



UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGING IN THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

MODULE CODE: BMSK5003

BA LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS FOR THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

The constantly elusive needs of today's customer have stimulated dynamics in the competition requiring businesses to engage their customers more than ever to stay in business. The changing needs imply changes in demand and as the market moves along, and it is there imperative of organisations to understand effective and efficient customer engagement methods and tools to invoke processes that ensure a good customer, experience, satisfaction, and business growth a whole. This report highlights models, theories and methods that would be effective in customer engagement, relationship management, expectation and satisfaction and provides recommendations for improvement.

Key words: customer engagement, customer experience, customer satisfaction, customer relationship management, customer expectation.

1.Introduction

Within interactive and dynamic environments of business, customer engagement is seen to represent a strategic necessity for developing improved corporate performance, alongside a advanced competitive advantage, sales growth, and profitability (Neff,2007; Sedley 2008; Voyles, 2007). Several researchers such as Patterson etal (2006) and Hollebeek (2011) refer to Customer engagement as a state of mind that is psychological although Bowden(2009a) contrastingly refers to customer engagement as a psychological process driving the loyalty of a customer.

1.1. Microsoft History

After the foundation of Microsoft in 1975, by Bill Gates and Paul Allen in Albuquerque it was later moved to Bellevue, Washington. When approached by IMB in 1980 to provide an operating system for IBM's personal computer, Microsoft received \$50,000 in exchange for an operating system called 86-DOS bought from Seattle computer products and adopted to the IBM's personal computer but declined to transfer the system's copy right to IBM.

By 1995, Microsoft was expanding their product line to include computer networking and the World Wide Web, same year Windows 95 was released with a new user interface which also had a start button and was very pre-emptive in multilinking. Since then several products have been released by Microsoft such as Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7, 8, Xbox 2001 and Windows Phone. In 2008 Gates retired from being the company's Chief Software Architect but remained the chairman of the board and an advisor on key projects, leaving the company in the hands of Ray Ozzie and Craig Mundie (Curtis, 2014).

1.2. Customer engagement

Customer engagement is poised to supersede the limitation of transactions and may be defined as manifestations of behaviours caused by motivation that influence the brand of the focus of a company beyond the purchasing period (Brodie etal, 2011).

1.2.1. Touch points

These are interaction points between human, services, products, spatial, communication working as an interface between the business and its customers during the customer's purchase cycle (Dhebar, 2012).

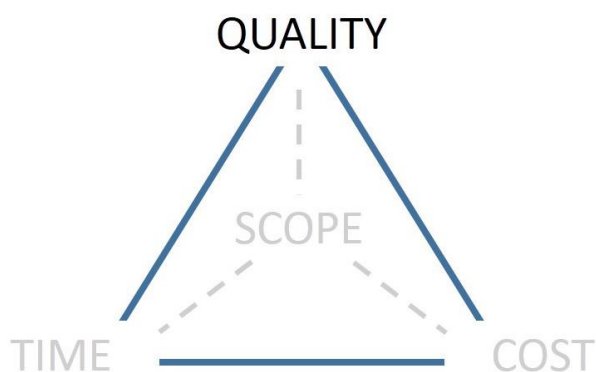
Microsoft customers can access the Microsoft touchpoints to purchase products and services through web-based applications such as website, emails, blogs, online, and retail stores. In some cases, Microsoft sales personnel in the stores are face to face interactions with customers while making presentations about the Microsoft products and services features to the potential buyers (Smithson, 2017).

2.Customer expectation, experience and satisfaction

2.1. Customer expectation

Customer expectations are beliefs a customer about a product of service prior consumption (Oliver & Winer 1987). There is need to look into the various dimension of customer expectation. It is important to understand these dynamics for one to be able to achieve the set customer satisfaction level (Ojasalo,2001; Grönroos, 2008, pp.106).

Figure 2. The 3 Pillars of customer expectations; Price (Cost), Quality and Time)



Source: Credencys Solutions Inc.

2.1.1. Managing Customer expectations

Therefore, managing the customer's expectation requires assessing the actual issues of contention with in the customer expectations. The need for the supplier to ensure clarity when dealing with the customer is very eminent to avoid customer dissatisfaction because the of the fact that the customer's unclear expectation are not being met. Solving the problem successfully should have an antecedent of a successful formulation of the problem (Ojasalo, 2001; Grönroos 2008, pp.107-108).

As per Microsoft, managing customer expectation involves the management of the quality of the services and products provided by the corporation. Microsoft depends heavily on the information gather about the customer to either create a new product to the customer's expected quality or improve the quality of the services and products already being provided

to the existing customer. Improvements may be done through periodic software upgrades (Smithson, 2017).

Clear customer expectations regarding the quality of a products are referred to as implicit expectations. They are often developed in situations where common grounds of needs to be met are clear between the customer and the company establishing a standard level of expected quality in a particular service or product, change of company employees or migration of a customer from one supplier to another may cause expectation problems since the customer may come on board with the same expectations as they did have when they were being serviced by their previous supplier. Hence the need clearly defining the grounds of operation by making all the implicit expectations explicit (Grönroos 2008, pp. 108-109).

2.2. Customer experience

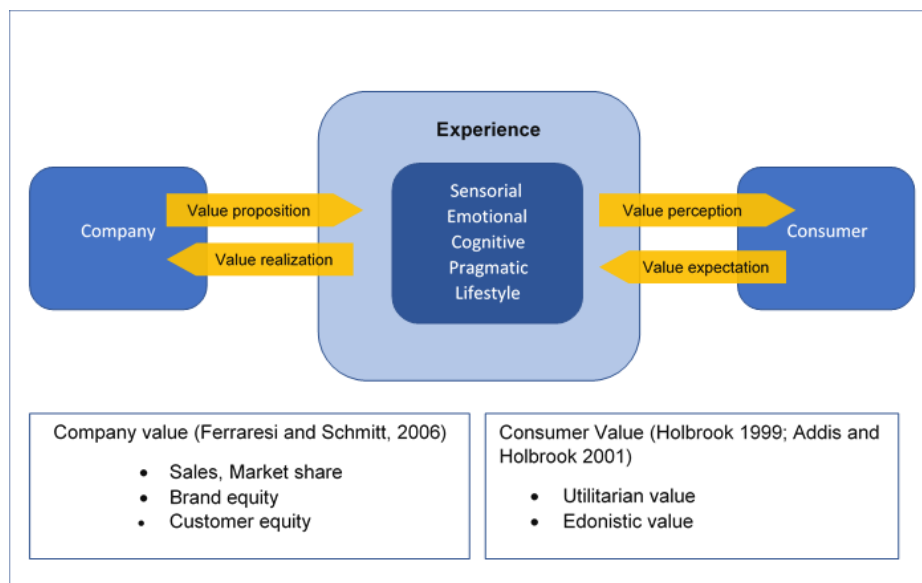
When interactions take place between part of an organisation, a company, a product and a customer which often causes a certain reaction, a customer experience is produced (LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Shaw and Ivens, 2005). Personal experience explains the customer's involvement at several levels such as rational, sensorial, emotional and spiritual (LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Schmitt, 1999). Customer experience is evaluated based on the expectations of a customer, the stimuli caused when they interact with the organisation and the available offers as per their touch points or contacts (LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Shaw & Ivens, 2005).

As per Microsoft, customer experience involves making sure that their customers can connect to them via their channel using the customer's preferred device regardless of whether it is through the assistance of Microsoft agent or a self-service portal. It also involves making sure that their customers get a personalised service which is fast and effective once the customer connects through to them. Microsoft ensures that consistency in the quality of services across all touch points and channels is maintained. And lastly their customers receive predictive and proactive services through social channels or their connected devices. This makes deliverance of a contextual and personalised interactions across the customer journey a strategic necessity (Ortola, 2017).

Businesses need to focus on the kind of experience they give their customers to be able to compete effectively. And managing the customer's experience requires businesses to understand the meaning of customer experience. Customer experience involves each single contact that the customers make with the business, services and products. Customer experience management requires a business to design a specific strategy to manage the customer's experience; ideally a win-win exchange of value between the business and the customers (Grewal et al., 2009).

2.2.1. Customer experience dimensions

Figures 3. The dimensions of customer experience



Source: Gentile et al (2007)

As indicated in figure 4 above, there are 6 customer experience dimensions namely; cognitive, sensorial, pragmatic, emotional, relational and lifestyle component. Each of these components affects the customer differently. These effects include stimulations of the senses, generation of feelings, moods and emotions, creativity, conception of usability, affirmation of beliefs and values, and the need to socially enjoy a product (Gentile et al., 2007).

2.3. Customer satisfaction

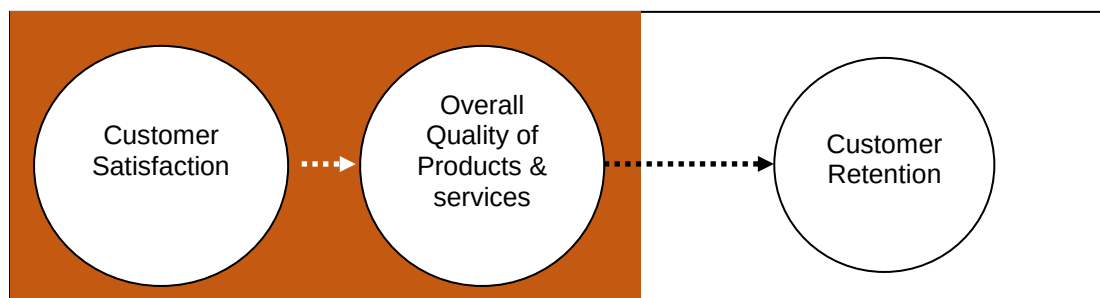
There are two ways to conceptualize customer satisfaction i.e. Transaction specific and cumulative (Boulding et al. 1993). In the transaction – specific perspective, the notion that Customer satisfaction is an evaluative judgement made after one has made a purchase of the product or services (Hunt 1977; Oliver 1977, 1980, 1993) and antecedents and after effects of this customer satisfaction has been investigated by several behavioral researchers (Yi 1991 for a review). In comparison with the Transaction specific customers satisfaction, the cumulative customer satisfaction's evaluation is based on general consumption and purchase experience customers get with goods and services at some point in time (Fornell 1992; Johnson and Forell 1991).

Conclusively, the quality of output expectation that the market has of the company's output influences the customers' general expectations of that company and these expectations have a small albeit adoptive and rational nature (Anderson,1994). Customer satisfaction reduces existing customers' price elasticities (Garvin,1988) since satisfied customers are more than willing to pay for their satisfaction and often tend to be flexible to price increments. This represents customer loyalty and high profit margins (Reichheld and Sasser 1990).

Because it is hard to convince a competitor's satisfied customers, plus the escalating costs of new business acquisition, a low customer's satisfaction level signifies a loss of business and it is needless to mention that the cost of replacing them is very high. A company providing superior customer satisfaction will be able to get a decrease in price elasticities which in turn increases their profit margins and lowers the cost of production. Likewise, there is often an increase in customer retention.

2.4. Impact of customer satisfaction on Product and services development

Figure 4. Relationship between customer satisfaction, and product and services



Source: (Hennig & Klee, 1997)

As showed in figure 4, customer satisfaction is often thought to happen immediately before one make a judgement about the quality of the product and consequently followed by customer Loyalty (Oliva et al., 1992, p. 84). When looking at customer retention, one must compliment the value of the customer satisfaction derived from a transaction of products and services, with the what customers perceive as the quality of products and services (Hennig-Thurau, and Klee, 1997).

To maintain a competitive advantage over other technology companies, Microsoft focuses on the quality of their services and products to ensure their customers' satisfaction. This is done by continuously focusing on innovation and aiming to improve the quality of their services and products based on the usage information collected from Microsoft's feedback system and then integrating the collected information into the new technology products. Microsoft also invests heavily in R&D to maintain rapid innovation (Smithson, 2017).

2.5. customer satisfaction and the organisation's marketing strategy.

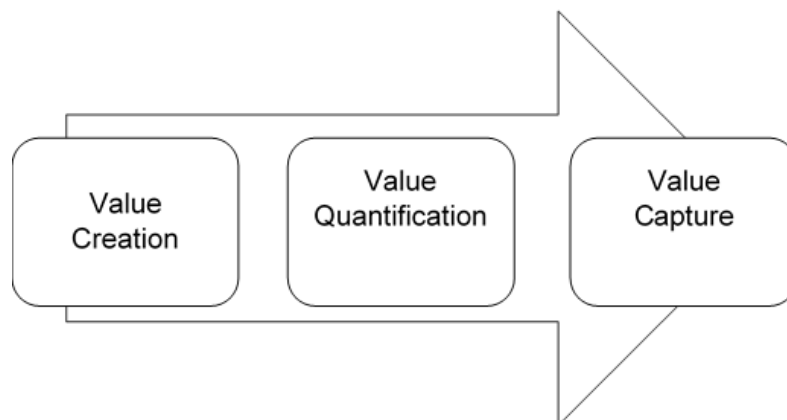
Marketing strategy requires identifying the segment to focus on and the specific product for that segment (Walker et al., 1996) and therefore for customer satisfaction to take effect, the planning and execution processes when designing the marketing plan, should focus on influencing the behavior and beneficial exchanges in the targeted customer segment (Andreasen and Kotler, 2003).

3. Customer value

While customer value is considered to be economic or financial, to some it is perpetual or relationship based (Ulaga, 2003) better still in the context of sale and marketing, value is based in seller –buyer interactions (Narayandas & Rangan, 2004). Precisely this is the reason why operationalizing, comprehending and improving value is hard (Liozu, 2016a). Just like any process in business, one has to intentionally and formally manage value (Aspara & Tikkanen, 2013).

Management of customer value is done in three phases forming an unbreakable sequence starting with creation of value, quantification of value and capturing of value.

Figure 4. Customer value management



Source: Kotler (2017)

As showed in figure .4, Firstly, value creation activities are design for and with customers managed by marketing and innovation teams alongside support from the sales and business development teams (Aspara & Tikkanen, 2013).

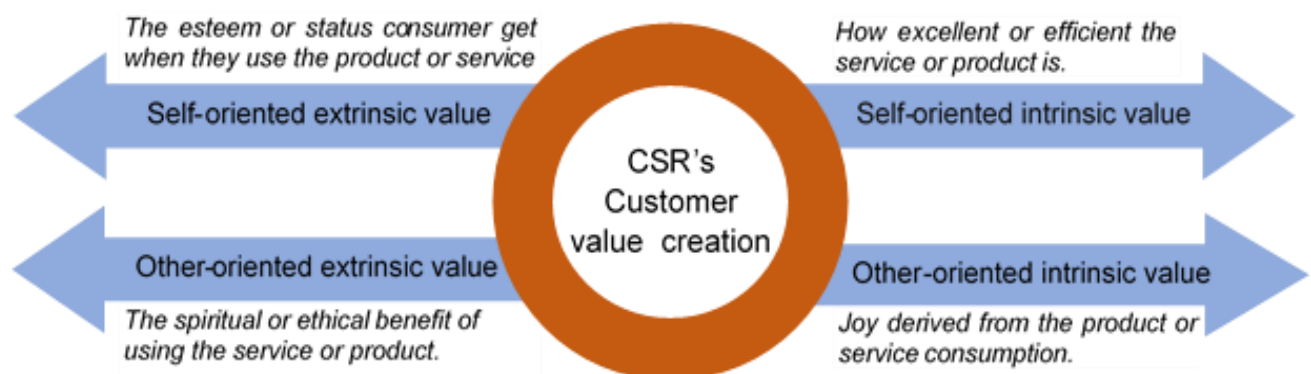
Customer value is identified both in form of partnerships and collaborative projects though and later extracted and captured. At the second stage, marketing and pricing of items is done with the value management process in clear focus of the value quantification (Liozu, 2016a).

The company has a big job of creating a superior value of the product in the mind of their customers although this sense of value varies between customer and the company, with the customers focusing on, warranties and guaranties, service level, return policies and financial arrangements as the product itself. The idea is to enable a customer to get an understanding of their total value versus the cost of acquisition of the customer and their product usage (Kotler, 2017).

3.1. Delivering Customer Value to the Customer through CSR

When examining CSR's potential to create customer value, focus is put on actives referred to as interactive, and offer preference experience that is relativistic. The creation of value when customers and a company get into contact make value interactive. While the individual customer's response to services, products, subjective taste and personnel based corporate initiatives is evidence that value is preference based. The influence of external factors in relation to the customer's environment often reflects in the customer's perception, making value relativistic in nature (Peloza and Shang, 2011).

Figure 5: Customer value perceptions through CSR



Source: Author

As illustrated in figure 5 above, customer value may be derived from CSR activities in mainly four ways of perception: Customer value may be seen through a self & other-oriented intrinsic or extrinsic value perceptions (Peloza and Shang, 2011).

3.2. Customer Value Management

Companies commonly known as value champions take time to be able to cultivate the potential to achieve the standard level of discipline and cultural readiness. Customer value management and its three requires steps (value creation, quantification and capture)

requires one to develop the potential to be able to manage these steps with confidence and discipline (Liozu, 2015b).

3.2.1. The Customer Journey Mapping (CJM)

Customer journey Mapping is about depicting the series of events that customers go through as they interact with a company throughout the whole purchasing process. The necessary touch points a customer needs for the whole purchase process are identified and management develops ways that cause innovation to improve the customer experience through good customer service at each touchpoint a customer uses to interact with the business (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

4. Supply chain management

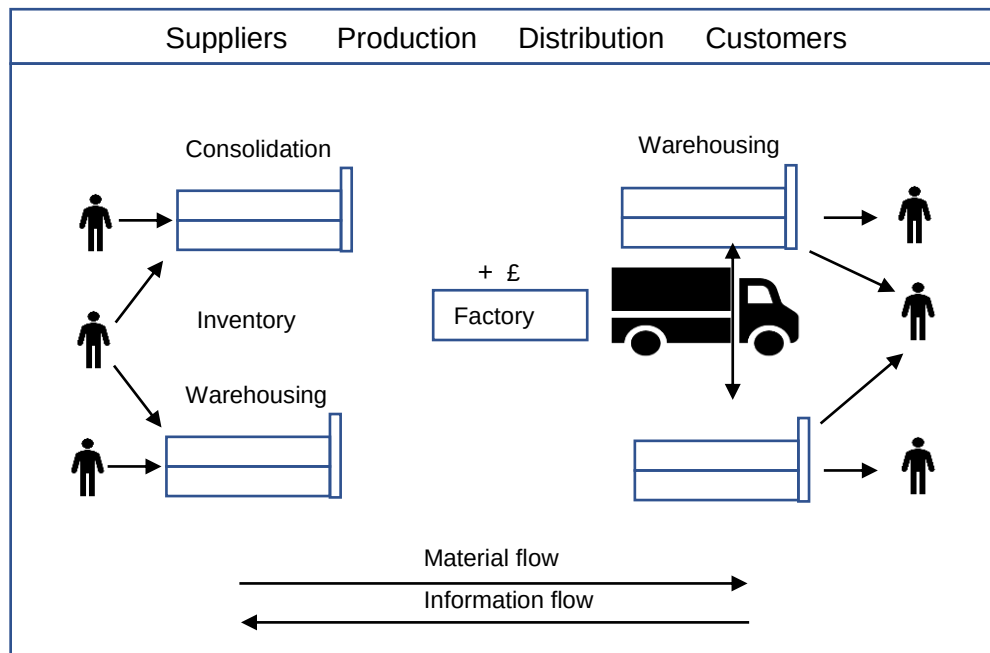
The eliminating redundancies and breaking barriers to communication by use of monitoring, controlling and coordinating process as suggested by Kaufman (1997, p. 14) is reason for managing a supply chain. Integration of this supply chain was referred to as the highlighting connections that the individual components of the chain have to enable effective and efficient decision making; thus, establishing communication within the chain, creating possibilities of identifying bottlenecks within the clearly vision supply chain (Clancy, cited in Putzger, 1998, p. 55).

Currently the orthodoxy thinking in management of the supply chain is referred to as a thinking committed to the discovery of techniques and tools to increase efficiency and effectiveness in operations at all levels of the channel of delivery created both externally and internally with the intention to supply and support existing service and products (Cox, 1997a). This was evidently seen when investigating the Japanese automotive industry success phenomena during the 1970s and 80s (Womack et al., 1990).

Both demanding customers and demand driven markets caused by a rise in competition on a global scale, the scenarios where new types of inter-organisational relationships have emerged and lastly evolution of information have proved to be the principal supply chain integration drivers. And hence the supply chain model operates on three main elements namely; Management of inventory, financial flows and information systems management, and lastly trading partners relationships management (Handfield & Nichols, 1999 p. 5).

Thus, the supply chain integration is comprised of collaboration, trust partnership, cooperation, technology sharing, sharing of information and an eventual change to management of the process of integrated supply chain from the previous system of managing the functional processes individually (Akkermans et al., 1999).

Figure 6. The supply chain scope



Source: Stevens (1989)

Figure 6. shows that the supply chain is made up of several activities including controlling and coordinating material, planning for both finished good and material alongside the information in between. At one end is the supply source and the other is the consumption point. Managing the supply chain involves synchronising the customer's requirements with the incoming flow of materials from the suppliers there by balancing the between conflicting high customer service goals, inventory investment. Every activity in the supply chain dependent one on another in the sense that a disruption of one means a poor performance on the other this may also involve trade-offs (Stevens, 1989).

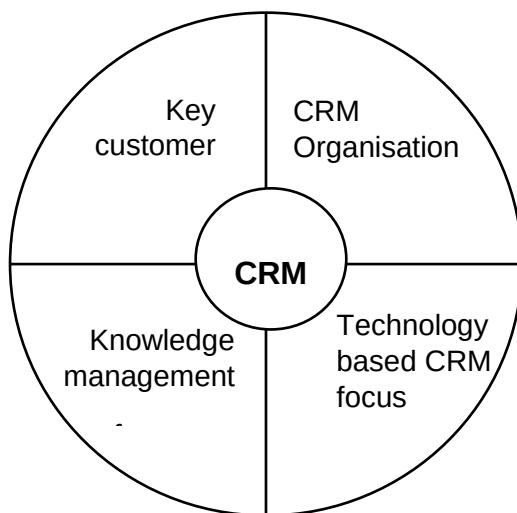
Microsoft's supply chain is managed by integrating the supply chain with other activities in a streamlined manner. This include monitoring the corporation's global supply chain via a network of computers with personnel inputting real time supply status. This data is monitored at the corporate and regional office of Microsoft and an automatic analysis of the data is carried out to identify changes in Microsoft's supply chain and thence an informed decision is made depending on the real time data collected and distributed on the supply chain network (Smithson, 2017).

5. Customer relationship management

Customer relationship management (CRM) involves acquiring, retaining and developing loyal and satisfied customers for a company to be able to grow. CRM is necessary to ensure that the number of profitable customers for the company increase, grow revenues from the existing customers and keep them subscribed to the company (Hailwood et al., 2003).

A simple CRM model is made of four main elements as illustrated in figure 7 below; These include Customer features often referred to as consumers characteristics, management of customers' information, Structure of the CRM including the obligations of the organisation, the structure of the organisation human resource and lastly the use of information technology to substantiate customer relationship management (Sin & Yim., 2005).

Figure 7. The customer relationship model

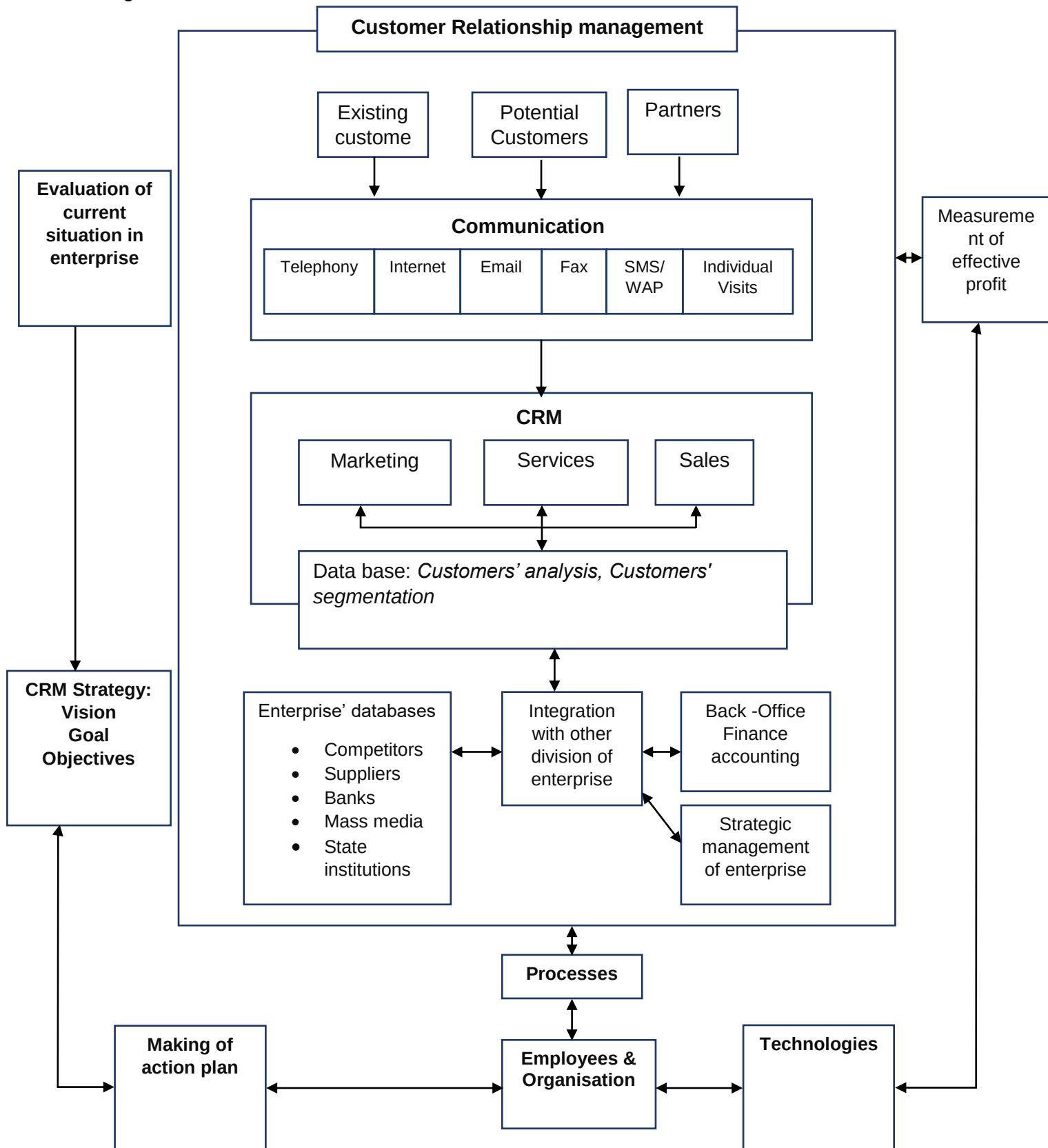


Source: Sin & Yim (2005).

5.1 CRM theoretical Model

Figure 8 below illustrates a theoretical CRM model comprising of a summary of a choice of stages and elements of the customer relationship system. These elements and stages include Assessing the company's present situation and making a customer relationship strategy, Designing the CRM systems, establishing communication channels, focusing on the employees and the organisation. It also involves working through a clear organisation process, choosing the relevant technology for the job and lastly, anticipating the profits upon investment (Urbanskienė et al., 2008).

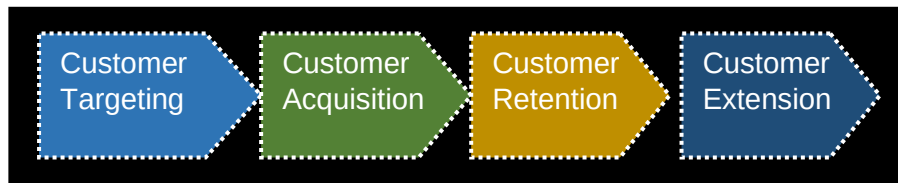
Figure 8. The theoretical CRM model



Source: Urbanskienė et al (2008)

5.2. CRM phases

Figure 8. Customer relationship phases



Source: Author

CRM is carried out in four major phases namely; Customer targeting, customer acquisition, customer retentions and customer extension. During the customer targeting phase, the right segment of customers is identified leading to the acquisition phase where captured data at the various touchpoints is used to optimise the customer targeting to build the relationship with the customer. The Customer retention phase involves identification of the customer traits for a long-term relationship while the extension phase ensures the extension of relationships with the company's core customers (Kokemuller, 2017).

Kokemuller and Kurpys seem posit the same views about CRM phrases, although Kurpys refers to these customer phrases as action to be taken in the effort to reinforce a company's relationship with the customer. These actions include identifying the customers unique characteristics, remodelling the products and services around those characteristics for future purchase purposes, design profit-based business plans and lastly realigning the activities of the company to strength the company-customer relationship (Kuprys cited Urbanskienė et al., 2008).

Microsoft employs the broad differentiation strategy as a CRM tool where by a unique product and service is designed for various customer segments. The collected data from various touch points integrated into the unique features of the products and services to appeal to the targeted segments and build a relationship between the corporation and the customers (Gregory, 2017).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The integration of various management groups with in a company such as marketing, customer service and retention, supply chain management and other aspects of the business is very essential for customer relationship management, as this practice often enables company growth buy increasing customer retention. Revenue generation as satisfied customer will often prove to be loyal and bring more customers and at the same time create room for innovation and R&D. Being able to understand the customer's

expectations, map the customer's journey and identify the most effective and efficient touch points to engage the customer is equally important.

Hiring the best candidates in the industry has given Microsoft leverage in developing and diversifying their products and services through the differentiation system and this has paved way for the innovations that have and accelerated the growth of the corporation through acquisitions and mergers. This has enabled customer extension as Microsoft touch points have created a system where information has readily been captured via touch points through Microsoft's supply chain and enabled real-time decision making.

As much as the future business error is anticipated to be purely technology based, and the artificial intelligence seems to be the new normal that for future business, Microsoft should not negate the ever present conservative customers who will forever find technology a liability based to their business since not all businesses will entirely rely on technology to survive. Microsoft must not abandon the traditional product line and the same goes for down playing the relevance of Brick and mortar stores in their supply chain.

Microsoft has been able to harness the art of capturing customer value, generate systems to maximise the corporation's customer engagement and build the customer base at the same time. However, Microsoft's product diversification and the fast-evolving technology may increase the operating cost of the corporation to a point where the need to let go of some product may be inevitable, a factor that will impact greatly on their profit loss margins. Microsoft needs to invest more in R & D that may either see the creation of newer products are adoptive to the future technology (artificial intelligence).

Although Microsoft's involvement in philanthropy has boosted CSR Image of the corporation, perhaps it is about time that Microsoft began to focus in the CSR as a product in itself by developing soft wares and in restructure that generate revenue by engaging other companies outside the software industry to complement their cause.

Microsoft's anticipated change of their office packages into monthly subscription packages is rather timely as most software companies are embarking on products that are paid for on a monthly basis however more investment into the future of cloud computing technology is inevitable for Microsoft to maintain its position in the software industry since the needs of the customers in the software industry are rapidly changing. The need for the development of software that can be used on multiple platforms is becoming more eminent and it seems to be the next big market for in the technology industry.

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