

Foreword

In order to survive in an increasingly dynamic and complex world, many organizations are attempting to redefine themselves to gain sustainable competitive advantage and better respond to new marketing demands. As competition grows, delivering high-quality products and services that meet customers' needs and expectations becomes an important way to success. Since the added value and quality of a product or service is perceived by the customer, it is paramount that companies have a thorough understanding of customer needs and expectations. To achieve such a level of understanding, companies are arranging processes and deploying systems for storing customer data, managing customer interactions, building and managing customer knowledge.

In our current economy, customer knowledge has become a valuable asset for organizations. Customer knowledge provides organizations with a reference for improving customer experience, as it allows companies not only to effectively identify customer needs and preferences, but also compare performance against customer expectations. Managing customer knowledge is no longer something that only leading-edge companies use to gain sustainable competitive advantage. It is now a managerial necessity for all types of organizations.

Increasing "*customer share*" is a better strategy than increasing "*market share*." The more companies know about their customers, the better they can serve them. To convince customers to give you more of their attention and business, let them know about your business very well. To work with quality, it is necessary to continually observe the expectations and perceptions customers have about the products and services you deliver. Due to the availability of current information and communication technologies such as the Internet, mobile, and wireless resources, customers are now able to get more information than they usually were able to a few years ago and they usually know very well the companies they regularly deal with. Online access to databases, chat resources, and bulletin boards put customers in contact with staff and with other customers so that they can mutually help each other.

The adoption of customer-focused strategies and practices may significantly increase an organization's capacity to generate knowledge. In this context, customer knowledge management (CKM) can be seen as an enabler for the development of organizational capabilities that allow the adoption of business approaches that support knowledge creation and sharing mechanisms. Although the adoption of technical solutions makes it feasible for organizations to systematically manage knowledge, strategic and cultural aspects should be carefully observed prior to any technical investment. The adoption of customer-focused strategies is of crucial importance to the processes of knowledge acquisition, conversion, and application. In this context, CKM practices provide powerful resources to improve an organization's ability to recognize not only customer demands, but also to identify patterns and trends that can guide future strategies.

CKM regards customers as the focal point of the organization. A fundamental notion of CKM is that it is not something that can be bought and installed in an off-the-shelf manner. It should be seen as a broad business strategy that implies the redevelopment of organizational structures, systems and processes in a way that services and product offerings are arranged around a refreshed understanding of customer needs and expectations. The real concept of CKM implies deep strategic and operational concerns. More professional approaches to CKM are necessary and the contribution that this book makes is very welcomed. The book provides a comprehensive and holistic view of CKM by addressing managerial and technological aspects of the matter, including issues concerning strategies, human resources, processes redesign, ICT systems, customer relationship management, and change management. This multidisciplinary feature of the book makes it a valuable source for academics and managers at all levels who wish to become active players in today's dynamic and complex business world.

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