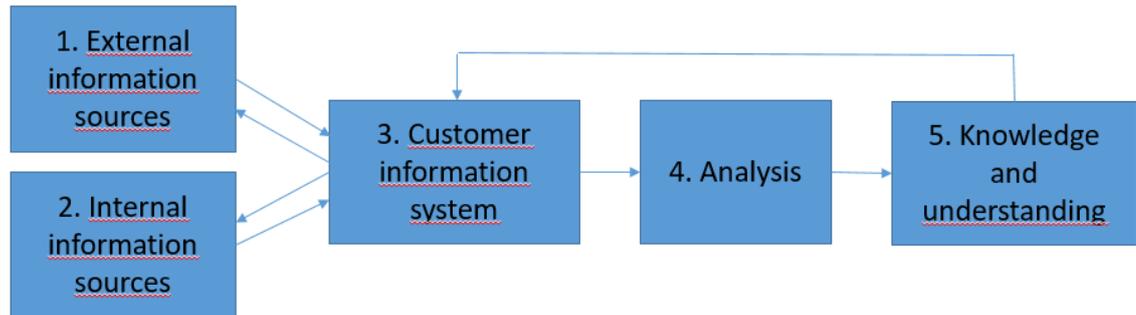

Figure 2 Customer information system (Doole et al. 2005)

Doole et al. (2005) are dividing information into two distinct sources: secondary information and primary information. Secondary information is information that already exists, which is collected initially for a specific purpose but is later used for other than the original intention. Primary information is new information collected for a specific purpose. Later it may transform to secondary information when it is used for some other purpose. Primary information is used to bridge any gaps in business knowledge. Doole et al. (2005) also state that some of the information will be found in sources within the company. That is internal information, e.g. product cost and complaint rates. As internal information does not fully satisfy the information needs also external sources of information must be utilized. Those are e.g. market research or competitor information. Further the information can be divided into quantitative and qualitative information. Hard, numerical facts, for example market share figures or customer complaint rates are quantitative information. More in-depth information contains few (if any) hard scientific facts – that is qualitative information. This qualitative information helps business to acquire knowledge and understanding, and most importantly may help "to put the flesh on the bones" of the hard facts. Qualitative information is useful when company wants to examine customer's behavior, motivation, attitude or opinion. Its intention is to describe and explore something rather simply count numbers.

Arantola (2006) presents four channels for collecting customer information. The channels are:

- Customer data (through automated data collection systems)
- Internal tacit knowledge (e.g. organization's customer service and sales)
- Listening the customer & business intelligence (customer satisfaction surveys & feedback)
- External tacit knowledge and customer data (e.g. partners and distribution channels)

Although there are several external data sources available, the information collected by the organization itself is unique – it contains detailed information on how customer acts in a customer relationship. Arantola (2006) also further notes that the higher business benefits are aspired the more strict requirements shall be set for information sources.

Mattinen (2006) captures in his book the listening of the customer in a systematic and analytical way. He states that when companies are listening to their well-known customers it is essential to concentrate in finding new perspectives. Weak signals must be listened carefully and the discussions shall be guided towards the right direction without impacting customers' opinion. Understanding of customers' business environment, organization, culture and other alternatives or options is important – it is not only the collaboration between the company and customer, but deeper understanding on customers' thoughts, actions, authority relations, roles of decision makers etc.

Arantola (2006) describes listening the customer to be such information collection where the source is customer. Examples of listening the customer are customer satisfaction survey and market research. Although usually customer knowledge is considered to be knowledge about existing or known customers, Arantola states that useful customer knowledge can be obtained through market research as well. She introduces the term customer intelligence, which is a process of systematically gathering and analyzing customer information in a centralized way. It is close to business intelligence, although different information is collected, but both limit to each other when the focus is on how

procedures and knowledge utilization could be improved in customer relationships and decision making.

Mattinen (2006) presents the term customer empathy in his book. By customer empathy he means the state of readiness in the organization to sense customer impulses. Customer empathy appears in three levels: firstly as a willingness to understand how customer feels about company's actions, secondly as a capability to enforce customer empathy in collaboration and thirdly as a competency to create competitive advantage of customer empathy. An important question to be asked from customers is "From which factors a good collaboration is made of?". Utilization of the answer will lead to higher level of customer empathy.

According to Mattinen (2006) listening the customer is based on the qualitative approach. Starting point for such study is simply first to listen the internal team taking care of customer relationship, then to listen customer side, and compare the views around the corresponding themes. Most important is to focus on the following themes:

1) Revolutionary moments which lead either to customer engagement or divergence
2) Unforeseen moments when either of the parties is acting out of line (deviations from customer relationship process)
3) Parties' views on improvement opportunities in collaboration

Based on the proposed approach a gap analysis on expectations and experiences, collaboration and new opportunities can be made. Attention should be paid on the differentiating views. The approach is described in Figure 3.
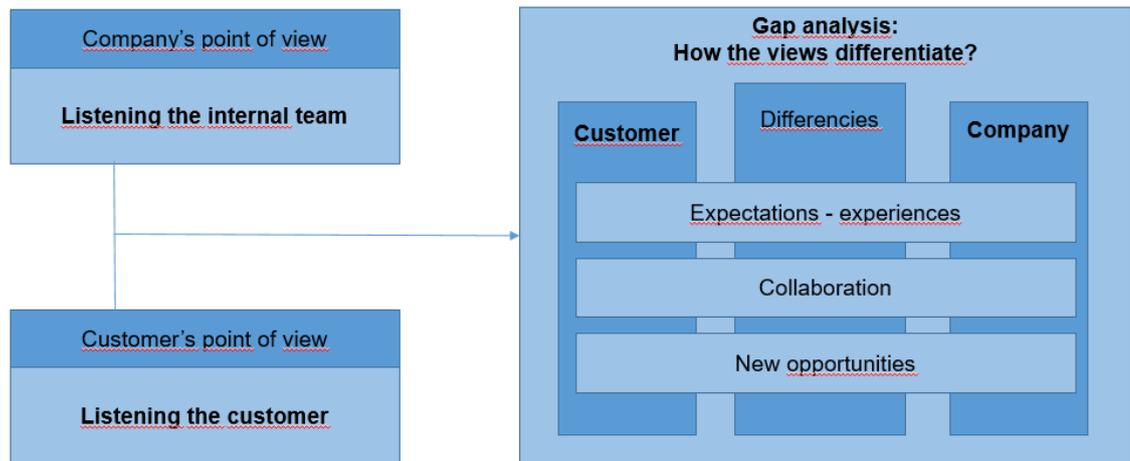
Figure 3 Listening both the customer and company personnel for gap analysis (Mattinen, 2006)

Mattinen (2006) further states that another aspect in listening the customer is related to interviews that should be done in different levels in customer's organization. Customer view shall be looked for through interviews from upper and middle management as well as from operating level. Views and expectations related to collaboration can vary a lot depending on the organizational level.

Mattinen (2006) points out the importance of recognizing remarkable incidents that are either threats or opportunities to collaboration. These incidents may turn the collaboration to a new direction, towards more intensive collaboration or on the other hand even relationship termination. These occasions, on both parties' side, are e.g. when there are changes in strategy, ownership, decision makers, production processes and when either party ally with a new party, responsibilities in customer relationship management changes, budget is agreed or cost follow-up program is started.

1.5 Customer relationship management (CRM)

CRM is a combination of people, processes and technology that intents to understand a company's customers. It is an integrated approach to managing relationships by focusing

on customer retention and relationship development. Advances in information technology and organizational changes in customer-centric processes have evolved CRM. As a result of successful implementation of CRM the companies will reap the rewards in customer loyalty and long run profitability. (Catalán-Matamoros, 2012).

Zablah et al. (2004) have defined CRM from five different perspectives:

1. as a process,

2. as a strategy,

3. as a philosophy,

4. as a capability

5. and/or as a technological tool.

They propose the following conceptualization of CRM: an ongoing process that involves the development and leveraging of market intelligence for the purpose of building and maintaining a profit-maximizing portfolio of customer relationships. They further state that from the process perspective relationship marketing activities are constituting sub-process of remarkably broader and more strategically orientated CRM process.

Zablah et al. (2004) continue that although both relationship marketing and CRM are concerned with relationship development and maintenance activities, there are still major discrepancies regarding the intended process outputs, i.e. close, collaborative exchange relationships vs. profit-maximizing portfolio of customer relationships, and due to the more extensive nature of CRM. They are thus related phenomena but still different. On the other hand, if relationship marketing is defined as a business philosophy, the nature of the association between the two phenomena changes dramatically. Then the definition comes closer to the proposal by Frow & Payne (2009), see Figure 4.

In order to focus on understanding and growth of knowledge in the relationship discipline Frow & Payne (2009) are proposing the following definitions for relationship marketing,

CRM and customer management: "Relationship marketing should consider the wider context of relationships with key stakeholders, whilst CRM should be focused on building knowledge based relationships with customers. The term customer management should be applied to tactical activities within CRM, such as campaign management." Figure 4 describes the same.

Relationship Marketing:
Strategic management of relationships with all relevant stakeholders

CRM:
Strategic management of relationships with customers, involving appropriate use of technology

Customer Management:
Implementation and tactical management of customer interactions
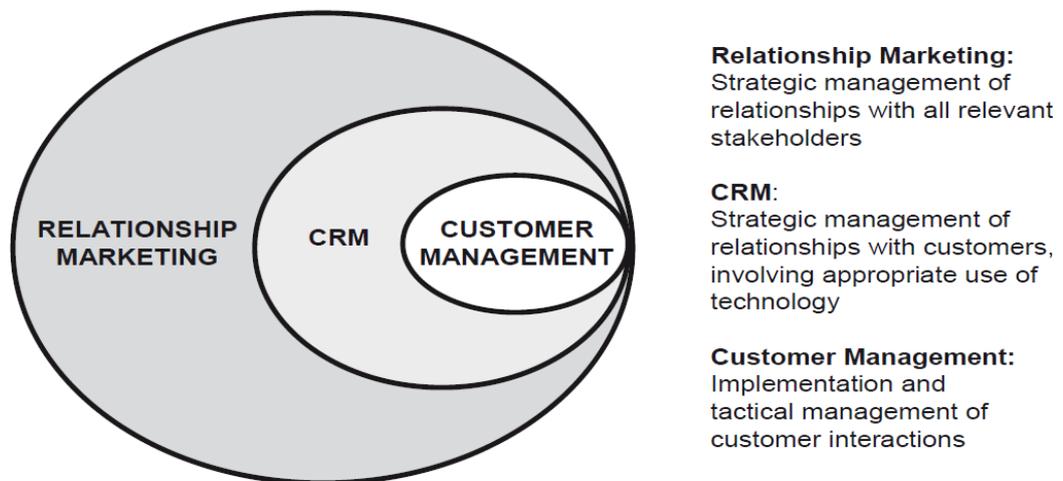
Figure 4 Relationship marketing, CRM and customer management (Frow & Payne, 2009)

Triki et al. (2011) have studied the role of customer knowledge competencies in CRM project implementation. They conclude that three types of knowledge competencies are needed: Customer knowledge acquisition skills, customer knowledge sharing skills and customer knowledge use skills.

Mithas et al. (2005) have evaluated the effect of CRM on customer knowledge and customer satisfaction as the research demonstrating the benefits of such investment is considered to be lacking. Primary motivation for a company to implement CRM application is to follow customer behavior in order to gain insight into customer preferences and needs. They found out that CRM applications help companies to gain

customer knowledge. They argue that the use of CRM applications is positively associated with improved customer knowledge and satisfaction.

According to Zablah et al. (2004) knowledge management process together with interaction management process form a CRM process. Knowledge management process is concerned with all of the activities directed towards creating and leveraging the market intelligence that company needs to build and maintain a portfolio of customer relationships that maximizes organizational profitability. Knowledge management process consists of data collection, intelligence generation and intelligence dissemination. It is worth noting that any intelligence that has a potential bearing on the outcome of customer interactions is considered especially valuable (e.g., value drivers, changing preferences, cross-selling opportunities, etc.). And, any intelligence that is generated needs to be disseminated to all members of the organization who either have direct contact with the customers (i.e., boundary-spanners) or have an influence over the marketing activities.

Peelen (2005) considers CRM as a business strategy and proposes that its goal is so-called customer intimacy. Being able to achieve lasting success the relationship development requires both parties to get to know each other, and to commit to each other for the long term. He suggests that this approach offers an opportunity to further expand customer knowledge and to develop more diversified customer approach.Further Peelen (2005) determines four cornerstones of CRM. They are 1) customer knowledge, 2) relationship strategy, 3) communication and 4) individual value proposition. In this research customer knowledge is captured in more detailed in chapter 3.

Salomann et al. (2005) studied enhancement of customer relating capabilities with knowledge management instruments. They were studying how companies could successfully utilize customer knowledge to achieve superior performance in CRM process. For their study purposes they deployed a process framework describing the business processes relevant to CRM and knowledge management initiatives (see Figure 5).
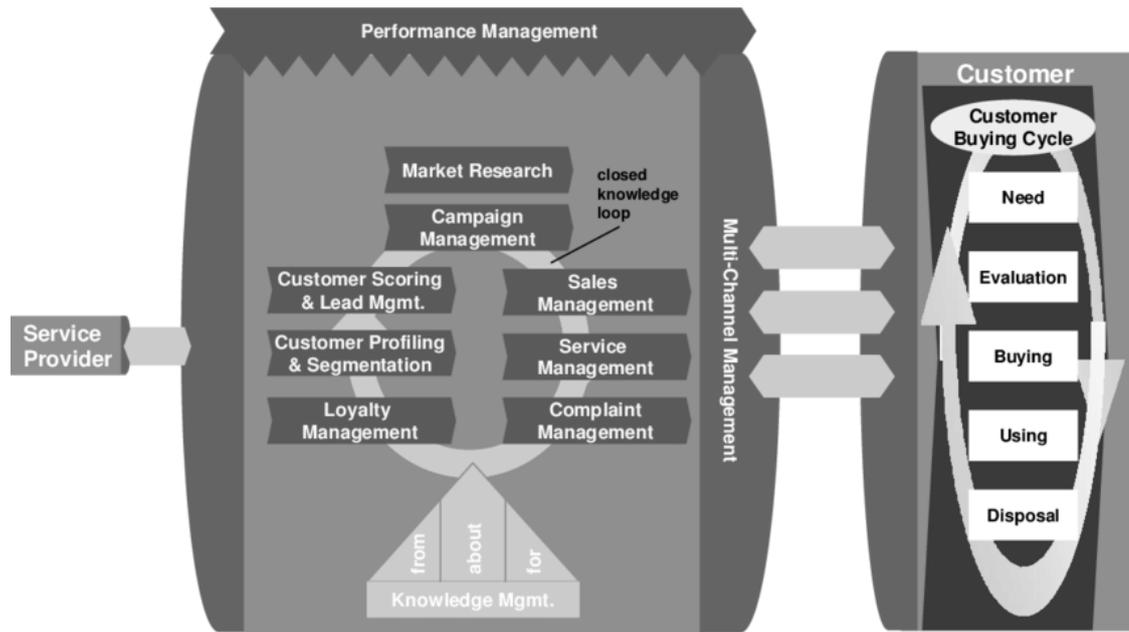
Figure 5 Process framework for CRM (Salomann et al. 2005)

All identified business processes that are relevant to successful CRM implementation within an organization are comprised in the process map. The characteristic of the process map is its gear towards customers' needs and desires. Knowledge about customers is gathered in CRM service and support processes and analyzed in CRM analysis process. Organization's knowledge management capabilities are in a remarkable role in CRM success. (Salomann et al. 2005)

As a result on their study Salomann et al. (2005) are presenting conceptual framework for knowledge-based CRM strategy, processes, systems and change management in order to improve CRM process by customer knowledge management. Framework is presented in Figure 6.
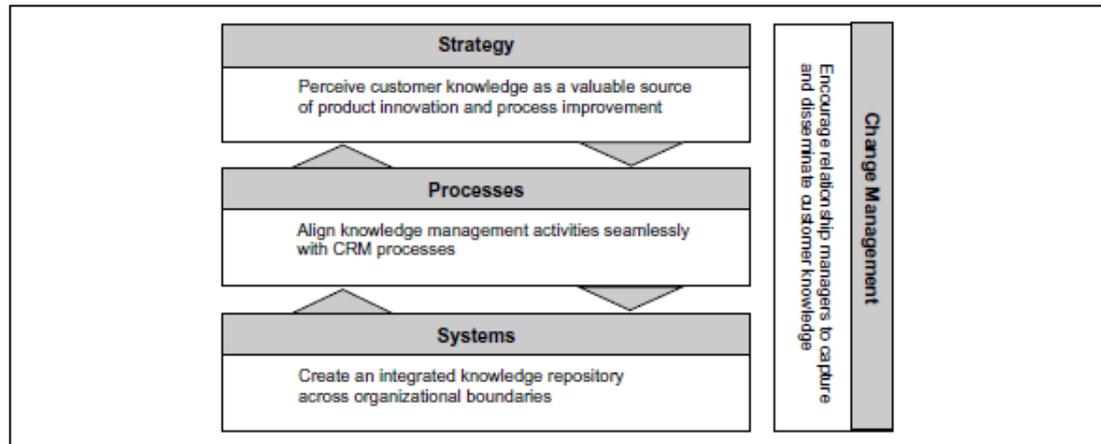
Figure 6 Managerial framework for knowledge-based CRM (Salomann et al. 2005)

The framework by Salomann et al. (2005) is suggested to serve as a guideline for practitioners. They highlight that from strategic perspective customer knowledge shall be perceived as a valuable source of process improvement and top management should recognize customers as a valuable source of knowledge. From process perspective they suggest to align knowledge management activities seamlessly with CRM processes as they are best enabled by customer knowledge if the supportive knowledge management processes are lean and tightly integrated into a relationship manager's actual work. From systems perspective they support idea of creating an integrated knowledge repository across organizational boundaries as their study showed that it helped in overcoming both regional boundaries and separations between business units. Lastly for change management purposes the relationship managers should be encouraged to capture and disseminate customer knowledge. Top management should encourage an organizational culture in which employees are willing and motivated to share their own knowledge from and about customers with others and to make use of knowledge provided by others.

Payne & Frow (2005) have introduced a conceptual framework for CRM strategy. It consists of five building blocks: strategy development, value creation, multichannel integration, information management and performance assessment. Framework is aimed at enhancing customer value by providing deeper insight into achieving success with CRM strategy and implementation. CRM system plays a remarkable role in the

information management process within CRM strategy framework. Information management process includes a so-called "data repository" also associated with the CRM system. Its key purpose is to store key customer data collected by the company and used by employees to plan, execute and analyze their customer activities. Accumulating the necessary customer data is the main intention of such CRM system. Payne & Frow (2005) further state that if these kinds of systems are perceived and used properly by employees, they may significantly improve company's customer understanding and, in turn, help to enhance promotional strategies and improve company results and competitiveness.

Mithas et al. (2005) for one state that CRM applications are of help to companies through two mechanisms in gathering and using customer knowledge. Firstly, relevant information about each customer transaction can be recorded by customer contact employees by using CRM applications. Once the information is captured, it can be processed and converted into customer knowledge by utilizing the information-processing rules and organizational policies. The customer knowledge can then be made available for future transactions, enabling employees to respond to any customer need in a contextual manner. Further, companies may also use customer knowledge for profiling customers and identifying their latent needs on the basis of similarities between their purchase behaviors and those of other customers. Secondly, companies can share their customer knowledge with customers for they intention to determine the services that fulfill their needs best. Process of self-selection of service features may provide new opportunities for companies to learn more about their customers' needs and to deepen their customer knowledge.

Saarijärvi et al. (2013) studied the role of customer data within the CRM framework. They argue that as the companies are shifting their attention to better serve their customers, the role of customer data should be reconfigured in order to address those strategic purposes. They identified three CRM waves based on previous literature and proposed the fourth one based on their study results. The waves are characterizing the evolving role of customer data in CRM and helping recognize new ways of using customer data. The four waves are representing the evolution from data dispersion through data organization and data ownership towards data sharing, see Figure 7.

	(I) Data dispersion	(II) Data Organization	(III) Data ownership	(IV) Data sharing
Evolution phase	CRM wave 1 – early 1990s Companies faced with overwhelming amounts of data; a focus on developing technological solutions to better manage the company-customer interface	CRM wave 2 - mid 1990s Customer data organised to better serve company purposes; concepts such as mass customisation and one-to-one marketing established	CRM wave 3 – 2000-2010 Customer data as a company asset; customer loyalty programmes used to better manage customer relationships	CRM wave 4 – 2010 Customer data refined and given back to customers; external use of customer data, customer data as customer resource
Characteristics	Sevice automation; call-centre management; customer service support; sales force automation	Mass customisation; one-to-one marketing; service and sales	Entire organisation; integrated communications	Social CRM; CRM leveraged outside the organisation; customer-to-customer interactions
Focus	CRM as a technology solution	CRM as tactical and operational	CRM as strategy and philosophy	CRM as value co-creation; experiences; interaction; conversation
Goal	Improved service operations; increased sales efficiency; empowering technology	Reduced cost interaction; increased customer retention; improved customer experience; empowering data	Cost reduction and revenue growth; predicting customer behaviour; competitive advantage; empowering firms	Serving customers; supporting customers' value creation; empowering customers

Figure 7 Four CRM waves (Saarijärvi et al. 2013)

Saarijärvi et al. (2013) concluded that the focus in customer data usage is shifting from the internal to external and that the role of customer data within CRM is entering to customer data sharing phase - opening new business and service opportunities. Ways

to refine and give the customer data back to customers are looked for by companies. Customer data is considered to be a resource for the customers and supporting their value creation process.

Puschmann & Alt (2001) state that customer centricity has been a guiding principle for many businesses for a long time. However, it is mostly limited to marketing existing products, while corporate strategy remains product-centered. This is the case in pharmaceutical industry as well. Customers typically have a fractured view of the organization, and conversely the organization has only a splintered view of the customer which is determined by different customer contact points. Puschmann & Alt argue that more customer-centric view is needed, and that CRM, which is built on an integrated view of the customer across the whole organization, is suggested as an appropriate concept for achieving it. They aim was to outline how CRM concept can be used to achieve better customer centricity in the pharmaceutical industry. According to them CRM is not only a strategic concept, but is built on a clear understanding of the underlying processes and information systems. They noted that unlike other industries marketing and access to patient information is restricted for pharmaceutical companies due to the governmental rules and complex structure of healthcare system which separates companies from patients through various intermediate stages in supply chain (e.g. wholesalers, pharmacies).

As a result of their case study by Puschmann & Alt state that the new kind of service integration through healthcare portals is revolutionizing customer relationships in pharmaceutical industry. Healthcare portals are positioned as intermediaries between pharmaceutical companies, medical device companies, insurance companies, laboratories and governments on the one side and patients, doctors, hospitals, wholesalers and pharmacies on the other. For pharmaceutical companies the major benefit of these portals would be the possibility of direct interaction with end-consumers and patients, offering a better analysis of customer needs and their transformation into the development of individualized products.

Kros et al. (2007) were investigating CRM implementation within the contract pharmaceutical manufacturing industry in their research. Exploratory study was completed based on the four key factors that have driven CRM best practices in other industry sectors. They were 1) a notion of use of internal resources and/or reliance on external relationships, 2) needs research, 3) upper management commitment and 4) education. As a research finding the key success factors were reported to be well-managed internal and external relationships, high level completion of CRM and customer needs research, obtainment of CEO & board commitment and a certain extent end-user education.

1.6 Customer care model and its execution

Selin & Selin (2015) describe necessary tools for creating a customer care model. They state that additionally to customer vision, target and strategy the actual customer plan, its follow up, iteration, measurement, continuous improvement and recording tools are needed. Customer care model can be interpreted to be a book with a storyline or a manuscript that are taking place in a certain environment.

Lehtinen (2004) determines customer care plan as an action plan which intention is to implement customer strategy into practice. In the best case it is jointly discussed and agreed with the customer, and guides the work done for enhancing the customership or relationship. Development of customer care plan is a challenging exercise as it shall fulfil strategic targets on one hand and have very practical and simple approach at the same time. Lehtinen also highlights the same than Selin & Selin (2015) - successful execution of customer care plan requires bringing customer into focus and concentrating on the value that customer can achieve, simultaneously rewarding and prioritizing investments.

Cheverton (2015) describes four different models for working with key customers. The models describe the development of relationship between partners by comparing supplier's and customer's strategic intentions. The strategic intent increases when both parties see more value gained when more effort is put into the relationship. One of the models is bow-tie model (Figure 8, left). It represents the situation where individual point of contact at supplier (seller) has the connection with the point of contact at customer

end (buyer), but no contact with the rest of the organization. In this model it is difficult to obtain in-depth information on customer's actual needs and decision making processes. One-on-many model is advanced model of bow-tie model. In that the supplier's main contact establishes direct contact with a number of other people at customer end, not only with their main point of contact. Duet is a model where Key Account Manager is pairing and facilitating the straight connections and discussions between the experts at both parties and supports the team members in acting in a customer interphase. This model increases the trust and openness towards supplier organization.

According to Cheverton (2015) the most developed relationship model is a diamond model (Figure 8, right), where whole supplier organization is linked into the whole customer organization. These kind of relationships are typically partnerships. When the relationships are evolving from short-term transactions to genuine collaboration the partners start to work together towards joint objectives and aspirations. Cheverton further states that here the benefits should start to flow. More open and honest transfer of information is enabled when expertise on both sides is properly deployed – resulting improvement in customer understanding and potentially even securing key supplier status.
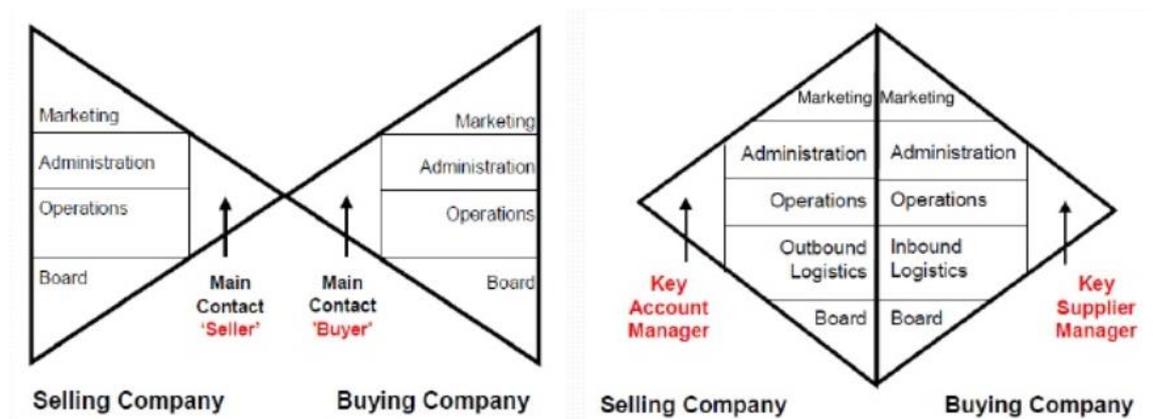

Figure 8 An adaptation of Bow-Tie (left) and Diamond (right) relationship models by Cheverton (2015)

Gorry & Westbrook (2011) argue that genuine customer care depends on empathy. They consider technology as a risk for the empathetic relationship between company and customers. Sharing their experiences with company may be difficult for customers when they appear only as fragmented transactions and the emotional connection is missing. When a company is not able to empathize with customers it inevitably cares less about helping them. However, Gorry & Westbrook further suggests that companies should introduce variety of tools to facilitate the connections between its employees and customers, but not to forget a careful consideration of opportunities and risks in order to gain the greatest benefit from technology in customer care. They also bring up that face-to-face interaction with customers is usually vivid and powerful, being opposite to abstraction of quantitative marketing and sales analysis. In situations where company can observe customer actions and open more ears to hear what customers have to say the empathetic response in strongest. Customers feel like company sees the matters from customers' point of view which results better and more caring service for them. Further Gorry & Westbrook argue that such listening as part of everyday business is valuable for company for its efforts to understand customers and learn from them. The information gained through listening could be more profound, engaging and lasting than the one collected e.g. statistically.

Review and integration of existing knowledge on customer metrics (e.g. customer satisfaction, retention) and proposals of generalization about their impact on the financial performance of companies is a topic in article by Gupta & Zeithaml (2006). The importance of customers is generally acknowledged by companies; without customers, a company has no revenue, no profit and therefore no market value. It is essential that companies understand how customer metrics link to profitability and firm value. They investigated both unobservable or perceptual customer metrics (e.g. customer satisfaction) and observable or behavioral metrics (e.g. customer retention and lifetime value).

Gupta & Zeithaml suggested a framework to link what companies do (i.e., their marketing actions), what customers think (i.e., unobservable constructs), what customers do (i.e., behavioral outcomes), and how customers' behavior affects company's financial performance (i.e., profits and firm value). For example, satisfaction is expected to lead

to repurchase behavior, which further translates into increased sales and profit. They suggested that unobservable constructs are related to observable behavior, which leads to financial gains.

Goodman (2014) says that in order to achieve a good customer experience a cross-selling or additional selling should only be strived for when customer's original need is fulfilled successfully. Exception is when cross-selling could solve the original need and thus satisfy customer. Goodman suggests that the decision about cross-selling shall be made based on data e.g. in CRM. It is common that cross-selling and additional selling are set as targets without considering the actual customer encounter and problem solving. If the previous aspects are not acknowledged the targets for cross-selling will most probably fail.

1.7 Summary

Knowledge management is widely seen as mixture of processes, technology, culture, leadership and organizational structures. The importance of basic processes of knowledge creation, storage, transfer and application are confessed. The aim of knowledge management is to create competitive advantages, new opportunities and innovations.

Various set of terms are used in relation to customer information, knowledge, understanding, insight and intimacy. In general the terms information and knowledge are upper level descriptions whereas understanding, insight and intimacy are describing a deeper understanding of customer behavior – something to which decision making can be based on. Continuity in information collection and processing is highlighted by many authors.

Customer knowledge consists of both customer information and business environment. Personal interactions are in a key role in customer knowledge creation and knowledge exchange between the partners. Customer knowledge is essential resource in customer relationship management. Thoughtful analysis of information is needed in order to better

understand customer needs and preferences. Customer understanding is fundamental for improving customer relationships and developing products and services that fulfil customer needs.

Customer relationship management is mainly considered to be a process involving development and utilization of customer knowledge in order to build and maintain profit-maximizing customer relationships. Additionally CRM is seen as strategy, philosophy, capability as well as a technical tool. On the other hand CRM applications are believed to be of help to companies to gain customer knowledge and enhance customer understanding, and in turn to improve company results and competitiveness. The linkage between CRM and customer knowledge management is obvious and thus CRM process can be improved by customer knowledge management.

Customer care plan is determined as an action plan by which the customer strategy is implemented into practice – in other words its intention is to fulfill strategic targets simultaneously being very practical and simple approach at the same time. Ideally customer care plan is jointly agreed with the customer.

2 RESEARCH METHODS

This section presents the chosen research method for the empirical study and tools that were used for data collection. The suitability of research method is also discussed.

2.1 Qualitative methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate what the case company should know about its' customers in order to recognize new business opportunities among them and make suggestions for the potential customer care model to support the case company's activities in e.g. customer meetings' planning and preparation, and improve its capability to capture new business potential in those occasions. The study is based on qualitative research and the focus is on providing a deep view of the customer expectations and values towards the case company's services and customer care practices. Theoretical framework was presented in the part of literature review. It provided the background of knowledge management, customer knowledge and customer understanding as well as their sources and management. Those were considered to represent relevant background for empirical study.

A qualitative research method was chosen for this study as its' purpose is to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Boeije, 2010). The goal was to study specific subject area as accurately and in-depth as possible. According to Myers (2013) qualitative research helps to understand people, their motivations and actions, and the broader context within which decisions and actions are taken place. According to Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad (2012) the qualitative approach is "based on subjective assessment of behaviour, attitude, opinions, behaviour impressions etc." Also Oun & Bach (2014) state that the goal in qualitative research is to collect in great details the understanding of human behavior. In other words, questions of how, where, what, when and why a person would act in a certain way towards a specific matter are examined and answered by the qualitative research method.

A survey as a research method is about asking the same information from number of people in order to understand what they think, feel, experience etc. Survey is determined as "asking questions of a target population (or a sample of it) and analyzing the responses in order the generate information" (Walle, 2015). Walle (2015) and Krishnaswami et al. (2012) consider survey as an economical and quick technique for qualitative data recording. They further state that typically it uses a small sample that researcher concludes to be adequately representative.

2.2 Data collection

When considering the availability of data for this study earlier customer satisfaction surveys or similar were considered as a source of data, as a secondary data. However it appeared that the content and quality of different surveys varied a lot, they were conducted over many years meaning that the time window was quite wide, and they were not systematically recorded but some of them were in electronic format and some were just hand written notes in notebooks. For these reasons the data for this study was decided to be collected as a primary data. A questionnaire was considered as a suitable data collection method for the survey. The questionnaire worked as a primary data. Primary data is a first-hand information that researcher directly obtains for a specific purpose, it has not been previously collected (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2012). For the basis of the study a secondary data was used. As literature review concerns with knowledge that already exists, it analyzes second sources (Walle, 2015). Secondary data thus is data that has already been created for another purposes than which it is used for. In this research the theoretical part was based on secondary data and the literature review initially explains and justifies the methods that were used (Walle, 2015).

To investigate customer needs and expectations towards the case company's services and relationship management a questionnaire was conducted. Nine questions were prepared in order to gain more precise understanding of customer expectations and needs towards the case company's service offering, and their decision making process when selecting service providers. Information was also collected to make suggestions for developing customer specific care models for each of the selected customers. The questionnaire was sent to primary business contacts at each customer. They were representing either company's purchasing, sourcing or relationship management

functions. Prior to sending questionnaire an email describing questionnaire background and objective was sent to recipients by the case company's responsible business contacts (Appendix 1) – the aim was to support the respondents' favorable attitude to questionnaire and explain the benefit their company could gain by answering the questions.

The case company has a customer portfolio of Y customers in total. Customer segmentation is based on both current business value and potential future business value. Business value is simply corresponding to either current or foreseen sales value. The case company selected seven customers for the study. They were deemed to be adequately representative as they were considered to have the greatest business potential in the future – either through existing business and/or through new business opportunities. Customers were representing the following segments: Business Strategic Customers, Important Customers and Growth Customers.

The case company's responsible person for these specific customer relationships provided contact names and email addresses of selected customers. Advanced information was provided to respondents by email to notify them about the case company's initiative to improve their relationship management practices in order to be able to serve customer's expectations and needs better. It was explained that the case company was running the questionnaire to better understand customer's values and needs as well as their decision making process when selecting external supplier for their outsourcing projects. The importance of cooperation in this initiative was highlighted for successful results. Survey results were intended to be used for further developing the case company's customer care model for customer company.

The questionnaire was executed by using Webropol application. The tool assured also anonymity of respondents. Questionnaire itself was again accompanied by covering letter explaining the purpose of the study and the importance of respondent's cooperation for the success of the initiative. The content of the covering letter was similar the pre-notification email (Appendix 1). Answers were collected within a period of three months. Originally the responses were requested within a week, but it appeared that due to some

main business events many of the respondents were not able to contribute within that time period. Reminders were sent and finally four responses of seven were received within three months' time period. One respondent informed that their company policy is not to share feedback through questionnaires but rather in annual meetings in person.

Questionnaire was sent to respondent with a request to complete it. Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad (2012) state in their book Business Research Methods that preliminary contact with respondents in order to share advanced information with them is more successful than follow-up efforts. Self-administrative attitude and cooperation in questionnaire completion was endorsed by contacting respondents in beforehand and explaining the rationality for the initiative. The aim was to create simple questionnaire so that respondents could easily understand the questions and answer them. Both open-ended and close–ended questions were used. Open-ended questions were used in background questions and allowing the freedom for respondent to provide feedback in regards their processes, expectations and improvement proposals. They can reveal more rich insights into studied phenomenon than close-ended questions (Walle, 2015). Close-ended multiple-choice question was used only for prioritizing the supplier selection criteria. To design the questions a careful literature review and discussions with the case company's key contacts, supervisor and thesis instructor were carried over, as suggested by Saunders et al. (2016), in order to make sure that the research questions will get answered and the study objectives addressed.

2.3 Structure of questionnaire

Questionnaire (Appendix 2) was organized in three sections. First three questions were supposed to gain background information on respondents' position in customer's outsourcing organization and process as well gain understanding on customer's outsourcing strategy, their current needs and decision making process. The questions were:

1. Describe your role/position in your company's outsourcing / supplier selection process
2. Describe your company's outsourcing strategy and needs for outsourcing

3. Describe your company's decision making process and organization in outsourcing projects

The next two questions were intended to capture the general level information on what customer values when selecting service provider. The multiple-choice question was used and it was based on the common industry understanding on the most important components when selecting supplier. The questions were:

4. Your company's supplier selection criteria in order of importance are (1 = very important, 5 = not important)
5. Your company's supplier selection criteria - other than above

The last four questions were more concentrating on information sharing between the parties and figuring out how the case company could improve its' relationship management practices in order to generate new business opportunities. The aim was to listen to customer needs and expectations for being able to create tailor made customer care models for them and further to understand on how deeper customer insight could be gathered and possibly utilized for new business potential. The questions were:

6. What information about the case company is available at your company's decision makers through existing contacts, and how the information is shared/updated?
7. What kind of information about the case company would be beneficial to your company when selecting a supplier and how would you prefer to receive this information (channels e.g. F2F meetings, email updates…)?
8. What is good in the case company's current relationship management practices and what could be improved?
9. If you could develop only one thing at the case company, what would that be? It should be done within three months time period, but there would be unlimited budget and resources to do that.

Respondents:

The respondents were selected based on the case company's preference. Respondents were primary contacts at customer end in the existing relationships. They were considered as representative participants at their company as they were holding a position or role either in purchasing & sourcing or relationship management functions. It was assumed that they adequately represented their organizations. This assumption for one justifies the creditability of the survey (Walle, 2015).

2.4 Analysis of the data

The answers to the questions (Appendix 2) were analyzed qualitatively not only with the help of the pre-themed themes included in the questionnaire (questions 1-5), but also looking for the most common new themes in the answers to the open-ended questions (questions 6-9).

3 RESULTS

The questionnaire was sent to seven respondents representing selected customer companies. In total four responses of seven were received and one respondent informed that their company policy is not to share feedback through questionnaires but rather in annual meetings in person. Although open-ended questions allow much freedom to respond in a thoughtful and unique manner they may also require more thought and additional time, and thus response rate may go down (Walle, 2015). Sekaran & Bougie (2014) state that larger chance of nonresponses and nonresponse errors are introduced in questionnaires. They further state that return rates in electronical questionnaires is typically low, and consider 30% response rate acceptable.

Respondents:

Background information on respondents' position in customer's outsourcing organization and process, their outsourcing strategy, current needs and decision making process were mapped out in the first questions. Respondents were describing their roles and positions to be in identifying, evaluating and selecting new suppliers, negotiating contracts and managing relationships. They were holding titles such as Associate Director of Purchasing, Head of Strategic Procurement, Third Party Manager and Key Account Manager. Based on the titles and description of roles and positions the respondents were clearly representing two different phases in outsourcing process. Based on the data it can be said that some respondents were involved more in new supplier selection which includes supplier identification, evaluation, contracting and implementation. Other respondents were involved in the next process phase, the management of existing relationship, which is more about supplier maintenance and development.

Considering the case company's intention to find new business opportunities amongst existing customers the above mentioned roles and responsibilities in supplier selection and relationship management are good connections at customer end in order to get information on customer's current needs as well as upcoming plans in regards their outsourcing projects.

The following answers were given to question "Describe your company's outsourcing strategy and needs for outsourcing":

- Work with reliable supplier and have a close relationship to obtain the best performance for the 2cies
- Reduction and simplification of network of Contract Manufacturing Organizations, development of partnerships
- …competing internationally in this industry sector and continuously monitoring the procurement market. Existing strategic partners play an important role in intensifying cooperation.
- The outsourcing strategy is to find supplier that can fulfill the company needs in terms of outsourcing projects. Continuous screening of the market trends.

In the responses the prevailing outsourcing strategy appears to be continuous monitoring and screening of the market environment. Additionally strategic partnering, reliable supplier, intense cooperation and development of partnerships as well as reduction and simplification of supplier network are mentioned. The responses are well supporting the case company's intention to achieve a key supplier position in customer's supplier network. Being part of carefully selected and optimized supplier network the opportunities for new business creation are considered to be better due to limited number of alternative suppliers and existing contact with customer. However, there also appears to be a continuous competition as customers are systematically looking for new alternatives for their changing needs and not necessarily select the supplier within the existing supplier network. Here in this context it is essential that the case company keeps up the close relationship with customers and makes sure that they are aware of current capabilities and new development projects in the case company's offering portfolio. A communication plan for these items could be added into customer care plan, as well as close follow up on customer's current and future outsourcing needs. The correct contacts at customer end are essential to be in place for this approach – roles in supplier selection might be more suitable than roles in relationship management. Also a straight contact with decision makers, who are not necessarily the current primary contacts, shall be strived for.

Only two respondents out of four shared information on their decision making process and organization in outsourcing projects. In both responses the involvement of various organizations, departments and people as well as decision making forums were described. Described process steps appeared to be in general quite similar: recognition of the outsourcing need, decision of outsourcing strategy and start of the project for supplier selection and implementation.

Supplier selection criteria:

The question about which components are most valued when selecting external service provider for their project. Delivery performance and Quality & Compliance (and/or inspection track record) were considered as most important components by two respondents but also least important by other two respondents. Additionally Price and General Supplier Requirements (including environment, health and safety aspects) were consider as most important elements in one cases each.

As Festel et al. (2014) classified quality and compliance as one of the minimum requirements for strategic partnerships the questionnaire responses may indicate that some customers are considering company more from strategic perspective than others. Code of conduct in the article of Festel et al. (2014) is correlating with General Supplier Requirements, such as labor conditions, environment, health and safety, and ethics. The variation in responses may also indicate that customers are evaluating company as a supplier from different perspectives.

Completeness of Offering Portfolio and Geographical Location were considered somewhat important. In half of the responses Existing capabilities for customer's product or process were kept quite important, but the other half considered it least important. However in the free comments it was noted that technical capabilities for different technologies would be appreciated. Industry Reputation and General Supplier Requirements were having the most variance in all components answered.

Festel et al. (2014) have studied strategic partner selection process in outsourcing. They concluded that strategic outsourcing requires partner selection processes and selection criteria that fits into whole corporate strategy and considers all advantages and disadvantages on a corporate level. Partnering was seen as an opportunity to create value for the company. They classified selection criteria into basic criteria which supplier has to fulfil as a minimum requirement to qualify for partnerships. Basic criteria are quality & compliance, code of conduct and supply chain partnership. Strategic criteria are more company-specific and aligned with the strategy.

Based on customer responses the most important production outsourcing criterias are:

- Delivery performance

- Quality & Compliance / Inspection track record

- General Supplier requirements (EHS…)

- Price

Information sharing:

The third set of questions were about sharing the information between the parties and investigating on how company could improve their relationship management practices in order to generate new business opportunities. The purpose was to listen customer's needs and expectations in order to be able to plan and create specific customer care models to support relationship management activities and further to gain deeper customer insight and possibilities for new business. It was asked on what information about company is available at respondent's decision makers through existing contacts and how that information is shared and/or updated. The responses about the availability of information at customer end varied a lot – some thought that all sufficient and necessary information is available and some thought that nearly none is available. The type of information was not specified among the responses other than information on key performance indicators and quality performance metrics. Key performance indicators and quality performance metrics are simply describing company's performance as a supplier and service provider in a routine relationship. It was mentioned that the

information is shared through channels like sharepoint and internal summaries which may assumed to be prepared by current key contacts at customer company and based on routine communication through existing channels and information exchange.

For the question of what kind of information about company would be beneficial to customer company when selecting a supplier it was responded that "*information on the case company's services and portfolio*" would be useful. Respondents would prefer to receive information in annual business review meetings or other meetings in person or through emails. Based on the feedback some consider that all necessary information is already available and they are not expecting any further information, but on the other hand, some feedback though highlights the necessity of sharing company's services and portfolio information. It is essential that the case company includes an activity for sharing the requested information into the tailor made customer care plans.

The case company's relationship management:

To question what is good in the case company's current relationship management practices the following feedback was received:

- great contact with SPOC (single point of contact) and prompt answering and follow up on questions

- operational team have good management of relationship: proactive communication and customer care

- flexibility, level of quality, professional behavior

It can be concluded that customers appreciate having nominated primary contact or contacts in different functions at the case company, good service attitude, professional competence and good communication. Communication was noted in two of the responses and proactivity, promptness and timely follow-up on requests were specifically mentioned. One respondent noted that operational team has a good management of relationship. It can be interpreted to mean that daily routines (like orders and deliveries) are well managed and customer feels like to be heard and served well. Flexibility and

professional behavior were also mentioned as good features at the case company's relationship management. Level of quality might be connected either to product quality but also to service quality.

To question what could be improved in the case company's relationship management practices the following feedback was received:

- a focal point and yearly meeting to know company's projects and new activities

- price, communication, more flexible processes more adequate to an external manufacturing environment

Development needs:

The last question "If you could develop only one thing at the case company, what would that be? It should be done within three months time period, but there would be unlimited budget and resources to do that." was set in order to give respondents a chance to propose an improvement to the case company, maybe such that are not clear supplier selection criteria but rather something additional that reflects customer's values and expectations and would allow the case company to improve their service and relationship management practices towards customer. The question was based on Mattinen's (2006) approach to listen the customer and his suggestion to ask this last question as part of the listening process in B2B environment. Mattinen (2006) suggested that this kind of information would be extremely beneficial for a company in order to make decision on improvements.

The question did not generate any proposal for improvement for the case company's relationship management practices. Maybe the set up or structure of the question could have been improved, or maybe it would have worked better as a personal interview question. One response was suggesting improvement in technical capabilities.

Saunders et al. (2016) argue that producing a good questionnaire is much harder than one might think. They state that the challenge is to collect precise data that is required to answer to the research questions and to achieve the objectives. The design of the questionnaire is affecting the response rate and the reliability and validity of the data. They suggest that clear design of individual questions, nice and clear layout as well as lucid explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire, pilot testing and carefully planned and executed delivery and return of completed questionnaires are essential in order to maximize the response rate and also the reliability and validity of the data.

In this research a questionnaire was used as only data collection method to collect primary data. As the results did not yield very remarkable improvement proposals as such the data could have been enriched by linking the questionnaire with some other method. Saunders et al. (2016) suggest that the questionnaire could be complemented by in-depth interviews as multimethod research to explore and understand customers' needs and expectations in more detail.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section the key findings of this thesis are concluded, and managerial implications and suggestions for the case company are discussed. Some limitations and suggestions for further research are also introduced.

4.1 Summary and conclusions

The case company is operating in a very regulated industry area offering manufacturing services for other companies. They are looking for additional business opportunities through new customer acquisition and through existing customer portfolio. This research was concentrating on the latter – the aim was to find out what the case company should know about their customers in order to recognize new business opportunities amongst them and to plan their customer relationship management activities accordingly. The results obtained through this research were intended to be used for suggesting how to develop the case company's customer care models and support the case company in preparing and planning its' customer communication and meetings. The questionnaire was specifically designed for investigating customers' needs and expectations towards the case company's services and relationship management practices.

The questionnaire was used as a mean to gather information. Respondents were selected amongst the case company's existing customer portfolio. They were representing customer companies that were seen to have the greatest business potential in the future. The questionnaire was sent to seven respondents. It was completed by four respondents, response rate being 57%. One respondent informed that their company policy is not to share feedback through questionnaires, but in annual meetings in person. In total the feedback rate was 71%.

The questionnaire was organized in three sections. First section was gathering information on respondents' position in customers' outsourcing organization or process as well as capturing the understanding on their outsourcing strategy, current outsourcing needs and related decision making process. The respondents were representing two

different phases in outsourcing process. Some of them were more involved in new supplier selection process including supplier identification, evaluation, contracting and implementation phases whereas others were involved in the following process phase of supplier maintenance and development. Customers' outsourcing strategies were consisting of continuous monitoring and screening of the market environment and including elements of strategic partnering, reliable supplier, intense cooperation and development of partnerships as well as reduction and simplification of supplier network. *Clear answers on customers' outsourcing needs were not received*. In responses the involvement of various organizations, departments and decision making forums were described as part of the decision making process in outsourcing. Based on the feedback the outsourcing process steps were compatible with each other, covering the recognition of the outsourcing need, decision of outsourcing strategy and starting the supplier selection and implementation project.

The second section was concentrating on the supplier selection criteria and which components are most valued when selecting external service provider for customers' outsourcing projects. The responses highlighted the importance of delivery performance, quality & compliance and inspection track record, general supplier requirements, including e.g. EHS, and price.

Questionnaire's third section were concentrating on information sharing between the companies and finding out how the case company could improve their relationship management practices in order to generate new business opportunities. The intention was to listen to customer needs and expectations for being able to make suggestions for tailor made customer care model creation and further to understand on how deeper customer insight could be gathered and made use of for new business potential. The question of what information about the case company is available for customer companies' decision makers generated various responses. Some considered all sufficient and necessary information to be available and some thought that nearly none is available. The only type of information specified was key performance indicators and quality performance metrics. Sharepoint sites and internal summaries were mentioned as information sharing channels. Respondents considered information on the case company's services and portfolio to be beneficial for their company and preferred

receiving that information in annual business review meetings or other meetings in person or alternatively by email. Based on respondents' feedback on the case company's relationship management practices they seem to appreciate having nominated primary contacts in different functions at the case company, good service attitude, professional competence, flexibility, good communication and relationship management. The improvement proposals for the case company's relationship management were including the update of the case company's topical projects and new activities in meetings as well as pricing, communication and more flexible processes to better fit to contact manufacturing environment. Additional development needs as such were not proposed by respondents.

For establishing customer understanding it is essential to consider which problems can be solved with the information that is collected about customers (Arantola, 2006). As the case company intends to collect information and achieve such customer understanding that would support their activities in recognizing new business opportunities they should carefully consider how the information from different sources, both quantitative and qualitative, can be combined and how it shall be applied. The information gained through pre-determined actions in customer care plan may not as such be adequate to be used for sales and service development purposes, but may need to be supplemented with information about purchases, invoices, product cost, user reports, complaint rates as well as with tacit information from customer service personnel (Korkman & Arantola, 2009, Doole et al. 2005). Before to start collecting customer information it shall be determined which information is already available within the organization and evaluate its currency, accessibility and adequacy, and then decide on what additional information is needed (Selin & Selin, 2005). As per Doole et al. (2005) it is worth noting that the internal information does not fully satisfy the information needs but also external information sources shall be utilized.

Customer care plans should include certain number of F2F meetings with customers, as for example García-Murillo & Annabi (2002) state that personal interaction (F2F) with customer leads to richer information content and may help explaining customer behavior. To learn to know customers better and to aim to identify new opportunities proactively the utilization of teams, involvement and commitment of top management and formal key

account management practices are needed (Salojärvi et al, 2009, Kros et al. 2007). Thus the suggestion for the case company's customer care plans should include involvement of team members and management representatives in F2F meetings. Also as Mattinen (2006) highlights the customer view shall be looked for by interviewing upper and middle management as well as operating level.

Revolutionary moments are mentioned as threats and opportunities in customer relationships. As Mattinen (2006) states it is important to recognize these moments which may either be a great leap forward or break-off in collaboration. Thus for the case company it is important to maintain such a relationship with its customers where they have an opportunity to recognize these kind of a situations. When the case company implements customer care models they shall make sure that either through regular planned contacts (like quarterly/annual meetings, business review meetings) or more informal contacts (like phone calls, weekly meetings) they would have an opportunity to listen the customer and have an access to information when there are changes in e.g. customer company strategy or decision makers, primary customer contact or budget. This may require curiosity and constant vigilance when communicating and listening to customer. Mattinen (2006) also suggests to find new perspectives when listening to customers in order to achieve deeper understanding on customer's thoughts, preferences, decision makers' roles etc. The case company might want to consider to set up for example a practice of hello calls each time before formal meetings in order to connect unofficially with customer and have a chance to hear and feel the general atmosphere at customer end.

According to Mithas et al. (2005) CRM application is for following customer behavior in order to gain insight into customer preferences and needs, and that it eventually helps to gain customer knowledge. The case company shall involve CRM application to support its relationship management activities and customer care planning. Zablah et al. (2004) stated that CRM process includes both knowledge management and interaction management processes, though CRM is not considered only as an application. The customer intelligence is generated through knowledge management process and it is notable that as part of that intelligence any outcome of customer interactions, e.g. changing preferences or cross-selling opportunities, are considered especially valuable.

For the case company the usage of CRM application could be extended more towards CRM process and thus supporting creation and utilization of customer intelligence in more deep level. However, it is good to remember that cross-selling shall only be strived for when customer's original need is successfully fulfilled, and it should be based on the data in CRM (Goodman, 2014).

One channel that might be included as part of customer care plan are customer satisfaction surveys. The case company does not systematically conduct satisfaction surveys, but the might be useful addition to personal communication. As Mattinen (2006) proposes an important question shall be asked from the customers "From which factors a good collaboration is made of?" and this could be asked regularly as part of satisfaction surveys. Also it could be worth considering on how the information collected through customer satisfaction surveys could be refined and shared back to customer (Saarijärvi et al. 2013).

Aiming to increase the customer understanding at the case company the below considerations for customer care plan can be listed based on the literature review and the results from empirical research:

- regular F2F meeting and planned contacts through other channel

- informal contacts, e.g. hello calls

- involvement of team members and management representatives in F2F meetings

- utilization of CRM application

- customer satisfaction surveys

All these actions are intended to increase the level of customer knowledge and allow the case company gain such customer understanding that new business opportunities can be recognized.

4.2 Managerial implications and suggestions for the case company

Festel et al. (2014) state in their article pharmaceutical industry is a growing industry. Still companies struggle with capitalizing the growth because of various challenges like shortening patent lives, pressure on prices, strict regulations and shifting the growth to emerging countries. Outsourcing of manufacturing is more commonly seen as a way to reduce operating costs and improve competitiveness. At the same time external manufacturing is moving away from purely opportunistic approach towards more strategic approach where external service providers are seen as partners.

Rather than signing a typical fee-for-service contract many companies are nowadays looking for strategic partnering, and thus it is time to think and act differently and try to find win-win opportunities to collaborate. A systematic and structured customer care planning has been lacking at the case company. Based on the literature review and empirical study results it may create customer care plans that support its intention to recognize new business opportunities among the recognized potential customers (prospects) and existing customers. For prospects it is may not be called as customer care plan but rather contacting plan or follow up plan as no current business exists. However, the plan may include similar themes as customer plans – contacting plan and schedule, presentation of the case company capabilities, development projects and performance figures as well as customers' outsourcing strategy, needs and expectations towards service provider. Customer care plans can be created as a tailor-made plans to each individual customer if necessary. The case company is using MS Dynamics software application for CRM and its account plan feature can easily be used for customer specific care plans. Based on the findings in this study the case company's customer responsible persons can create preliminary plans which then can be adjusted as needed once some experience is gained first. CRM could also be considered not only as an application, but as a process to create and utilize customer intelligence. The decision to switch to this kind of an approach requires though an approval from the case company's management.

As the case company is acting as a service provider in contract manufacturing business it is also worth taking into consideration that many customers are having their own

supplier management programs that they are actively executing. This has been the case already with some customers at the case company's customer portfolio. Thus the case company shall consider its customer care plans to serve as a supportive and supplementary tool to customers' supplier management activities. It is essential that the customer care plan is shared with the customer and that the customer and supplier management activities enrich / endorse each other in parallel. In some cases the customer's supplier management program as such can even serve the case company's intentions and purposes and allow the access to all needed information for allocating sales activities correctly.

4.3 Limitations and further research

The results and conclusions presented in this thesis are based on this individual study with limited data from limited number of the case company's customers. The limited number of respondents and the fact that responses did not reveal the in-depth and new purchasing needs of the customers can be considered as deficient in this study. Therefore it is important that the case company continues the exercise for modifying practical customer care plans that will be of most help for the case company to increase its business with existing customers. Further development of customer care plans can be made once some experience is gained first.

Arantola (2006) states that in order to gain true customer insight it is essential that all the information related to a specific customer is collected from different parts of an organization and different sources. Technical tools, like CRM, can be used for collecting, storing, utilizing and developing the information, and making it accessible for all decision makers. Arantola remarks that it is not only the customer responsible person or team who possess the understanding of customer but together the whole organization. As a further research proposal the case company might investigate in more detail the availability of different kind of information inside the company, the information from general sources (e.g. market research) and the information they could attain straight from the customers through the customer relationship management activities. An analysis on all this information together and how it could be turned into deep understanding of customer behavior might enable new business opportunities.

As per the research approach proposed by Hult et al. (2016) it might be an interesting exercise to run customer feedback survey and then translate the particular survey into managerial versions and run the survey internally at the case company. Internal managerial responses could then be compared with existing customer data in order to figure out the potential gap between the views in understanding on how customers perceive the case company's service and why. By doing this kind of exercise the case company could have a chance to recognize potential gap between the views and then plan the relative actions to mitigate the gap.

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Pre-notification email

Dear NN

I am contacting you to kindly ask for your assistance with our initiative to improve our relationship management practices in order to be able to serve your expectations and needs better. We are running this survey to better understand your company's values and needs as well as decision making process when selecting external supplier for outsourcing projects. Survey results will be used for further developing our customer care model for your company.

You will receive a separate email including a web link to questionnaire. It consists of nine questions, and it will take no more than 10-12 minutes to answer.

I hope you will find the time to give us your feedback – your opinion will be much appreciated and it will help us to make the right changes and improvements. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me for further information.

Kind regards,

XXXX

Questionnaire

Case Company – Customer Needs and Expectations – Relationship Management Improvement 2019

1. Describe your <u>role/position</u> in your company's outsourcing / supplier selection process

2. Describe your company's outsourcing <u>strategy and needs</u> for outsourcing

3. Describe your company's <u>decision making process and organization</u> in outsourcing projects

4. Your company's <u>supplier selection criteria</u> in order of importance are (1 = very important, 5 = not important)

5. Your company's supplier selection criteria - other than above

6. <u>What information</u> about the case company is available at your company's decision makers through existing contacts, and how the information is shared/updated?

7. <u>What kind</u> of information about the case company would be beneficial to your company when selecting a supplier and how would you prefer to receive this information (channels e.g. F2F meetings, email updates…)?

8. <u>What is good</u> in the case company's current relationship management practices and what could be improved?

9. If you could develop only one thing at the case company, what would that be? It should be done within three months time period, but there would be unlimited budget and resources to do that.