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Better customer experience: Improving customer service in the order-delivery process

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Technology.

Espoo, 22.09.2017
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Abstract of master's thesis

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Abstract

Intense competition and demanding customers have driven industrial manufacturers to offer additional customer service. However, these product-service systems are diffused, thus lessening their impact on strategic differentiation as such. Meanwhile, customer experience has emerged as a new basis for competitive advantage. Customer experience is the outcome of a service process, hence improving customer service in the order-delivery process is currently a relevant step towards competitiveness.

The existing customer experience literature has mainly focused on the B2C markets, while the B2B markets have been studied less due to their specific nature. Consequently, the B2B markets and complex engineer-to-order (ETO) projects of the case company have created a research gap, thus motivating empirical research by a case study method. Furthermore, the subjective character of customer experience requires that each company study their own customers. The data collection methods employed in this thesis include a survey, focus groups and qualitative interviews; all of which gathered the required data for effective improvement of the case company's process.

The case study concluded that responsiveness and communication are the most important factors of customer experience. Flexibility and documentation, in turn, were identified as the main improvement areas in terms of customer service. This knowledge and understanding of the internal capabilities led to process improvement by means of an employee handbook. In addition, the study reports that the SERVQUAL instrument, which was originally designed for the B2C markets, is applicable for the case company's needs within a specific B2B environment.

The equivalence found between the SERVQUAL instrument and the preferences of the B2B customers may indicate that the B2C and B2B markets differ less in terms of humane topics, such as customer experience. Therefore, further research is needed in order to empirically test the applicability of the existing B2C theories in the B2B markets. Furthermore, future practitioners may benefit from the findings of this thesis, but only if they truly understand their customers.

Keywords Customer experience, customer service, order-delivery process, B2B

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Tiivistelmä

Intensiivinen kilpailu ja vaativat asiakkaat ovat ajaneet teolliset valmistajat tarjoamaan ylimääräistä asiakaspalvelua. Nämä tuotteen ja palvelun yhdistelmät ovat kuitenkin yleistyneet ja näin ollen niiden vaikutus strategiseen erilaistumiseen on vähentynyt. Samaan aikaan asiakaskokemus on kehittynyt uudeksi kilpailuedun lähtökohdaksi. Asiakaskokemus on seuraus palveluprosessista ja siksi asiakaspalvelun kehittäminen tilaus-toimitusprosessissa on tällä hetkellä järkevä askel kohti kilpailukykyä.

Olemassa oleva asiakaskokemuskirjallisuus on keskittynyt lähinnä B2C markkinoihin ja samaan aikaan B2B markkinoita on tutkittu vähemmän niiden yksityiskohtaisen luonteensa vuoksi. Näin ollen kohdeyrityksen B2B markkinat ja monimutkaiset engineer-to-order (ETO) projektit osoittautuivat puutteellisesti tutkituiksi ja siten tarjosivat perusteita empirialle tapaustutkimusmenetelmän avulla. Lisäksi asiakaskokemuksen subjektiivinen luonne vaatii yrityksiä tutkimaan omia asiakkaitaan. Tämän diplomityön datankeräysmenetelmät, kyselytutkimus, focus group -menetelmä ja laadulliset haastattelut, kokosivat tarvittavan tiedon tehokkaaseen prosessikehitykseen kohdeyrityksessä.

Tapaustutkimus havaitsi, että reagointikyky ja kommunikointi ovat asiakaskokemuksen tärkeimmät tekijät. Joustavuuden ja dokumentaation puolestaan havaittiin olevan keskeisimpiä asiakaspalvelun kehityskohteita. Tämä tietämys sekä ymmärrys sisäisistä kyvyistä johtivat prosessikehitykseen työntekijöille suunnatun käsikirjan avulla. Lisäksi tutkimus raportoi, että alun perin B2C markkinoille suunniteltu SERVQUAL mittari on käyttökelpoinen kohdeyrityksen tarpeisiin yksityiskohtaisessa B2B ympäristössä.

Havaittu vastaavuus SERVQUAL mittarin ja B2B asiakkaiden mieltymysten välillä saattaa osoittaa, että B2C ja B2B markkinat ovat vähemmän erilaiset keskusteltaessa ihmisläheisistä aiheista, kuten asiakaskokemuksesta. Näin ollen uutta tutkimusta kaivataan, jotta olemassa olevat B2C teoriat voitaisiin empiirisesti todentaa käyttökelpoisiksi B2B markkinoilla. Lisäksi tulevaisuuden ammatinharjoittajat saattavat hyötyä tämän diplomityön löydöksistä, mutta ainoastaan, jos he todella ymmärtävät asiakkaitaan.

Avainsanat Asiakaskokemus, asiakaspalvelu, tilaus-toimitusprosessi, B2B

Foreword

The topic of this thesis arose from the customers of the case company. More specifically, the Superior Customer Experience –program aimed to identify the most significant improvement areas in terms of customer experience and improving customer service during the order-delivery process was one of them. The program identified seven improvement areas in total. Consequently, the aim of this thesis was to improve customer experience by improving customer service in the order-delivery process.

I would like to thank the case company, since they offered an extremely interesting topic. It was a pleasure to learn and understand such a modern and significant topic. Furthermore, I want to give an especial thank to my advisor, Tanja Höytölä, who asked me to do this, guided me through the process, and supported when needed most. I appreciate the empowerment and space that I got.

Thereafter, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Kari Tanskanen, who assisted me during the process. The support was especially needed in the beginning of the study. Our discussions clarified the purposes of each component of a Master's thesis. In general, I want to thank the whole department of industrial engineering and management for offering relevant knowledge for this thesis.

Lastly, I want to thank the people around me. Especially my beloved partner, Inga Makkonen, who supported me on every single day during the process. As a recent graduate (M.Sc.), she was able to guide me well. Furthermore, my beloved mother, Doctor Eija Kärnä, shared her profound knowledge of academic research, which improved the quality of the thesis.

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Abbreviations and used terms

B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to consumer
CRM	Customer relationship management
CEM	Customer experience management
FAT	Factory Acceptance Test
KAM	Key account management
SD-L	Service-dominant logic
MRT	Media richness theory
ICT	Information and communication technology
SCSO	Strategic customer service orientation
COSE	Customer orientation of service employees
RQ	Research question
F2F	Face to face

Order-delivery process / project	A process from a purchase order to the delivery of the final product.
Customer experience	A personal interpretation from the interaction between the customer and the company, which emerges in the customer's mind.
Customer service / service	Serving the customers during the order-delivery process by means of additional support, engineering changes and updates.
Services	Similarly with products, services are part of the offering as such.
The case company	The principal company of this thesis.
The customer	The customer of the case company in particular.
Interaction	Interaction, such as communication, occurs between people.
Touchpoint	An interactive moment between a company and its customer.
Customer journey	The whole set of touch points during the relationship with the company.
Kick-off meeting	The first meeting of a project.
Customer interface / Frontstage	A part of an organization, which have a direct connection with the customers.

1 Introduction

Customer experience is a subjective perception of the interactions between the company and the customer (LaSalle and Britton, 2002). Recent literature justifies the relevance of improving customer experience. In fact, customer experience is currently seen as a new basis of competitiveness (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). Furthermore, financially successful companies are able to include superior customer experience in their offerings (Grønholt et al., 2015). Ignoring customer experience is an absurd option, since every company provides customer experience, whether it is positive or negative (Richardson, 2010a; Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). However, improving customer experience is a difficult task due to the complexity and subjectivity of the concept.

In turn, customer service is a significant part of customer experience. More specifically, customer experience is the outcome of a service process (Johnston and Kong, 2011). The importance of customer service in general has long been recognized by scholars in the industrial markets. Indeed, the traditional marketing mix variables, such as product and price have become obsolete, and customer service is the core of B2B exchange (Parasuraman, 1998). This phenomenon is mainly driven by escalating competition, increasing globalization and demanding customers. Currently, customer service is still seen as a key to sustainable business (Carter, 2014).

Order-delivery processes are common practice among all the industrial business-to-business (B2B) companies. The process begins with an order from the customer and continues through several activities until the final delivery. The order-delivery process of the case company of this thesis entails a complex engineer-to-order (ETO) process. For instance, this latter process includes interaction, customer service, and close collaboration with the customers. However, despite this collaboration, it would appear that the case company evaluates the order-delivery process as being product-oriented rather than customer-oriented. Therefore, the case company desires to improve customer experience and customer service during the order-delivery process.

The literature review of this thesis gains understanding of customer experience and customer service as concepts. Additionally, the review offers motivation to conduct empirical research. From the academic point of view, while there have been many efforts to research customer experience, most of these have been limited to the B2C markets. Therefore, a research gap may exist in the B2B markets. Moreover, the literature lacks direct suggestions for the case company due to the specific ETO process and unique customers. In fact, both customer experience and customer service are perceived subjectively (Johnston and Kong, 2011), thus the literature suggests identifying the customer needs and perceptions together with own customers (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006 p. 227-229; Nätti and Palo, 2012). Consequently, the specific business environment of the case company as well as the subjectivity of both customer experience and customer service create a need for empirical research.

The background that led to the research process in general is based on the strategic aims and current challenges in the case company's business. The operations of the case company are product-oriented. For instance, research and development is invested heavily. However, they desire to be more customer-oriented and improve their understanding of the customers in general. Services are currently inactively offered during the order-delivery process, which they would like to change in the future.

In order to enhance their customer orientation, they launched a new *Superior Customer Experience* -program, which is the main driver to conduct this thesis. The Superior Customer Experience -program emphasizes humane perspective, including communication and customers' emotions, and thus they are emphasized in this thesis. The program aims to improve current customer experience by focusing on seven different areas. This thesis focuses on customer service, which is one of those improvement areas. In other words, this thesis aims to improve customer experience through better customer service. All the seven improvement areas were identified during the spring 2016, when the case company conducted a preliminary research about customer preferences and the pain points of the customer journey.

Currently, the customer interface is the only real responsible for customer communication. As a result, the customer interface is an important link between the internal functions and the customers. Due to this setting, the customer interface has a major responsibility in terms of both customer experience and customer service. Superior Customer Experience program aims to distribute the responsibility of customer experience creation among all the employees.

The main goal of this thesis is to improve customer experience and customer service in the order-delivery process. Therefore, the thesis aims to 1) understand the concepts of customer experience and customer service in the case company's business, 2) identify the most significant improvement areas, and 3) determine the internal capabilities. This knowledge assists finding relevant improvement suggestions. In practice, the case company expects to receive the suggestions in a handbook, which includes guidelines for better customer experience and customer service. This handbook aims to share knowledge internally, thus standardizes the capabilities. The handbook includes information about communication, roles and responsibilities as well as insights into customer experience in general. The contents are utilized as a basis for training materials in the Fall 2017 as part of the implementation of the Superior Customer Experience program.

The empirical research of this thesis follows the guidelines of a case study method, since the literature offered insufficient amount of knowledge related to the specific business case. The order-delivery process between the case company and its customers represents the case of this empirical research. Since the target of this thesis is to improve customer experience and customer service in the order-delivery process, action research was selected as research approach. Action research approach is consistent with the case study method, however, it aims to improve business processes and identify better practices (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 193-209). The handbook represents these practices. Furthermore, they suggests participating the employees of the case company to the research, and thus focus groups were used as a data collection method. In other words, the employees of the case company created the best practices together and in collaboration with the researcher. The case study method and action research approach are discussed in detail in 3.1.

The research questions 1 and 2 illustrate the main target of this thesis. In order to achieve the target, the research process requires supporting subquestions. First, the RQ 1.1 aims to understand the concept of customer experience within the specific business environment.

Second, the RQ 2.1 aims to identify the most significant improvement areas in terms of customer service in order to improve them.

Research questions:

1. How to improve customer experience in the order-delivery process?
   1.1. Which factors have the greatest impact on customer experience in the B2B markets?
2. How to improve customer service in the order-delivery process?
   2.1. What are the most significant improvement areas in terms of customer service?

Case study represents the main research method of this qualitative business research. However, the strength of case studies is triangulation, which means that the process utilizes several sources of evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009, p. 114). Therefore, this thesis applies multiple data collection methods to gather the actual knowledge related to the case. The additional methods focus on both the external and internal perspectives. On the external perspective, the customers are heard by means of a survey method. The answers of the survey are justified by an analysis of past customer satisfaction feedback data. On the internal perspective, all the functions related to the order-delivery process are studied by means of a focus group method. 16 functions in total discuss on the most significant factors of customer experience within the case company's business environment. Lastly, the case stydy requires more in-depth information, and thus two semi-structured interviews are conducted for a project manager and a key account manager. The Table 1 below summarizes the data collection methods, their target groups, and the focused research questions.

Table 1. The data collection methods, investigated target group and answered research questions.

Method	Target group	RQ
Survey	International customers	1.1 & 2.1
Focus group	All the functions that participate in the order-delivery process	1.1 & 2.1
Semi-structured interview	Project Manager & Key Account Manager	All

The empirical research is abductive, since it combines deduction and induction. In other words, this thesis aims to validate the existing theories in the B2B markets, which is a clear characteristic of a deductive research. On the contrary, the empirical research aims to identify the best practices within the case company's business in particular, which represents an inductive approach. However, the conclusions of this thesis emphasize the inductive approach, while the contribution to the literature is less focused due to the case company's interests.

As the table illustrates, the research questions 1 and 2 are less emphasized in the empirical methods. Nevertheless, the final discussion of this thesis aims to find answers to these research questions in particular. The final discussion combines and compares the literature and the main empirical findings in order to find applicable improvement suggestions. The structure of this thesis is clarified in detail in the end of the introduction.

Context

The context of this thesis is defined by means of the business environment of the case company. The case company is an international corporation, which has involved in many industries. Their experience in engineering and manufacturing is extremely strong. This thesis is mainly focused on their robotics and motions division in the global B2B markets. The research aims to keep distance from the product in order to generalize the findings within the company.

The business is done in a project environment in which each project includes many phases such as tailored design, purchasing and manufacturing. The production volume is low and the projects are relatively long. The time period between the purchase order and the beginning of the manufacturing includes multiple operations, such as communication, research and development, changes in specification, and additional purchase orders. Hence, the order-delivery process is similar to engineer-to-order (ETO) processes. Stated by Aloini et al. (2013), the economical trend of switching from product-orientation to service-orientation offers an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage in project environment as well.

Scope

The general scope of this study is the industrial B2B markets. More specifically, the study focuses only on the order-delivery process, since the operations before the purchase order as well as after the delivery are excluded from the scope. Therefore, the literature review excludes buying behavior, which is one of the roots of customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Further, the focus is on additional customer service, and thus the actual service business is excluded. In other words, existing customer service is improved instead of creating new service offering.

The theoretical scope focuses on the brand-owned customer experience, which means that this thesis excludes customer-initiated customer experience, such as word-of-mouth feedback between the customers. In other words, the only source of customer experience is the real interaction between the company and its customer. Consequently, the partner-owned customer experiences, which are caused by another company within the value chain, are excluded from the scope.

Background of the researcher

Introducing my own background is remarkable, since this thesis is qualitative, and thus the researcher's opinion may influence on the process. My working experience and university studies probably have the strongest influence on the process. I have worked at the case company for a few years, and thus the context of this thesis is familiar. As a project engineer, I worked at the customer interface, communicating with the international customers during the order-delivery processes. Project management required close collaboration with the internal functions, and thus the office process is well-known as well. In addition, I worked in production for one summer, gaining understanding of the production in general. Consequently, the whole order-delivery process is relatively familiar to me, which may have an influence on the research.

Within my Master's degree, I have majored in *Product Development* from the department of Mechanical Engineering. However, my genuine interest is in Industrial Engineering and Management, from which I have taken two personal minors. These minors are *Leadership & Knowledge Management* and *Strategic Management*. The former focused on working psychology and communication, whereas the latter focused on business strategy and marketing.

Further, I wrote my Bachelor's thesis with a title of *Customer value and value creation in product development.* In my opinion, the Bachelor's thesis may have the strongest influence on this case study. I believe that customer value is the general concept, which covers customer experience, customer service, and for instance the traditional marketing mix variables. Therefore, this case study is closely related to the discussion of the Bachelor's thesis. Furthermore, the Bachelor's thesis conclude that co-creation is significant for the successful value creation, and thus I believe that similar approach is required for successful customer service as well.

General framework

The general framework of this thesis is graphically illustrated in the next Figure 1. The figure is divided into three main boxes by broken lines, which are 1) why, 2) how, and 3) implementation. The first box clarifies the causes that led to the *Superior Customer Experience* – program. Hence, the box illustrates the background that initiated the case study. The second box describes the empirical research, which mostly answered to the research questions 1.1 and 2.1. The chapter of empirical research (3) presents a more specific empirical research framework in addition to this general one. The third box demonstrates the implementation phase. The orange rectangle is still a part of empirical research, however, the outcome is based on the final discussion rather than the data collection methods. The found suggestions represent the contents of the handbook, which is the basis of the training materials.

The figure visualizes the case study from the situation at the start towards the end result. The case company expects to be more customer-oriented, desires to improve the satisfaction of their customers, as well as gains a competitive advantages by means of superior customer experience.

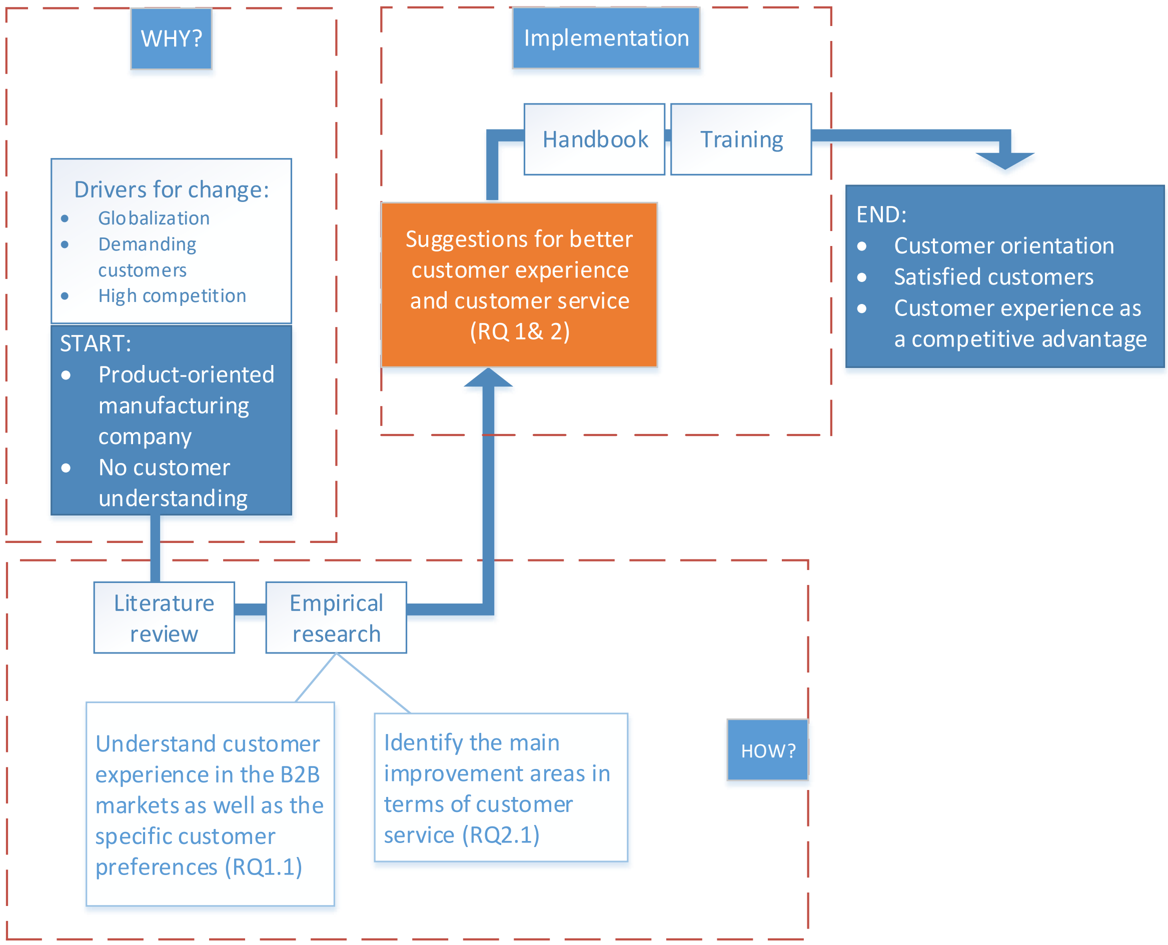

Figure 1. The research process of this thesis, which includes both case company's motivation to improve the order-delivery process and the desired end-result. However, this thesis ends after creating the handbook.

Structure of the thesis

The introduction is followed by the literature review of this thesis (chapter 2). The chapter focuses on the main concepts of the case study: *customer experience* (2.1) and *customer service* (2.2). Due to the soft nature of the concepts, the literature review present different definitions and perspectives in order to gain a wide and independent understanding. Furthermore, the literature review aimed to motivate the empirical research.

The empirical research is discussed in the chapter 3. The structure of this chapter is based on motivation to study, the research process, and the results. *Research design* (3.1) presents the research method and utilized data collection methods. Each data collection method is then discussed individually in the sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4. Importantly, these sections include the collected data and brief analysis, since analysis of a case study is often performed in multiple stages (Eisenhardt, 1989). *Synthesis* (3.5) combine and compare the collected data in order to analyze and justify them. Importantly, this discussion excludes the literature point of view and does not offer concrete suggestions for the case company although the discussion is already reflective, and thus resembles the final discussion.

The *discussion and conclusions* in the chapter 4, in turn, combines the synthesis and the literature in order to find applicable suggestions for the case company. Further, the reliability of the case study is discussed. In more detail, the discussion aims to transform the identified improvement areas into valuable solutions through the empirical results, literature, and researcher's own understanding. The section 4.1, *Limitations and reliability* evaluates the empirical research and the overall case study. Additionally, this section offers some future insights for the academic scholars and the case company.

The appendix 1 represents the data sheets of the root cause analysis of the customer survey results. The purpose of these sheets was to support the understanding of the customers and internal causes. The appendix 2 describes the process of creating the *handbook*. It begins with clarifying the targets and the overall purpose of the handbook. Thereafter, the text explains the way how the empirical results transformed into the contents of the handbook. Lastly, the chapter presents the ways of utilizing the handbook as well as the limitations of the process and contents. The actual handbook is not part of this thesis.

2 Theoretical discussion of customers' perspective

This chapter offers two different perspectives for the theoretical framework of this thesis. On the one hand, the chapter clarifies the main concepts, including customer experience and customer service. These concepts are discussed from different perspectives, since the literature recognizes varying definitions. The goal is to create a holistic understanding of these concepts and their interconnections. On the other hand, this chapter aims to outline the framework for the empirical part. The past research offers a basis for understanding these concepts, however, it also reveals lacks of studies in certain areas. In fact, this chapter aims to identify research gaps in order to motivate the empirical research.

The structure of this chapter is divided into two main sections. In 2.1, the concept of customer experience is discussed, since it introduces the right perspective to the further discussion. In 2.2, customer service is presented and concerned. The second section is the most important, and thus discussed in more detail. The structure of the theoretical discussion is in line with the topic of this thesis: *Better customer experience: Improving customer service during the order-delivery process*. Customer service is covered after customer experience, since it deepen the discussion.

2.1 Customer experience

This section aims to gain knowledge related to customer experience by introducing different theories from the literature. In general, customer experience is the personal interpretation of the service process, as well as the feeling emerging from all the touch points, such as interaction and involvement, during the customer journey (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Customer journey is the timeline of engagement between the company and the customer that consists of touch points (Richardson, 2010b). However, the literature recognizes several different definitions for customer experience, which are discussed in detail in this section. Before the detailed discussion, it is appropriate to clarify the importance of customer experience. Indeed, financially successful companies are able to include superior customer experience in their offerings (Grønholt et al., 2015). Sharma and Chaubey (2014) embrace this and argue that customer experience has become the most important factor for success across all industries. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) support both of these claims by introducing a recent study by Accenture, which reports that customer experience is the ranking management objective currently. Importantly, the phenomenon is salient in the B2B markets as well (Bitner, 2008). However, the concept of customer experience is difficult to understand and implement due to its personal and contextual dimensions (Grønholt et al., 2015).

This section first illuminates customer experience as a concept by offering different definitions (2.1.1) and deepening the discussion with important characteristics (2.1.2). Further, 2.1.3 explains the real roots of customer experience, since the concept is a new combination of well-established fields of literature. Finally, this section presents two approaches for implementation. These are customer relationship approach (2.1.4) and customer experience management (2.1.5), which are both significant for improving customer experience in the B2B context (Grønholt et al., 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

2.1.1 Definition clarification

Although customer experience has become a commonly used term, the main improvement objective and a source of competitive advantage, the academic world lacks a general and simple definition for it (Richardson, 2010a). More ironically, business consultants at Bain & Company investigated 362 firms, and found out that 80 per cent of managers believe they deliver superior customer experience, however, merely 8 per cent of their customers perceive the same feeling (Allen et al., 2005). Hence, seems that practitioners aim to improve customer experience without understanding the whole concept. The root cause for this lack of understanding is the high amount of unclear definitions (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Despite this ambiguity, the main principle of customer experience is the customer in particular. The following paragraphs explain customer involvement in experience creation as well as offer overview of the different definitions.

LaSalle and Britton (2002) offer a general definition for customer experience, which is used here as a foundation. They state that interaction or a set of interactions between a company and its customer is the premise of experience. Such interaction, also known as touch points (Richardson, 2010c), creates critical reactions in the customers' mind. These reactions can be thoughts or emotions, and if they are positive, the customer perceives value. In addition, the customer brings his or her own values, beliefs, preferences and personal history to the interactive moment, which makes the experience unique and personal. Customer experience can be used to mean an individual experience from one touch point or the cumulative customer experience from the whole journey. Although, most of the authors agree on the notion that customer experience is a sum of all the experiences or emotions perceived by the customer. Altogether, customer experience is the personal and cumulative interpretation from the set of touch points between the company and the customer.

Sharma and Chaubey (2014) offer a similar definition for customer experience:

> *"Customer experience (CX) is the sum of all experiences a customer has with a supplier of goods and/or services, over the duration of their relationship with that supplier. This can include awareness, discovery, attraction, interaction, purchase, use, cultivation and advocacy."* (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014)

Further, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) add external partners and interaction between customers as sources of customer experience. In other words, collaborative companies, such as delivery companies, may effect on customer experience as well. Similarly, customer experience emerges if two people discuss on the company, and thus spreading the brand image. The Figure 4 offers an overview on this matter.

Many scholars (e.g. Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Sharma and Chaubey, 2014; Richardson, 2010c) agree that customer experience is a cumulative sum of many touch points. More specifically, each touch point creates an individual experience, and all these together create the customer experience. The touch points together define the customer journey, which illustrates the overall engagement of the customer over time. Therefore, it is essential to focus on both separate experiences and the whole customer journey (Rawson et al., 2013). Further, Rawson et al. argue that it might be even detrimental for customer experience to emphasize great single touch points rather than understand the whole customer journey. Additionally, a single poor touch point might have a remarkable impact on the cumulative customer experience.

Figure 2 illustrates the contribution of each touch point to the whole customer journey. As seen in the figure, each touchpoint creates an experience and all the experiences are multiplied by others. Therefore, only one weak touch point may reduce the total customer experience significantly. However, authors debate whether to use sum or product in this illustration. Regardless, the main point is that all the touch points effect on the total customer experience, and an individual touch point may perform well even if the total experience is poor.

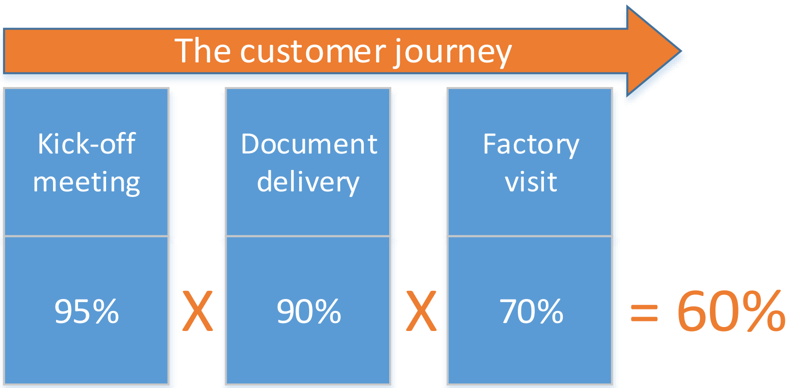

Figure 2. The cumulative effect of each touch point to the overall customer journey. The percentages illustrate the perceived customer satisfaction.

Although there are similarities, customer experience is not the same as customer service (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Although most people associate customer experience with customer service, customer service is only one element of overall customer experience (Yohn, 2015). Customer experience is a broad concept emerging from the subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company (Meyer and Schwager, 2007). In detail, this direct contact occurs mostly in purchase, use phase or service, whereas indirect contact occurs spontaneously in any interactions with the brand, such as word-of-mouth feedback, advertising, news, reviews. Customer service, in turn, is an essential part of customer experience, but it is not sufficient (Millard, 2006). Indeed, a service interaction always creates an experience, however, customer experience is a complex combination of interactions, emotions and customer relationships (Richardson, 2010a). Therefore, the concept of customer experience might be ambiguous and thus difficult to understand. Altogether, the difference between customer experience and customer service is that customer service is merely activity, while customer experience is the personal interpretation of it (Johnston and Kont, 2011).

All the above definitions and explanations consider customer experience supplemental to original business offering. However, Pine and Gilmore (1998) describe customer experience from a different point of view. They equal goods, services and experiences in a way that defines customer experience as the basis of exchange. In other words, companies focusing on customer experience are only selling experiences as such, while goods and services enable this exchange in practice. The idea is similar to service-dominant logic (Lusch et al., 2008). Within service-dominant logic concept, goods are seen as vehicles that enable comprehensive service offering. Lusch et al. state service is no longer complementary to goods, but independent and fundamental part of the firm's offering. In this respect, service dominant logic and customer experience have a similar logic in terms of the role of goods. Customer experience is rather a product with a price than an additional process that aims to enhance the customer relationship and satisfaction. Consequently, this different perspective also demonstrates why defining customer experience is challenging, since some of the authors define it as a process or interaction (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016)

In summary, customer experience is a complicated concept, which is not clear even for management (Allen et al., 2005). Nevertheless, the literature agrees that customer experience is based on personal emotions and perceptions. These emotions and perceptions emerge from the interactive touch points between the company and the customer. As a result, the total customer experience is the sum of all the experiences from the individual touch points. In addition, these touch points define the customer journey, which is the timeline of engagement between the company and the customer. Importantly, customer experience is not the same as customer service, although the concepts are strongly linked (Johnston and Kong, 2011). In other words, every customer service interaction creates experiences, since they can be defined as touch points (Richardson, 2010a). However, customer service is merely a small proportion of total customer experience (Yohn, 2015). Finally, customer experience can be defined as part of the core offering (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). They amplify that customer experience may have a price similarly with products and services. The definition remains the same, but the perspective changes from other theories.

2.1.2 Characteristics and building blocks

The previous section clarified the definition of customer experience in general, and this section explains the concept in a more detailed manner. The purpose is to reveal important characteristics of the concept in order to help measuring, designing and delivering of customer experience. Additionally, this section presents the building blocks of customer experience. Altogether, this section offers more specific information related to customer experience than the previous section.

The first considerable characteristic of customer experience is its personality. Although a company is involved in touch points that create customer experience, the actual experience occurs only in customers' mind (LaSalle and Britton, 2002). Hence, perceived experience is a subjective reaction, which may be different between people in the same stimulative environment (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). The explanation for this difference in perceptions is that subjective customer experience depends on personal background, context and expectations, rather than merely on the conducted service process itself (Halvorsrud et al., 2016). Customers appreciate different things and customer value is highly personal measure as well (Hakola, 2013). Consequently, the company can never anticipate perceived customer experience in detail, regardless of how well and carefully they design their practices (Richardson, 2010a). In this respect, great customer experience cannot be standardized, and thus imitation from others is not applicable way to enhance organizational practices (Millard, 2006).

Wall-Mullen and Envick (2015) divide customer experience into three characteristics, which are: 1) functional, 2) mechanical and 3) humanic. These characteristics and practical examples are graphically presented in the Figure 3. As the figure demonstrates, functional characteristic refers to traditional factors, such as service quality and on-time delivery. Functional characteristic emphasizes mostly production and tangible exchange. Mechanical characteristic means facilitative supplements, for instance tools, equipment and practices. These previous factors are non-human, however, humanic characteristic represents behavioral aspect of customer experience. These include body language, enthusiasm and tone of voice, for instance. Altogether, in order to produce great customer experience each characteristic must be considered. As Rawson et al. (2013) argue, a company must understand the customer interactions as a whole in order to be able to identify the real root causes of poor customer experience. Similarly, all the three characteristics have significant contribution to the creation of customer experience (Wall-Mullen and Envick, 2015).

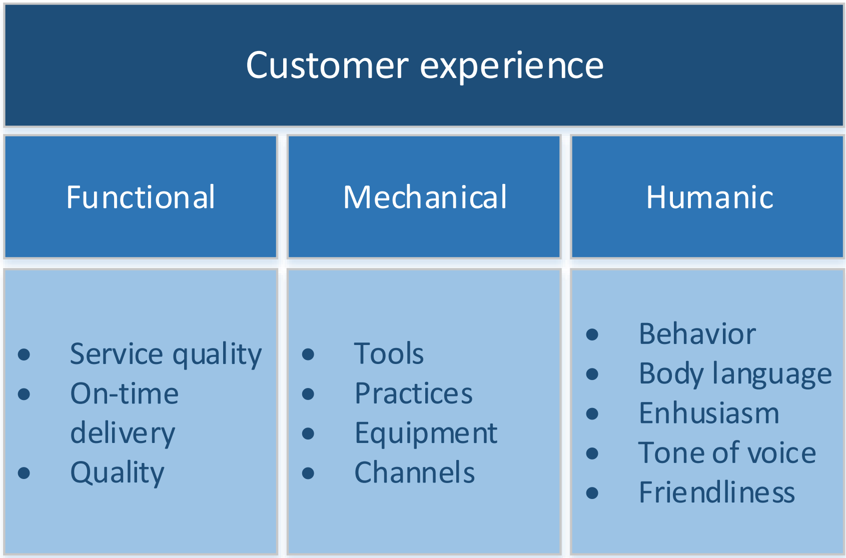

Figure 3. Characteristics of customer experience including practical examples for each. (Wall-Mullen and Envick, 2015)

One of the important characteristics is that customer experience consists of several touch points. Touch points represent the building blocks of customer experience. As mentioned before, customer experience emerges from touch points with firm's brand and its customer (Richardson, 2010c). More specifically, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) divide touch points into four categories, which are brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned and social/external touch points. The two latter are customer-initiated, whereas the two former, brand-owned and partner-owned, are firm-initiated (Anderl et al., 2016). Figure 4 illustrates these four categories. Furthermore, a company can control the firm-initiated categories by operations and processes with a possible collaboration relationship with external partners. On the contrary, customer-initiated touch points, such as social media and communication between customers, are mostly related to consumers and their purchase path (Anderl et al., 2016). For these reasons, this thesis focus only on firm-initiated touch points, such as customer service, since they offer distinct possibilities for improvement actions. However, although a company can control these touch points, the customer is yet actively involved in the two-way interaction (Richardson, 2010c) and creates subjective perception of customer experience independently.

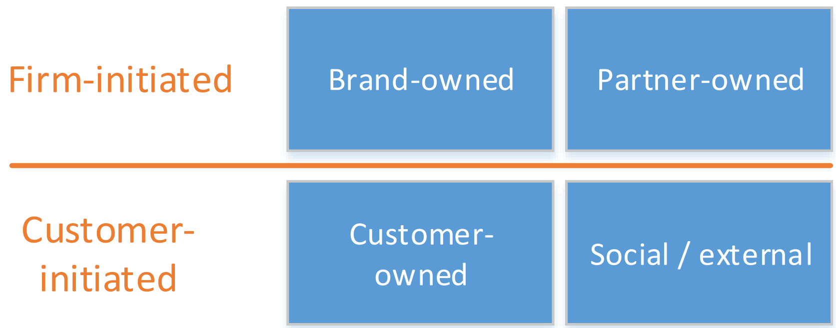

Figure 4. The four categories of different touch points. This thesis focuses on the category of brand-owned touch points. (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016)

In order to clarify the definition of a touch point, Halvorsrud et al. (2016) report three characteristics for a proper touch point. Firstly, a touch point must be visible for the customer and the customer must be able to encounter it. Secondly, it must be a separate situation, which is appointed in time. Thirdly, it must involve communication or other direct interaction between the company and the customer. Aligned with this definition, they argue for instance that advertisement is not a touch point, since it might not involve the specific customer in the specific time. However, many other scholars, such as Meyer and Schwager (2007) and Lemon and Verhoef (2016), argue that any indirect interaction, such as advertisement, can be seen as touch points. This definition makes understanding of touch points difficult due to multiple channels, partners and media (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Since the literature cannot standardize the definition of a touch point, customer experience as well remains as an unclear concept.

Despite the correct definition, Richardson (2010c) argue that each touch point shall be designed and performed well. This high performance is possible to reach by understanding the characteristics holistically (Wall-Mullen and Envick, 2015) as well as by identifying who controls the particular touch point (Anderl et al., 2016). Every touch point should be approached with a clear and comprehensive aim for better customer experience. However, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) argue that touch points are not equal in importance and some of them cannot be controlled. Hence, they suggest identifying the key touch points and emphasizing them.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, touch points together create the customer journey (Richardson, 2010b). An important characteristic of customer experience is that it consists of customer journey, along with touch points. In other words, touch points are the building blocks of the customer journey, which is, in turn, the main building block of customer experience. Therefore, focusing on the individual touch points may not improve the overall customer experience (Rawson et al., 2013). Richardson (2010c) agree on this and states that touch points should meld together, creating a continuous process. This process is defined as customer journey (Rawson et al., 2013; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), and it is critical for overall customer experience. In terms of customer service, Halvorsrud et al (2016) argue that understanding the whole service delivery process from customers' point of view will bring success. This means that a wide understanding of the whole customer journey is important for the customer service improvement as well.

Customer journey is an end-to-end route, which has a goal (Halvorsrud et al., 2016). In their study, the core idea is to define the whole process or set of touch points as customers see it.

Therefore, customers should be involved in the journey identification process. Richardson (2010a) reports that customer journey is the overall set of touch points during the collaboration. Importantly, he claims that the company needs to analyze all the steps, activities, questions, barriers and emotions from the customer's point of view during the journey. Further, emotions of individual customers are emphasized over physical characters, which is critical in terms of better customer experience (Grønholt et al., 2015).

Halvorsrud et al. (2016) explicate important characteristics of customer journey and customer journey analysis in their article. The main characteristic is customer perspective, and thus the process should not be performed completely internally. In addition, the process should involve the whole organization rather than merely the customer interface employees such as project management. Lastly, they distinguish planned customer journey from actual one. Companies can plan the customer journeys in several ways, however, customers are always involved in identification of the actual journeys. Therefore, information of the customer journey should include the customers' thoughts and emotions. Merely collecting a list of touch points is insufficient and represents an internal perspective. As a conclusion, listing all the touch points and visualizing the customer journey is important, however, it requires customers' voice to fulfil the information of each touch point.

In this section, characteristics and building blocks of customer experience are considered. Understanding different characteristics is essential for improving customer experience (Wall-Mullen and Envick, 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The main characteristic is that customer experience is interpreted personally (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). Furthermore, customer experience is divided in three other characteristics, which are functional, mechanical and humanic (Wall-Mullen and Envick, 2015). All these together enable in-depth understanding of the concept as well as improving it. Similarly, understanding the building blocks of customer experience enables its improvement. Indeed, knowing that customer experience consists of customer journey, which is further divided into touch points, simplifies the improvement process significantly. This section offers additional characteristics for touch points and customer journeys as well, which have an impact on the characteristics of customer experience. This section is closely related to general definition as well as to the next section that discusses the real roots of customer experience.

2.1.3 The real roots of customer experience

Although customer experience, as a concept, is relatively new and lively (Grønholt et al., 2015), the foundation of the discussion relies on topics such as customer satisfaction, relationship marketing and service quality (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). These topics are decades-old, and thus Lemon and Verhoef question the novelty of customer experience. In this respect, the thesis states that customer experience is a novel concept, which combines old theories to a new and holistic synthesis. Consequently, since the real roots of customer experience exist, it is important to understand these topics as well before improving customer experience.

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) offer a timeline in order to describe the chronological emerge of the real roots of customer experience. The time line is illustrated in the Figure 5. As seen, customer experience literature has evolved from 1960s until 2010s. In terms of this thesis and its goals, the long timeline has a positive and supporting effect, since the case company has focused on these topics over the years already. In other words, most of the roots of customer experience have already taken into account and improved in the case company's business. Therefore, the case company has improved their customer experience capabilities although the current process is unequalled.

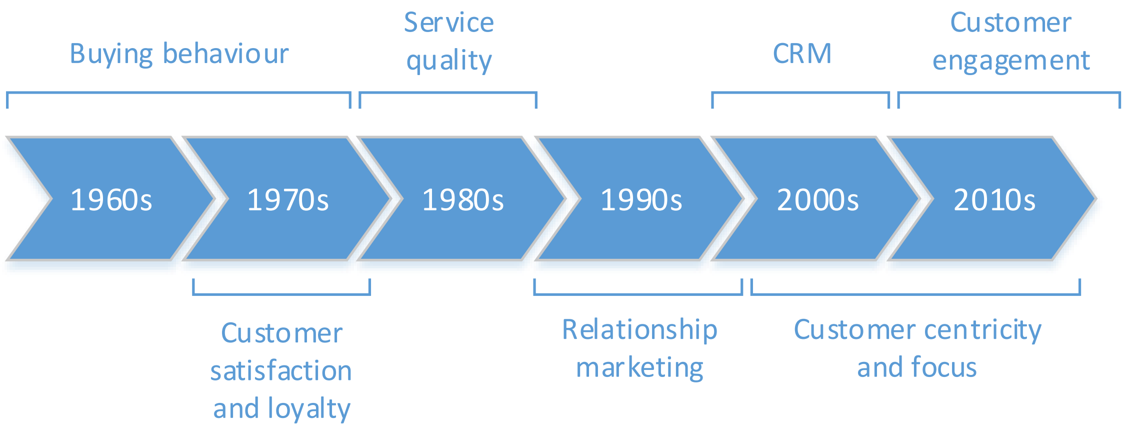

Figure 5. The timeline, which illustrates the real roots of customer experience over time. (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016)

The following paragraphs explain briefly the same topics as in the Figure 5. However, *buying behavior* is excluded from the descriptions, since the sales phase is not in the scope of this thesis. The below descriptions aim to gain understanding of how these topics contribute to this study as well as customer experience in general.

Measuring *customer satisfaction and loyalty* is the basis for measuring customer experience performance (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). As a result, customer satisfaction and loyalty is strongly linked to improving customer experience. The conceptualized idea is to compare expectations and actual performance. Customer emotions are emphasized in particular, which is essential for improving customer experience (Grønholt et al., 2015). The practice of measuring customer satisfaction has become a standard among companies (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), and thus it does no longer offer any possibility for competitive differentiation. However, customer experience does offer (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014) and customer satisfaction is a major part of it.

Similarly, *service quality* is defined as antecedent and foundation of better customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Service quality means the comparison between service expectations and perceptions from customers' point of view (Parasuraman, 1998). Further, Parasuraman argue that there exists usually a gap between service expectations and actual perceived service. This gap leads to poor service quality, which causes increased probability of weak customer experience. Additionally, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) conclude service quality literature has contribute to customer experience by emphasizing the focus of the context and journey mapping, including touch points. This thesis includes deeper analysis of service quality in the section 2.2.2.

Relationship marketing emerged in 1990s and the goal is to strengthen the business relationships (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The concept emphasizes emotional aspects as does customer experience (Grønholt et al., 2015). Relationship marketing leads to wider understanding of relationships in general, thus improving customer experience acumen and creation capabilities as well. In addition to emotions, relationship marketing highlights trust and commitment as constructs of relationship quality (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007). Altogether, relationship marketing aims at stronger relationships by means of long-term commitment (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007). The case company of this thesis appreciates and values strong customer relationship, and thus customer relationships are mostly considered from this perspective.

Relationship marketing was followed by *customer relationship management* (CRM) a decade later. CRM aims to utilize the customer relationships in terms of business profitability (Payne and Frow, 2005). The idea with CRM is to combine relationship marketing theories with IT tools in order to create shareholder value. However, relationship quality and long-term commitment are no longer the main objective of CRM (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Regardless, each company has its own strategic targets, which might define the sought type of customer relationship. Consequently, CRM may not be applicable for the case company, since it emphasizes profitability over the customer experience. Moreover, CRM focuses more on internal value than customer value, and neglects essential relationship building, which is detrimental approach for customer experience improvement (Schmitt, 2003).

Customer centricity and focus arose in 2000s, and the main idea with the concept is that companies try to understand the needs of their customers (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). This aim requires identifying the key customers instead of investigating massive groups of target customers. Ballantyne and Varey (2006, p.109) state in their book that understanding the specific customer needs is the basis of value creation, which is in turn the basis of customer experience (Gentile et al., 2007). Furthermore, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) discuss realization and utilization of customer needs aligns the whole organization to a cross-functional way to create value for customers, which is defined as a goal for this thesis. Ballantyne and Varey (2006, p. 227-229) also offer insights for gathering customer needs by emphasizing a co-creative dialogue between a company and its customers. The dialogue aims for mutual understanding of both parties' needs, desires and problems, for instance. This approach demands experimenting, listening and learning with the customer. Ballantyne and Varey even argue that focusing merely on mechanistic factors, such as touch points, will result in poor customer experience. This thesis concludes that touch points are still valid and important, however, they must be investigated and designed comprehensively and together with the customer in a way that customers' needs are taken into account.

The next paradigm shift after customer centricity and customer focus approaches is *customer engagement*, which has been actively studied during the current decade (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Lemon and Verhoef distil customer engagement as "motivational state that leads customers to participate with firms". In addition, they conclude touch points offer important opportunities for customers to interact, and thus engage with the company. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) argue that no firm can create value for customers without engaging them into the process. Additionally, customer value is a significant factor in terms of customer experience creation (Gentile et al., 2007).

The roots described above rest mainly upon the research of Lemon and Verhoef (2016). They all have an impact on customer experience, however, other roots might still exist. Since customer experience is a subjective concept emerging from personal emotions of a customer (LaSalle and Britton, 2002), identifying all the roots in explicit form prove to be impossible. However, this does not decrease the significance of these roots listed by Lemon and Verhoef.

What is remarkable, customer experience seems to be a macro concept, including several micro concepts such as customer satisfaction and service quality. Among these micro concepts, customer should always be in the center or at least interactive partner with the company. Thus, customer relationship is highlighted as one of the most important aspect in terms of better customer experience. The next section concerns customer relationships in general and a correspondence between relationship and customer experience.

2.1.4 Customer relationship approach

Improved customer relationship is one of the major causes for a competitive advantage of present successful companies (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). The logic behind this might be based on the fact that enhanced relationship leads to better customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), while the better experience has an impact on business performance (Grønholt et al., 2015). Further, Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007) remark the importance of efficient and satisfactory business relationships, when the offering is complex and the business relationships have a long-term nature. This suits well the business and relationships of the case company, since the core offering is complex and engineer-to-order by nature, and the customers are only limited amount of well-known industrial partners.

Defining customer relationship in the B2B context is far from a straightforward task. Some authors compare it to close friendship or similar interpersonal relationships, whereas the other point of view is to define it as a rational connection that creates value for both parties (Bettencourt et al., 2015). Regardless of the specific definition, establishing and maintaining customer relationship are both essential processes these days due to changed role of customers, as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) argue in their paper. They also claim product-oriented business approach with a focus on internal processes and the company itself is an obsolete strategy. Customers have more and more willingness to participate in value creation and to share information. The basis of the new approach is establishing a strong customer relationship in order to create the essential link between the company and its customer. In other words, gathering customer needs and creating value together is impossible without a mutual relationship.

Miller (2006) amplifies the most beneficial type of customer relationship, which is, at least among consumers, emotional relationship. These customers share their needs, pay a premium and stay for the long run, for instance. Further, emotions are emphasized in both customer relationship marketing (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007) and customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) literature. The question is, *how these relationships can be established?* Miller (2006) argues interaction is the only way to improve relationships, which is supported by the theory of touch points. Consequently, an appropriate design of touch points, as well as overall customer experience, is in a way connected with improving the customer relationship. Grønholt et al. (2015) highlight the importance of understanding emotional aspect in terms of customer experience design that, in turn, supports valuable customer relationships. From another point of view, strong and satisfactory relationships increase probability of positive word-of-mouth among customers (Gummeson, 2004), which effects on better customer experience through these customer-initiated touch points. Hence, customer experience and customer relationship are interconnected by several different ways however, touch points play a major role in this linkage.

Another and probably more concrete approach for better relationships is customer relationship management (CRM). In general, CRM is a method for implementing customer relationship marketing theory. As it was mentioned in the previous section, the logic of CRM is to combine customer relationship marketing understanding with IT-related knowledge and tools in order to increase shareholder value (Payne and Frow, 2005). In more detail, the aim is to collect and store the customer data, for instance listed interactions, service requests, customer needs and other specific information, and then analyze it in a way that attempts to maximize the profit from each customer. Many people state the Internet and IT-tools are the core and enabler of customer relationship marketing (Gummeson, 2004). However, he specifies that this approach represents a subconcept named *eCRM*, while *hCRM* emphasizes human factor, as the "*h*" refer to. He argue that technology is essential for relationships, but often leads to lack of human and customer understanding. Consequently, holistic understanding of the CRM concept and its two-sided nature is significant, as well as identifying the appropriate aim for the company.

Meyer and Schwager (2007) continue criticizing and argue that the amount of data might be overwhelming, and thus lead to shortage of proper actions. Moreover, they claim the CRM approach is still company-centric and excepts the real customer needs and important emotions. Salojärvi et al. (2010) argue CRM is a widely implemented practice however, it emphasizes data gathering instead of utilizing the customer information. Gummeson (2004) claim a strong focus on technology might lead to neglect of human aspects and unprofitable emphasis on IT. Nevertheless, Gummeson states CRM, and eCRM in particular, suits well the needs of B-to-C companies in mass markets. For the B2B companies with both low volume and few large customers, such as the case company, he suggests another approach for implementing relationship marketing than CRM. This concept is key account management (KAM).

Key account management (KAM) is a practice for relationship marketing in the B2B markets (Gounaris and Tzempelikos, 2014). More precisely, KAM offers additional and tailored business activities for the most important customers, as per their unique needs. Nätti and Palo (2012) defines KAM as *"an organized way for managing customers*". However, suitability of the concept depends on the particular business environment and Nätti and Palo defines it as follows. First, KAM is designed for the B2B markets and especially for long-term and close relationships. Second, its significance increases with the relation to complexity of the interaction. In other words, when the company and its customer desires to create value together through close interaction and engineer-to-order production, KAM practices are valuable to implement. Third, KAM is particularly applicable for knowledge intensive organizations that Nätti and Palo defines as expert organizations. As a conclusion, this environment definition is close to the environment and business context of the case company.

Utilization of KAM practices is beneficial, because it improves customer relationships (Nätti and Palo, 2012) and enhances customer knowledge management (Salojärvi et al., 2010). Therefore, customer needs can be gathered and utilized more efficiently. This knowledge combined with close interaction can be used for co-creation of value (Nätti and Palo, 2012). By means of better relationships, comprehensive understanding of customers' needs and value creation KAM supports customer experience improvement as well.

In summary of this section, customer relationship is critical for today's businesses (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014), nevertheless, the right relationship type and method for implementing must be identified. Customer relationship marketing offers general insights for desired relationship, and customer relationship management (CRM) is one well-known approach for implementing it. The main idea is that a strong relationship requires mutual understanding, friendship and appropriate utilization of IT (Gummeson, 2004). However, Gummeson criticize that CRM might be company-focused, too technical and appropriate merely in B-to-C mass markets. Therefore, he suggests key account management (KAM) as a method for implementing customer relationship marketing and establishing strong relationships. Furthermore, KAM supports complex interactions, engineer-to-order approach and co-creation of value (Nätti and Palo, 2012), which is well aligned with the business of the case company. Finally, customer relationships are strongly and mutually linked to customer experience. Emotions of customers are critical building blocks of both concepts (Miller, 2006; LaSalle and Britton, 2002). Consequently, both concepts support each other, and thus this thesis emphasizes relationship building approach for better customer experience.

2.1.5 Customer experience management

As the concept of customer experience, customer experience management (CEM) has many different definitions within the literature. Sharma and Chaubey (2014) define CEM "as a strategy that focuses the operations and processes of a business around the needs of the individual customer." Schmitt (2011, p. 85) emphasizes customer experience rather than only needs in his definition: "CEM is a set of frameworks, tools and methodologies to manage customer experience". In addition, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) claim that some practitioners define CEM as a part of advanced customer relationship management. However, they argue the goal is different, since CRM aims to value extraction, whereas the target of CEM is value creation for customers through better customer experience.

In terms of implementation, a practical CEM framework for managing experiences is presented by Schmitt in his book (2011, p. 88-90). Originally, the same framework had five steps, whereas, this version includes merely three, which are:

1. Analyzing the experiential world of the customer.
2. Building the experience platform.
3. Implementing the experience.

The first step begins with identifying current business trends and adding these insights to the brand. Customer knowledge is also gathered by focus groups, surveys and interviews. The second step is based on a design of the core experience concept. This concept is a guiding principle for implementing the framework. Further, this step contains "experiential positioning", which means differentiation by means of unique experience. The third step refers to actual implementation of the experience. This stage begins with the selection of the customer experience features that are implemented. In addition, planned customer experience is integrated to the brand that might require a responsible manager. Finally, the plan is implemented in a way that it emphasizes the ongoing processes and continuous improvement. Divergently from other customer experience approaches, touch points are not stressed (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

In addition, Schmitt (2011, p. 90) mentions the role of human resources in this process. He argues that employee incentives are required for applying the customer experience plan between customer interface and the customers. Further, internal employee experience has an impact on perceived customer experience, which demonstrates the need of appropriate work environment. This approach is further discussed in the chapter 2.2.4.

Grønholt et al. (2015) studied empirically the effect of customer experience management on business performance in 484 companies. The evidence indicated that financially successful companies implement CEM more efficiently than others. They analyzed and condensed the dimensions into seven final characteristics of CEM. Within this thesis, these characteristics are used for defining the dimensions for CEM as well as offering relevant improvement areas for the case company. The Figure 6 below illustrates the characteristics and the straightforward effect on business performance.

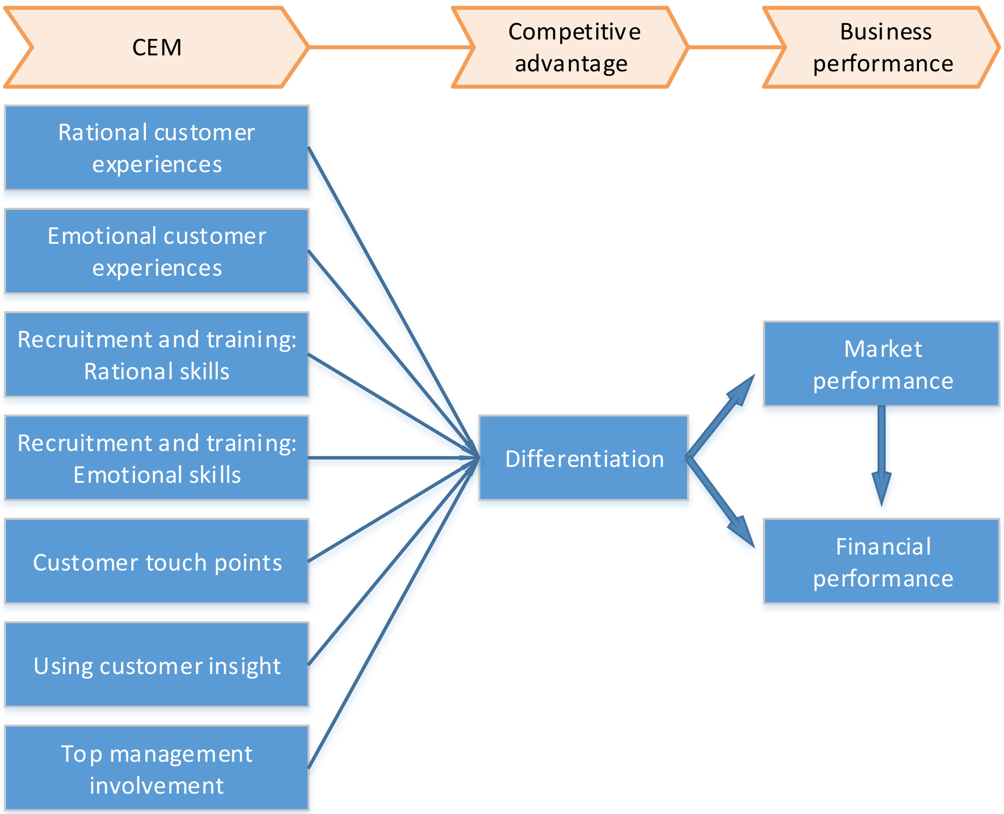

Figure 6. The different characteristics of customer experience management (CEM). The figure illustrates the mechanism how customer experience leads to better financial performance. (Grønholt et al., 2015)

As the Figure 1 illustrates, all the CEM characteristics support differentiation in terms of competitive advantage, and thus enhancing business performance. Rational and emotional aspects of customer experience are emphasized, since both are significant in the B2B markets (Grønholt et al., 2015). In particular, they state that the emotional side is important when the outcome of the product and service is difficult to evaluate. In addition to these two aspects, Grønholt et al. present customer touch points, using customer insights and top management involvement as major characteristics of successful CEM. Altogether, the characteristics represent the different dimensions of CEM and they are taken into account when analyzing the empirical results of this case study.

The previous Figure 6) visualizes the framework for the study of Grønholt et al. (2015) while the next Figure 7) demonstrates their actual findings. As the Figure 7 shows, touch points and involvement of top management emerged as the most effective but least performed activities among companies. Additionally, companies seem to lack capabilities for creation of emotional experiences, which can be a result from exiguous emotional skills. They also found out that using customer insights is difficult for most companies. Further, most of these relevant improvement areas support better customer experience in addition to business performance (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

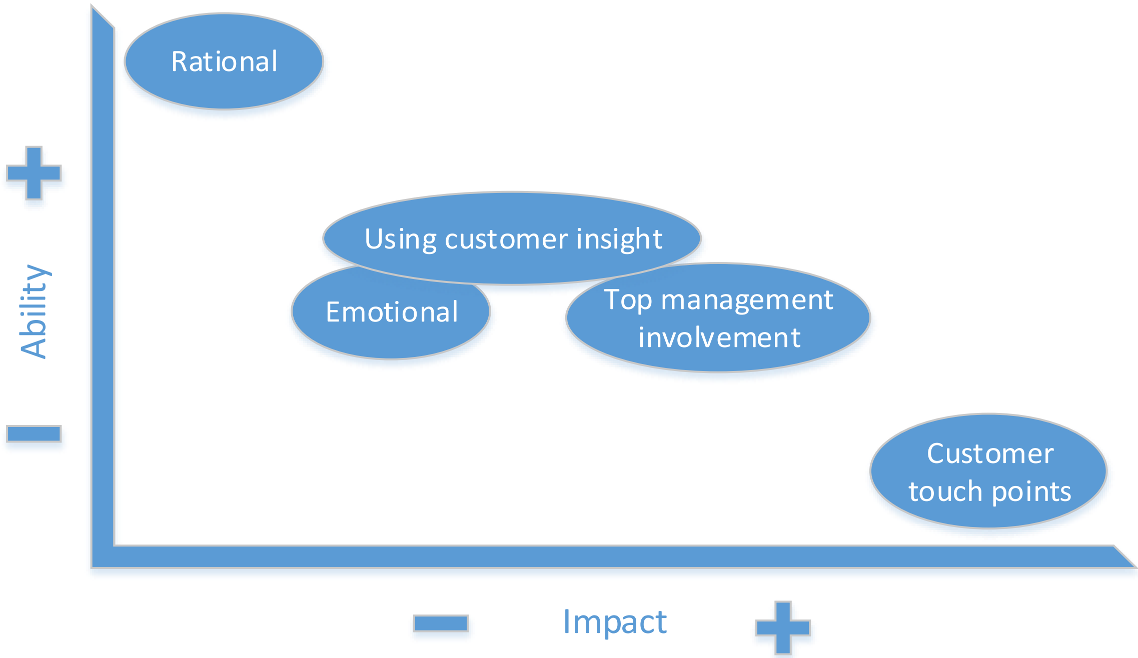

Figure 7. Their actual findings, which illustrate companies' abilities on the characteristics, as well as the impact on each characteristic on customer experience. (Grønholt et al., 2015)

Remarkably, merely rational characteristics are evaluated as strengths in the study, however, they have a low impact on business performance. On the other hand, an activity with high value in both ability and impact is completely missing. The result might indicate a lack of effective activities for CEM implementation. Rational aspects seem to be effortless for companies however, Grønholt et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of emotional experiences in terms of business performance. Nevertheless, they conclude as well that all the seven characteristics have positive effect on differentiation, market performance and financial performance. In this respect, ability to create rational customer experiences through rational skills is better than nothing. However, focusing on both rational and emotional aspects will maximize the customer experience as well as business performance.

As discussed, Grønholt et al. (2015) highlight the significance of CEM for business success. However, CEM cannot substitute a good product or service with a bargain price (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). In other words, traditional marketing mix variables, such as product and price, are taken for granted and CEM is only an additional way to differentiate a company from its rivals. However, the case company has focused on the traditional factors for long, and thus emphasizing customer experience is relevant.

This thesis aims to identify the correct actions for better customer experience and CEM in particular. The objective is relevant, since customer experience literature is "in its infancy"

(Johnston and Kong, 2011) while CEM literature is defined as scarce (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Alternatively, Lemon and Verhoef argue that the concept of customer experience is merely a modern synthesis based on well-established concepts, such as customer satisfaction and service quality. Consequently, the challenge is not the ambiguity of the concept, but rather the appropriate utilization of it. In other words, each company needs to identify the right approaches for better customer experience together with their own customers. Therefore, it is relevant to study the specific customer preferences empirically, and then find the most applicable theories to support the results. Additionally, Lemon and Verhoef argue the B2B markets are unfamiliar with the implementing activities of CEM, which was supported by the findings of Grønholt et al. (2015) as well. Finally, in order to implement CEM successfully a systematic way to gather customer perceptions should be conducted (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Therefore, the empirical part of this study could lead the way towards the systematic and customer oriented practice in the future.

2.2 Customer service

This section offers theoretical understanding for customer service. The previous topic, customer experience, offers the right perspective to this section, since the main target of this thesis is to improve customer experience by means of customer service. Generally, customer service is the activity or process, which creates customer experiences through personal interpretations (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Shostack (1982) defines customer service as intangible value created together with the customer through employee's skills. However, the general concept of customer service is well-known and diffused, and thus new approaches are needed in order to gain a competitive advantage from it (Gebauer et al., 2012). The prevalence of customer service increases the competition and sets higher standards. Therefore, neglectful implementation of customer service is insufficient at present, and comprehensive understanding of the concept is required for mastering the process.

The structure of this section is introduced here. First, the importance and different definitions of customer service are discussed in 2.2.1. Furthermore, the section (2.2.2) reviews different dimensions of customer service in order to simplify the measuring of customer service performance. Two implementation approaches, efficiency and relational, are presented in 2.2.3. Both approaches are supported by relevant tools, which are service blueprinting and relational dialogue. In addition, the connection between internal capabilities and customer service performance is discussed in 2.2.4. More specifically, the concept of service profit chain is presented in order to demonstrate this connection. Since communication and knowledge management are essential for successful implementation of customer service, these concepts are introduced in 2.2.5. Finally, customer orientation and customer service orientation are discussed in 2.2.6. Utilizing the right business orientation through organizational culture is essential, since every function is responsible for delivering high-quality customer service.

2.2.1 Importance and conceptual definitions

Parasuraman reports already in 1998 that competition, globalization and demanding customers drive companies to seek competitiveness from elsewhere than traditional marketing mix, for instance from customer service. Service development among manufacturers is motivated by high product competition, increased significance of customer value and constant need for profit growth (Gebauer et al., 2012). In addition, they state that service-driven manufacturing is one of the most important developments in modern industrial business management. Customer service is directly linked to the market performance and increased profit of the company (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007). For instance, McCrory et al. (2017) report that 70 per cent of customers in total leave due to unsatisfactory customer service.

Additionally, rapid innovation, shorter product life cycles and ever-changing customer needs have made customer service necessary for survival of companies (Setia et al., 2013). Therefore, companies find it difficult to develop products that meet the customer needs and even good products get obsolete at a short notice. Setia et al. amplify this by explaining that customer service focusing on "what the customers want, the way they want it and when they want it" will help defeat the challenges of the global markets. Furthermore, they argue that 40 per cent of the customers who perceive poor customer service quit making business collaboration. Thus, customer service has a significant impact on business performance by several ways. However, it must be remembered that customer service, similarly with customer experience, is merely an adjunct to the core offering. Therefore, even great customer service offers no substitute for a good offering, especially in the B2B markets (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014).

Although the importance of customer service is clear, improving customer service is less important with tangible offering, such as concrete products (Parasuraman, 1998; Meyer and Schwager, 2007). Both articles report that the reason for this is the difficulty of measuring the quality of intangible offering, such as customer service. Accordingly, customer service is a relevant improvement area for the case company without a doubt, since they deliver additional services, such as customized design, along the core products within the order-delivery process. The aim of the case company is to improve the process around the product and production in order to increase their competitiveness.

The above discussion clearly showed that customer service is important part of B2B business, and the discussion now continues through presenting different definitions for customer service. Before any detailed definitions are presented, it is appropriate to offer an important distinction between service and services. Parasuraman (1998) clarifies these concepts by describing services as "intangible products" and service as a complement of the core offering that can be either product or service. In other words, services refer to countable offering and service is the process along the delivery. In order to be precise, this thesis uses *customer service* as a synonym for service. In terms of the case company, services could refer to offerings such as mechanical design or additional factory acceptance testing (FAT), while customer service refers to the supporting action during the order-delivery process, which includes communication and organization of the process, for instance. The following paragraphs discuss about the importance and definition of customer service, while pure services are excluded from the scope.

Regardless of the importance and prevalence of customer service, some might argue that customer service is an ambiguous concept without a clear and comprehensive definition, which is close to the truth (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Service literature includes many different definitions, which have been evolved over the years. Moreover, different perspectives might change the meaning of customer service (Edvarsson et al., 2005). For instance, customers and companies might define customer service in a different way due to their perspectives. In fact, Johnston and Kong define these perspectives as "provided customer service from the operation's point of view" and "perceived customer service from the customers' point of view". However, they add that it is difficult to find an agreed definition due to the tremendous amount of available services from vast range of different type of organizations. Nevertheless, following paragraphs explain customer service and offer insights into the compositions of it.

The definition and viewpoint of customer service has changed over the years since 1960s. Gebauer et al. (2012) review the history and report customer service was first a minor part of marketing mix. Later, the definition evolved to "management philosophy", and finally, to "business in its own right". Conversely, Parasuraman (1998) claim that B2B customer service has long been associated with production-related factors, including delivery time and other easily measureable attributes. However, he reports that over the years the definition has evolved towards a softer meaning, which emphasizes customer interaction. In fact, the customer interaction enables value creation, which is seen as the heart of B2B customer service at present (Edvarsson et al., 2005).

Modern understanding of customer service is based on a difference in resources (Lusch et al., 2008). As per their theory of service-dominant logic, customer service is created by means of operant resources, such as employees' skills. More specifically, customer service is "application of specialized competencies", including knowledge and skills, that benefit the other party (Lusch and Vargo, 2014 p. 12; Lusch and Nambisan, 2015). These competencies are defined as operant in nature, they are embedded in humans, and they are utilized through interaction. On the contrary, producing goods requires operand resources, which are tangible and solid (Lusch et al., 2008).

Shostack (1982) distinguish service potential from the actual rendering of service. Service potential arises from resources and competencies, whereas rendering refers to the utilization of these resources. She clarifies this by giving an example of a barber: the potential for service is embedded in the barber's capabilities and the actual service is created together with the customer. Importantly, the internal capabilities cannot anticipate the actual service in detail, because the customer is an important part of the process. Thus, every haircut is different. Although this example is from the B2C market, customers participate in service processes in the B2B markets as well, making each relationship unique. This is a clear similarity with the concept of customer experience.

Commonly, customer service is described as a process, which includes the application of competencies (Parasuraman, 1998; Johnston and Kong, 2011). This process is unique, since good customer service is not "one size fits all" (Carter, 2014). Johnston and Kong amplify that the process consists of operations that the customer participates in and collaborates with the company. This approach is supported by McLean-Conner (2006) who claims that customer service integrates people, processes and technologies together through interaction. Accordingly, the interaction is again playing a major role in customer service process. In more detail, the interaction and utilization of competencies enable customer service, which lead to creation of customer value, since the customer company receives solutions for its problems (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015). Altogether, the purpose of the process is to create value for the customers by means of operant resources, in addition to the core offering. The customer service process results in perceived customer experience (Johnston and Kong, 2011).

Gebauer et al. (2012) take a stand in value creation by dividing customer service into two different approaches, which are exploitation and exploration. The former means incremental improvement of existing offering and processes that resembles the case of this thesis. Furthermore, exploitation approach is similar to the idea of customer service. In contrast, exploration approach refers to new ways to create value through services. Similarly with the definition of services, the idea of exploration approach is to create business offering by means of service. Therefore, exploration is neither a process nor a supplement of the core offering, and hence out of the scope of this thesis.

Goldstein et al. (2002) offer another point of view for customer service by dividing it in components. The aim is not to nullify the previous definitions, instead, the component approach only separates the building blocks of customer service, as well as the process itself. This approach might help companies to improve certain parts of the whole process. Within the article of Goldstein et al., they argue that customer service consists of even thousands of components, including people skills, processes, and materials that need to appropriately integrate to the planned service. They compare the service components with physical components of a product. However, the problem is that these components should be designed coherently and to meet the customer needs. Moreover, since the customer only perceives the overall customer service, without knowing the components in detail, a challenge is to know their preferences in terms of designing each of these components.

As mentioned, customer service is an ambiguous concept without a clear definition. Service literature has many different explanations and approaches for the concept. Nevertheless, as a conclusion of the above discussion, this thesis harmonizes customer service as *an interactive process that utilizes operant resources, such as personal knowledge and skills, in order to create value for the customer.* However, the definition is partially trivial if the customers' perspective is considered, since the perceived value is the only measure that the customer senses. In other words, the discussion related to processes and resources represents the internal point of view, which supports the fact that the definition of customer service depends on the perspective (Edvarsson et al., 2005). The next section concerns measuring of customer service from both internal and external perspectives.

2.2.2 Measuring customer service performance

Since the definition of customer service is more or less clarified within the previous section, the discussion in this section tackles the challenge of measuring customer service performance. Especially in B2B context, a generally accepted method for customer service measurement is missing (Benazić and Došen, 2012). They claim that one of the reasons for this lack is the specificity of B2B services. In addition, the task of measuring is difficult, since customer service is intangible by nature, which induces subjective perceptions among the customers (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007). Moreover, these customer perceptions are not based on the service process itself, but rather on the emerged customer experience (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Consequently, even the best possible service process might not result in valuable perceptions or benefits for the customer. A challenge in measuring customer service is a lack of relevant theoretical and empirical studies considering the B2B markets and professional services (Woo and Ennew, 2005). For instance, the model of SERVQUAL by Parasuraman (1998) is well-known in the field of customer service, but it is originally created for the B2C markets.

For these reasons, the following paragraphs describe different approaches for measuring customer service performance, including the different perspectives of a company and customer. Importantly, the discussion includes different dimensions of customer service, which simplifies its measuring. In other words, customer service is first divided into smaller dimensions that companies can measure, since customer service is too complex to measure as a whole (Woo and Ennew, 2005). The following discussion includes 1) a distinction between operational and perceived customer service, 2) a concept of service quality as well as SERVQUAL instrument to measure it, and 3) measurable dimensions of B2B customer service.

To begin with, it is appropriate to explain the distinction between operational and perceived customer service, and to give insights on how these can be measured effectively. As Johnston and Kong (2011) define them, the operational perspective for measuring customer service performance emphasizes internal point of view, whereas perception approach stresses customers' point of view from the same process. In terms of this thesis, both perspectives are taken into account, but customers' point of view is highlighted, since this approach is more customer oriented. Further, the empirical research of this paper focuses on understanding the customer's voice under the topic of customer service performance.

In more detail, the operational perspective refers to the internal operations that design and enable customer service process through input resources (Johnston and Kong, 2011). These resources might be labor, materials, tools, information, for instance. The Figure 8 below illustrates how these internal operations interact with the customer. The overlapping area demonstrates the customer service process, which is a co-creative set of touch points that create service experiences to the customer. Johnston and Kong illuminate additionally that customer service is an activity or operational process, while customer experience is the personal interpretation from the customer service process. As a result, operational customer service performance can be separated from customer perceptions, and thus measured individually. In detail, they state the measurement of operational customer service is based on a comparison between delivered service performance and specification of responsibilities and duties.

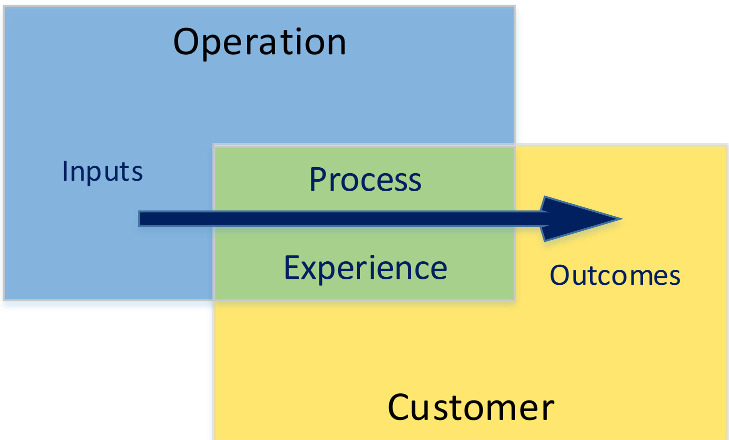

Figure 8. An illustration of the operational and customer perspectives as well as their interactive relationship. The green area refers to customer service. (Johnston and Kong, 2011)

Furthermore, the arrow in the Figure 8 indicates the direction and aim of the whole customer service delivery. In detail, Johnston and Kong (2011) explain that the input resources first interact with the customer, which then results in outcomes ("service received"). After the process, the customer compares the own critical needs and preferences with the actual received service, and creates an idea of perceived value. Finally, they argue that this customer value, combined with direct emotional experiences from the process, defines the perceived customer service performance. Parasuraman (1998) inserts the observation that perceived customer service relies on both the actual outcome and the customer service process itself.

Although the concept of perceived customer service performance is personal and ambiguous, this perspective is possible to measure as well. In fact, Johnston and Kong (2011) emphasize the significance of measuring of the customer perspective, since the operational perfection might not result in customer value or high customer experience. Further, measuring the customer's perspective is not difficult, since the customer continuously measures the service quality (Martin, 1992). He also argues that the customer mostly shapes the idea of supplier's performance based on service quality. Therefore, no matter how good the internal processes are, perceived service quality has the strongest impact on customer satisfaction. More specifically, high perceived service quality is connected with customer satisfaction, loyalty and long-term customer relationships (Gounaris, 2017). Further, since customer relationship is the core of B2B customer service, Gounaris suggests companies to measure perceived customer service performance. In this respect, this thesis will identify the case company's customer's preferences and perceptions in terms of customer service performance and customer experience before the process is improved.

In addition to operational and customer perspectives, Johnston and Clark (2005, p. 4-31) mention organizational perspective as an approach to customer service measurement. They argue that successful service operation requires both satisfied customers and meeting the organizational needs, such as financial or strategical objectives. Service operations management is defined as the main responsible for this approach. However, the organizational perspective is excluded from the scope of this thesis, since the main purpose of this paper is to improve customer service and customer experience from the customers' point of view in particular. Therefore, the basis of measuring customer service performance of the case company is operational and customer perspectives.

Another approach for measuring customer service performance is service quality. Especially service companies pursue high service quality, since it dictates the market success (Benazić and Došen, 2012). Grönroos (1984) studied service quality among the pioneers, and reports that the total service quality is divided in two sides: 1) Technical quality and 2) functional quality. The former refers to the outcome of the service process, and hence not emphasized in this thesis. Nevertheless, the functional quality means the quality of the service process, which is the focus of this study. In other words, Grönroos defines functional quality as "how the service is provided". Functional service quality is then seen as quality of interaction rather than part of the offering. Hence, this approach has similarities to the distinction between services and customer service (see 2.2.1). Furthermore, the theory by Grönroos is similar to the Valvio's (2010, p. 79) distinction between hard and soft quality. Valvio argues that hard service quality is easily measurable, while soft service quality cannot be measured.

Grönroos' model is echoed by Donabedian's model that offers three dimensions for measuring service quality (Benazić and Došen, 2012). These dimensions are service potential, process and results. They create a framework for measuring customer service performance from the customer's point of view. This updated model adds service potential to Grönroos' original model. Service potential includes organizational capabilities for delivering customer service. Benazić and Došen argue that service potential is especially needed in the complex B2B markets, since business customers find it difficult to assess the service quality in advance. They state that companies need to focus on all the three dimensions if they want to improve perceived service quality.

Valvio (2010, p. 79) divides service quality in hard and soft quality. More specifically, hard service quality refers to anything that is possible to measure. These quantitative matters, such as time span and cost, are mostly based on resources. Soft service quality, in turn, is difficult to measure or even define. Nevertheless, soft service quality is human-based and emerges from the interactions between people. Importantly, Valvio reports that both are critical in terms of creating a competitive advantage through customer service. However, soft service quality seems to be even more important for competitiveness, since it is difficult to imitate. Altogether, the measurable side of customer service, hard service quality, is less important than soft service quality, which is, in turn, difficult to measure.

Parasuraman (1998) defines service quality as comparison between customer's expectations and actual service performance. Similarly, Grönroos (1984) describe customer service expectations and perceived customer service as two variables of service quality. As discussed, service quality has inspired many scholars over the years to create models and tools for measuring and improving customer service (Woo and Ennew, 2005). The difference between these service quality approaches and the previously discussed operational and customer's perspectives is that service quality combines the actual service performance and perceived customer service together. In other words, measuring merely operational service performance offers valuable information; however, it considers only the internal point of view. The same problem of one-sidedness is salient in measuring the customer's point of view as well. This creates a challenge for improving customer service, since internal and external information are not integrated (Parasuraman, 1998).

In order to apply to the measurement of service quality, Parasuraman (1998) introduced the SERVQUAL instrument. The main principle of this instrument is to compare customers' expectations and perceptions of customer service. These perceptions are closely related to company's customer service performance (see Figure 10). The original version of the SERVQUAL instrument included ten dimensions, but Parasuraman (1998) reduced them to five generic dimensions, which are:

1. Reliability
2. Responsiveness
3. Assurance
4. Empathy
5. Tangibles

Parasuraman (1998) further explains the dimensions as follows. *Reliability* means "the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately". *Responsiveness* refers to "willingness to help customers and provide prompt service". *Assurance* is "knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence". *Empathy* means "caring and individualized attention the firm provides its customers". *Tangibles* refer to "appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials".

This instrument has received criticism over the years from both theoretical and empirical point of views (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007; Woo and Ennew, 2005). For instance, Caceres and Paparoidamis elaborate these dimensions are not generic and should be defined industry-specific. Moreover, the instrument was originally designed for the B2C markets and it lacks focus on the service outcome (Woo and Ennew, 2005). Gounaris (2005) states that B2B services are more specific and technology driven, and thus SERVQUAL is not applicable for this environment, since it emphasizes soft and relational aspect. Despite the critique, Woo and Ennew report measuring of service quality is usually based on SERVQUAL or its variants, which illustrates that the instrument is widely adapted. However, it is still unclear if the instrument as such is applicable in the B2B markets and further research is required to proof its functionality (Parasuraman, 1998). Therefore, this thesis investigated if the SERVQUAL dimensions are applicable for B2B environment. The results are discussed in more profound in the chapter 3.

Regardless, the SERVQUAL dimensions offer a simple basis for understanding and measuring the gap between customer service expectations and perceptions, which is required for measuring and improving service quality in general. Furthermore, Woo and Ennew (2005) argue that the SERVQUAL focuses on customer service within the process, neglecting the outcomes, which is well-aligned with the target of this thesis. Therefore, the dimensions are relevant theoretical framework for this study, although there might exist others as well.

As discussed, the SERVQUAL instrument is not sufficient for every environment. Indeed, especially within project environments service quality dimensions are *coordination, lead time, innovation and responsiveness* (Aloini et al., 2013). These dimensions emphasize the efficiency of the project as well as the outcome, but the human perspective is less focused. A more comprehensive model for measuring service quality would be INDSERV (Gounaris, 2005). This model consists of four dimensions, which are 1) potential quality, 2) hard quality, 3) soft quality, and 4) output quality. He clarifies these so that potential quality refers to the customer's knowledge of the suppliers customer service capabilities, which is especially important in the highly uncertain B2B markets. Hard quality is related to the process. In other words, timely delivered solutions according the customer needs during the process improve service quality. Soft quality means the interpretations from the actual touch points. This is most relevant for this thesis, since customer experience emerges similarly from the interactive touch points. Successful human-to-human interaction is the basis of soft quality. Finally, he argues that the output quality is extremely important in the B2B markets. In other words, the final output of the process matters most for the B2B customers. This notion strengthens the fact that SERVQUAL is not sufficient for the B2B markets.

Grönroos (1984) studied service quality as well and reports the total service quality is divided in two sides: 1) Technical quality, and 2) functional quality. The former refers to the outcome of the service process. Whereas the functional quality means the quality of the service process, which is the focus of this study. In other words, Grönroos defines functional quality as "how the service is provided". Service is then seen as interaction rather than part of the offering. Hence, this approach is similar to the distinction between services and customer service (see 2.2.1). Additionally, functional quality has similarities to soft quality of INDSERV instrument.

Since functional service quality is ambiguous and difficult to measure as such, another conceptual model of service quality can be utilized in order to identify smaller dimensions of service (Woo and Ennew, 2005). The Figure 9 below presents the six different components of B2B service quality. Further, the figure illustrates their conclusion that service quality leads to customer satisfaction. The product/service exchange is a part of the original model, but it refers to technical quality, and thus not emphasized. Additionally, financial exchange is not important for this thesis, since sales operations are excluded from the scope.

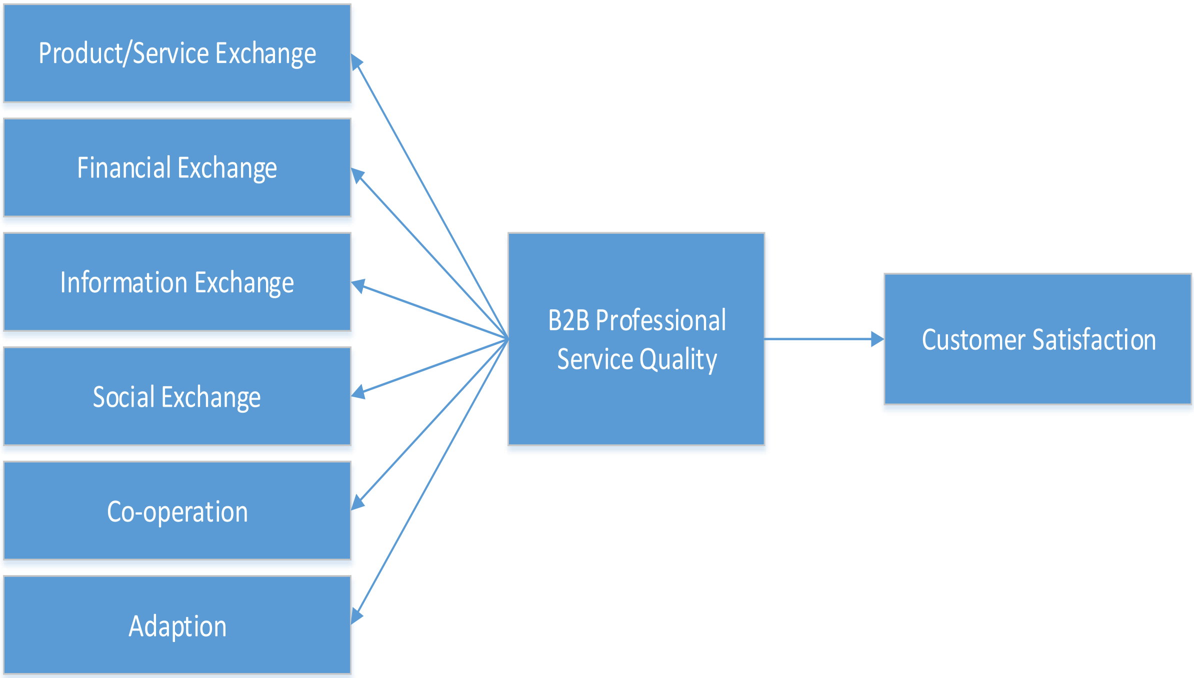

Figure 9. The six dimensions of service quality in the B2B markets. (adapted, Woo and Ennew, 2005)

In order to clarify the dimensions of service quality (Figure 9), we explain the major characteristics of each as Woo and Ennew (2005) define them. First, *information exchange* means frequency and quality of interactive communication. This mutual knowledge sharing and interaction is essential for the B2B problem solving (Woo and Ennew, 2005), and customer service (Edvarsson et al., 2005). *Financial exchange*, in turn, represent monetary exchange and the process around these activities. For instance, recording billing information properly is seen as a positive activity in terms of professional financial exchange. *Social exchange* is the core of relationship building that creates mutual trust, empathy and ease of making business collaboration. However, building the long term B2B relationships and high quality service requires both *co-operation* and *adaption*. The former means collaborative behavior such as joint problem solving and reciprocity, whereas the latter denotes making compromises. Altogether, these components of service quality simplify the concept in a way that might offer help for measuring customer service performance step by step. In addition, these dimensions are compared to the customer survey results in order to find equivalences.

In order to broaden the scope of service quality measurement from the original expectation-perception gap to the overall customer service process, Parasuraman (1998) presents the model of service shortfalls. The idea is to clarify the seller-customer interaction and enable effective measurement of customer service. This model demonstrates the interrelationships between organizational capabilities and customer expectations, as seen in Figure 10. The idea of the model is that by gathering information related to different measures (the blue boxes), is possible to identify the gaps (the orange rounds). These gaps represent the problems of service quality, and Parasuraman (1998) argue that by closing these gaps, service quality will improve. As a result, the first step of improving service quality is to measure relevant areas in order to gather information about discrepancies within the system.

Therefore, the empirical research of this thesis aims to understand both the customers' service expectations and seller's understanding of these expectations. Customer survey and functional focus groups are utilized in order to collect the data. Consequently, market information gap (see Figure 10) is identified by comparing the results. This analysis gave clear improvement areas, which can be found in the section 3.5.

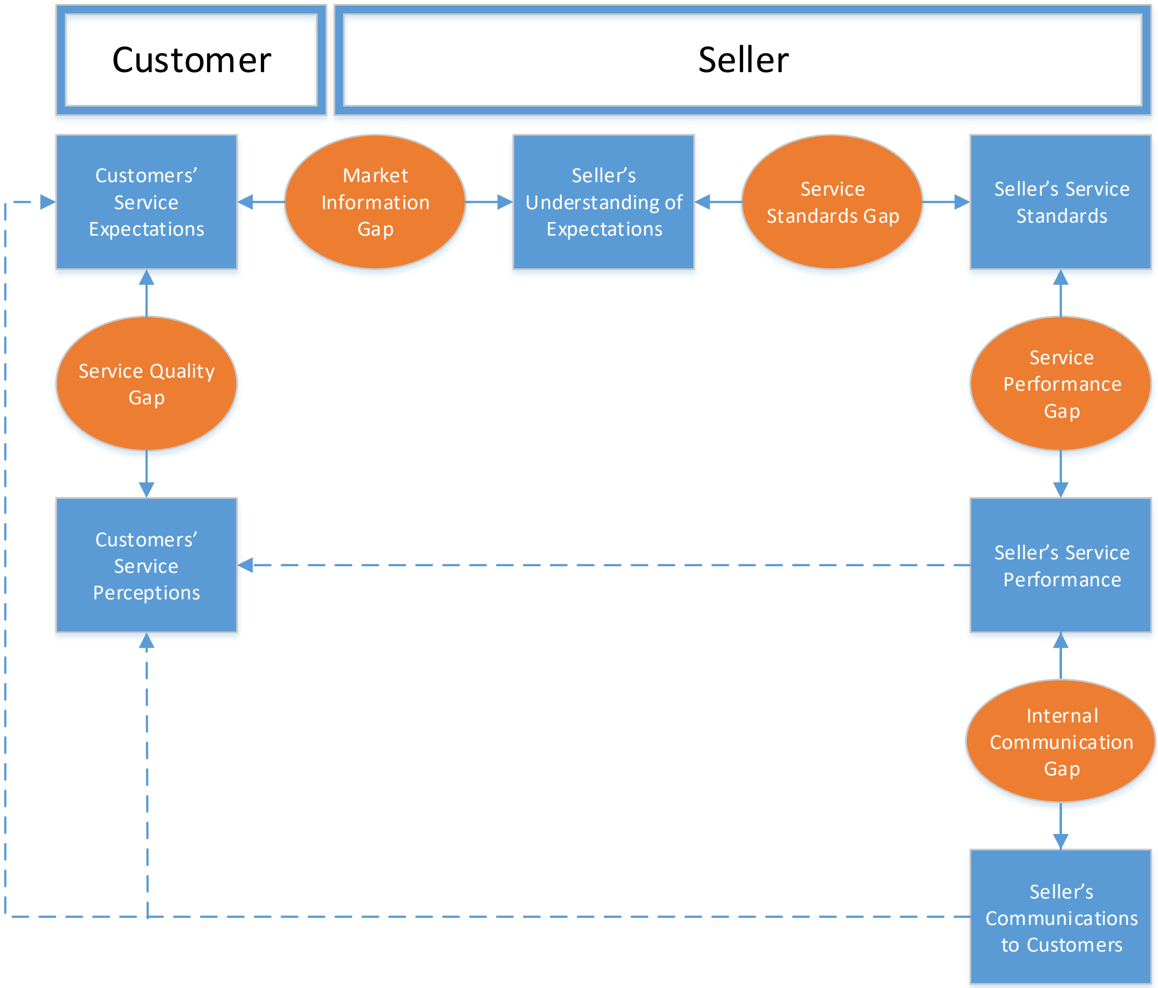

Figure 10. The gap model by Parasuraman (1998). This thesis focuses on the service quality gap and market information gap, since both of them are closely related to customers.

As it was discussed, customer service perceptions are closely related to firm's customer service performance (Figure 10). Further, Setia et al. (2013) report customer service performance is based on two capabilities: 1) Customer orientation capability and 2) customer response capability. Therefore, these capabilities have direct impact on perceived customer service. Thus, the two capabilities might emerge as root causes of service quality, in addition to the dimensions of SERVQUAL or its variants. Specifically, these capabilities might help to measure customer service performance. However, as it was discussed in the section 2.1.1, measuring only internal capabilities is a limited approach, since customer is always a part of the service process (Shostack, 1982).

Although the literature acknowledges many different approaches for measuring customer service, Heskett (1994) remind that the most important thing is to focus on the customers. In fact, he argues that companies need to measure such indicators that are most valued by the customers in particular. In other words, the whole process of measuring customer service should be conducted *with* the customers and based on their needs.

In summary, this section presented different dimensions of customer service that might assist in measuring customer service performance or understanding it. The reason for this approach is that measuring customer service performance as such is challenging. In other words, measuring customer service performance is less difficult if the concept is divided into these dimensions. Furthermore, the analysis of the dimensions generates clear improvement areas for the company in a way that enables the identification of improvement actions. In addition, different perspectives must be taken into account, since customers and companies observe service process differently, for instance. Consequently, the empirical research of this thesis aims to measure multiple gaps and perspectives. More specifically, the customer survey that was conducted as a part of this thesis aims to measure the service quality gap between the customers' service expectations and actual service perceptions. In addition, case company's understanding of expected customer service was identified by means of functional focus groups. Finally, the internal understanding and customers' expectations were compared in order to find relevant improvement areas. The different dimensions that are presented in this section of measuring customer service support the analysis of the collected data, and offer insights of appropriate improvement approaches.

2.2.3 Two approaches for better implementation

Implementing customer service can be approached from efficiency or relational aspects (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015). Efficiency approach is associated with mechanistic operations and there is a clear distinction between supplier's and customer' activities (Fließ and Kleinaltenkamp, 2004). Further, they define that efficiency aspect emphasizes standardization of service processes. On the contrary, relational approach stresses people centricity, unique human interactions and customer relationships as a basis for excellent customer service. In fact, recent service literature supports value creation by relational processes and dialogical interactions (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015).

However, Ylimäki and Vesalainen (2015) report that both approaches are required in terms of customer service. They explain that efficiency approach relies on the market mechanisms, whereas relational approach emphasizes value generation, continuous improvement, learning and business relationships. In particular, customer service during co-development processes, such as ETO projects, requires efficient operations in relational processes and vice versa. For instance, endless conversation reduces productivity, and thus efficiency is needed in order to achieve the objectives. In this respect, they claim that the combination of both approaches is the secret for great customer service in the B2B markets.

Seamless collaboration and knowledge based interactions are important for B2B customer service (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015). Further, in order to achieve this core through high efficiency and functioning relations, companies need to integrate service blueprinting, stage-gate model, dialogue and joint learning. In this section, this thesis will present service blueprinting as an example of efficiency seeking method, and relational dialogue as a relational method. Service blueprinting was selected, since it emphasizes customer involvement and overall customer service, while stage-gate model enhances creativity (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015). Dialogue was selected, since they emphasize it in their article and joint learning comes in parallel. In other words, the interactive dialogue is the basis for many other phenomena, such as joint learning and co-creation. Although these approaches are presented individually, Ylimäki and Vesalainen highlight the fact that both aspects need to be taken into account.

2.2.3.1 Service blueprinting

As mentioned above, efficiency in customer service is required in the B2B markets. Efficient customer service distinguishes and standardizes internal and external operations as well as emphasizes analytical and effective solving of joint issues (Fließ and Kleinaltenkamp, 2004). However, they report that the customer is always the other party of a service operation, which makes it challenging to manage the efficiency. In detail, the efficiency problem may emerge from customers' flow of information, delayed or unqualified contribution, or changing or uncertain customer needs. In order to manage the service process efficiently, Shostack (1982) presents the service blueprinting model.

Service blueprinting was initially designed for controlling service processes (Shostack, 1982). The model helps to understand the whole service process and aims to create common ground between the supplier and the customer. Therefore, service blueprinting integrates the customer in the process as well as enhances communication by improved common ground (Olsson and Olsson, 2000). Furthermore, service blueprinting enables understanding of hidden supporting operations within the service process (Bitner et al., 2008). As a result, the customer gets a better understanding of the created value, and thus the value proposition of the company is improved. Consequently, Bitner et al. state that service blueprinting is currently utilized in new service development, improving existing service and supporting cross-functional communication within the customer-centric projects. Furthermore, they argue that service blueprinting has evolved over the years in a way that makes it applicable to customer experience design as well.

The core method of service blueprinting is to *visualize* the operations and customer touch points (Shostack, 1982; Bitner et al., 2008). As an outcome, visualization of operations creates a chain or map that clarifies the whole process. The outcome is similar to Porter's value chain (1985, p. 31-45); however, the value chain emphasizes internal value adding operations, whereas service blueprinting stresses customer's point of view and customer-company interactions (Bitner et al., 2008). Overall, the visual outcome simplifies the service process, including the underlying supporting activities, to both the company and the customer. Furthermore, the method transforms tacit process knowledge into explicit form, which enables standardization of the service process. This standardization enhances the efficiency of the process.

Bitner et al. (2008) define five components for a typical "service blueprint", which are presented in the Table 2. These components clarify the different types of operations that need to be visualized in the service blueprint.

Table 2. The five components of a typical "service blueprint". In addition, the table presents explanations and practical. (Adapted, Bitner et al., 2008)

Component	Explanation	Case company's example
Customer actions	All the customer's contributions to the service process.	Sharing of engineering requirements for the supplier
Visible contact employee actions	Direct face-to-face interactions between the customer interface of the company and the customer.	A kick-off meeting, factory acceptance testing (FAT)
Invisible contact employee actions	All the indirect interactions as well as any other customer interface employee's activity that is part of the service process, but invisible.	Phone calls, preparing to the face-to-face meetings, cross-functional communication
Support processes	All the supporting operations carried out by employees that are away from the frontline.	Engineering, production planning, quality management
Physical evidence	All the tangibles that the customer perceives during the interactions.	Minutes of meetings, FAT serving, informative letters

Service blueprinting is applicable for many approaches, including controlling and designing customer service as well as designing customer experience (Shostack, 1982; Bitner et al., 2008). Furthermore, Bitner et al. state that the most significant strength of service blueprinting is its flexibility and adjustability to different purposes. However, service blueprinting might be too dedicated to efficiency approach. Although the method increases understanding of the whole process and emphasizes the customer's point of view, it aims to standardize and simplify the process in general. This aim enhances the efficiency of the process, but may lead to dissatisfied customers (Fließ and Kleinaltenkamp, 2004). Since B2B customers might appreciate different service processes (Carter, 2014), standardizing the operations causes difficulties in meeting the specific customer's requirements. In fact, Lusch et al. (2008) note that some companies, which have taken the efficiency approach too far, are utilizing machines within the interaction with the customers. Moreover, Fließ and Kleinaltenkamp add that standardizing activities is efficient in terms of productivity and cost only if the target group of customers is large enough.

2.2.3.2 Relational dialogue

The previous section covered the efficiency approach, whereas this explains the relational approach. Relational dialogue refers to an orientation towards mutual and interactive communication, which includes trust, learning and adaption (Ballantyne, 2004; Varey and Ballantyne, 2006; Lusch et al., 2008). This orientation aims to improve the collaborative relationship with the company and the customer (Varey and Ballantyne, 2006; Ballantyne, 2004). Standardization of the service process is no longer the aim, but instead, the customer relationship, interaction and people-centric operations are emphasized. Relational dialogue is presented as an example method for the relational approach. Although Ylimäki and Vesalainen (2015) argue that both approaches need to be taken into consideration equally, this thesis aims to improve customer experience and customer service in terms of soft factors, such as communication and behavior. In addition, the efficiency approach is already a common practice within the case company's operations. Therefore, the relational approach might offer valuable insights for the case companys of this thesis.

An important difference between efficiency and relational approaches is the way companies are seeking competitive advantages (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015). In fact, efficiency approach stresses internal competitive advantages, whereas relational approach emphasizes collaborative advantages (Dyer and Singh, 1998). These collaborative advantages create benefits for both parties, which requires co-creative operations. As a consequence, they argue that relational approach offer possibilities for sustainable competitive advantage.

Ylimäki and Vesalainen (2015) offer practical point of view for utilizing customer relationships. They argue that value propositions can be co-created together with the customer in order to benefit both parties. This co-creation process requires open and analytical negotiations, transparency, information sharing and common understanding of objectives and goals. They report that the main principle of the relational process is to achieve balance between the parties' interests. In other words, the co-creation of value proposition seek for "win-win" situation. In this respect, they note that the relational co-creation process must be interactive, dialogical and process oriented.

Additionally, service-dominant logic (SDL) and relationship marketing literature in general emphasize co-creation, relational development process and dialogical interaction (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015). A relational process that utilizes these characteristics aims for effectiveness to respond to the customer needs, rather than efficiency of the delivery process (Lusch et al., 2008). In detail, this effective responding requires understanding the customers within their own business context and in accordance with their unique experiences. Therefore, interaction and dialogue in particular are emphasized as enablers of relational approach.

Dialogue is a process of mutual communicative interaction between the company and the customer (Ballantyne, 2004). Importantly, within dialogs the supplier is not a dominant party communicating *with* the customer, but instead interaction is equal *between* the two sides. In detail, he defines dialog as "interactive process of learning together". However, dialog is not a method for communication, but rather an orientation to it (Varey and Ballantyne, 2006). Moreover, dialog is more than everyday conversations (Ballantyne, 2004) or alternating monologues aiming to understand the customer's needs, desires and problems, for instance Lusch et al., 2008).

Lusch et al. (2008) define the foundation of a dialog, which is based on: mutual trust, learning and adaption. However, Ballantyne (2004) reports that trust is rather an outcome of dialogical interaction. Regardless, dialog is definitely a relational approach, since it aims to enhance the collaboration within the relationship. As a result, both productivity in terms of value creation and relationship building are fostered (Varey and Ballantyne, 2006; Ballantyne, 2004).

Varey and Ballantyne (2006) argue that a dialog is essential for companies that desire for social or economic contribution. The underlying mechanism of dialog is to understand customers (Lusch et al., 2008), and especially, the deeper levels of knowledge regarding the business partner (Ballantyne, 2004). By gaining a wide understanding of the hidden issues within customer's business, companies are able to create desired value for their customers (Varey and Ballantyne, 2006). Furthermore, they state that dialogical interaction as a basis of value creation leads to sustainable competitive advantage, since the process is extremely difficult to copy. In addition, Ballantyne (2004) argue that effective relationships require knowledge of the collaborative partner. This "relationship specific knowledge" is mainly tacit by nature, and thus requires a dialog in order to be understood.

Altogether, both efficiency and relational approaches have their own pros and cons. Nevertheless, Ylimäki and Vesalainen (2015) report that both approaches are needed in order to improve customer service. In other words, they claim that these two approaches support each other creating a combination, which is named as "effective relational process". This section offered two practical examples for implementing the approaches: service blueprinting for efficiency, and dialogue for relational approach. Service blueprinting visualizes the service process in order to gain understanding of the process itself. The overall aim is to enhance efficiency by simplifying and standardizing the process. On the contrary, dialogue is relational interaction that aims to foster business relationships and value creation. Varey and Ballantyne (2006) argue that currently the hidden potential of marketing interactions is embedded in dialogical interactions. Importantly, the same combination of efficiency and relational focus might be applicable for customer experience as well. Since customer service is relatively similar concept based on similar fundamentals as customer experience, an improvement approach on the order of effective relational process may function.

2.2.4 Service profit chain

The previous section emphasized customer interface interaction and actual customer service touch points. This section aims to identify the internal process in which customer service is generated, and what circumstances lead to better service in general. In other words, the following discussion clarifies the organizational supportive factors that enable customer service excellence. As Parasuraman (1998) reports, internal capabilities result in perceived customer service, and this section will consider the interrelationship between these. In practice, this section presents a concept of *service profit chain* in order to illustrate the connections between processes that lead to customer service, and finally, revenue growth and profitability.

The service profit chain is a comprehensive framework that illustrates how different internal operations are linked together and how this linear chain is linked to customer satisfaction (Heskett et al., 1994). In other words, the framework demonstrates the way in which company's capabilities turn to customer performance that leads to financial performance (Theoharakis et al., 2009). The principle of the service profit chain is resource based view that emphasizes internal resources as a source of competitive advantage. The Figure 11 represents the original service profit chain framework by Heskett et al.

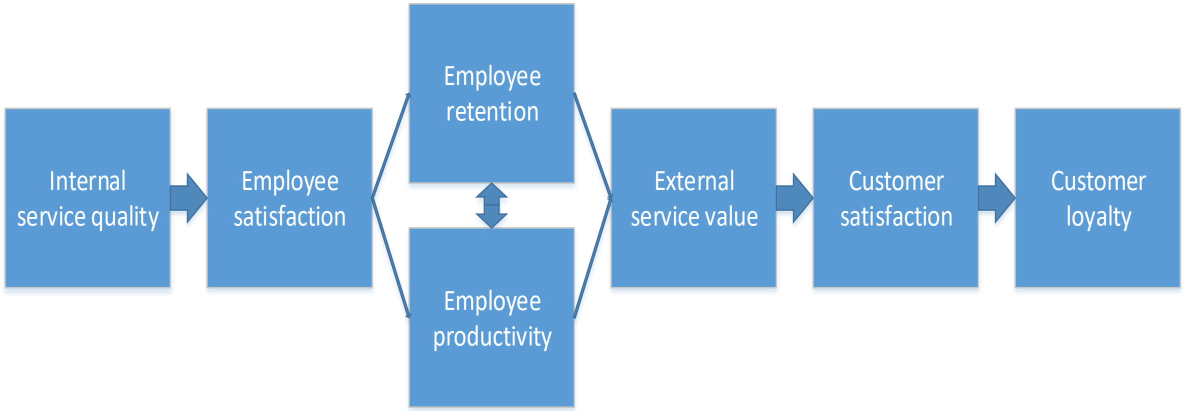

Figure 11. The original service profit chain by Heskett et al. (1994). The end results of the chain, revenue growth and profitability, are excluded in this version. (Adapted)

As seen in the Figure 11, the service profit chain begins with internal service quality, which encompasses work environment, human resource management and supporting tools for customer service. In detail, Heskett et al. amplify work environment as workplace design, job design, attitudes and feelings towards the job, company and co-workers, that all have an impact on employee satisfaction. Furthermore, HR activities, including employee selection, development and rewarding, contribute to employee satisfaction as well. Last but not least, appropriate supporting tools for serving customers are highlighted in this process.

The Figure 11 clearly illustrates that employee satisfaction effects on their loyalty and productivity, which leads to enhanced external service value. In other words, the customer expectations are met and correct value is delivered through service. McCrory et al. (2017) report that employee satisfaction supports service quality, especially with toxic customers. Furthermore, perceived service value increases customer satisfaction that leads to customer loyalty. Finally, this increased loyalty induces retention of purchases that means revenue growth for the company. Although Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007) agree on the link between customer satisfaction and loyalty, they argue that the concept of loyalty in the B2B markets is undefined. Hence, the link between loyalty and profitability & revenue growth might be unsound in the B2B context.

Theoharakis et al. (2009) offer updated service profit chain, which is based on the original framework by Heskett et al. (1994). Their aim is to modify and apply the service profit chain framework to the B2B markets by emphasizing business relationships. Although these two chains are different, the basic logic behind the frameworks is similar: the internal resources create customer value, which lead to financial performance through customer satisfaction and loyalty. The updated service profit chain is presented in the Figure 12 below.

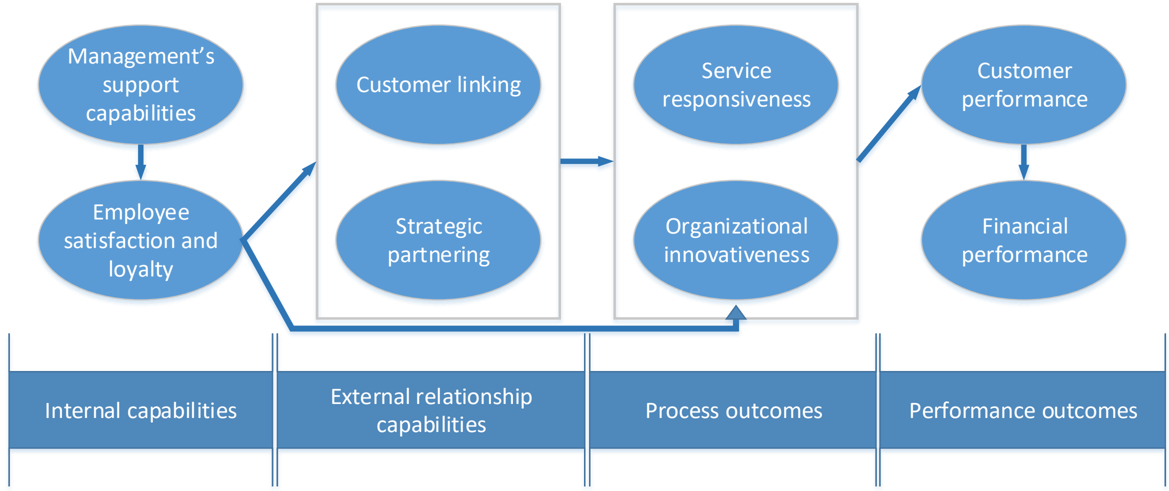

Figure 12. The updated service profit chain by Theoharakis et al. (2009).

A brief comparison between these two frameworks reveal that within the latter framework, the starting point is management's supporting capabilities instead of internal service quality. Employee loyalty is also added together with employee satisfaction. Further, the updated framework also combines external service value, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty from the original framework to one concept: customer performance. Similarly, financial performance is generic and includes both revenue growth and profitability.

However, the most significant difference between the frameworks is how the customer value is created. The framework by Theoharakis et al. (2009) emphasizes relational capabilities on business relationship development. They report that satisfied and loyal employees not only establish and maintain strategic relationships but also enable high service quality and responsiveness. In addition, they discovered employee satisfaction and loyalty result in organizational innovativeness, which means enhanced problem solving, and thus better customer service. In summary, the updated service profit chain highlights the importance of business relationships in customer service rather than merely internal productivity. This claim fits well for this thesis, since the customer relationship approach is significant for customer experience creation as well (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), as it was discussed previously in the section 2.1.4.

After defining the service profit chain, emerges another challenge: increasing satisfaction and loyalty of the own employees. Millard (2006) parallels employee satisfaction and loyalty by passion and commitment to the own work, and states that intangible factors drive them. In fact, employees value "soft" factors in terms of satisfaction, including a trustful work environment and motivational manager. However, they also remind that these factors are difficult but essential to measure among the employees. In this respect, Varca (1999) suggests that management should focus on improving the work environment instead of monitoring the employee's everyday activities or customer interactions.

A practical example of well-functioning work environment is the level of friendliness. Ziegenfuss (2007, p 126) states that within friendly organizations employees help each other. This activity is called internal service, and the level of external customer service can never exceed the level of internal service (Valvio, 2010, p.75). Therefore, the mechanism of internal service supports the idea of service profit chain as well. Further, we might assume that other phenomena could work similarly. For instance, internal friendliness among the employees might directly reflect to the customer interface, and thus improve perceived customer experience. However, these deductions are not validated by the service literature and in-depth empirical research is required.

The work environment is not always healthy and functioning. One cause for low employee satisfaction is high level of stress (Millard, 2006). For instance, the frontstage employees working in the customer interface might find it stressful to receive all the negative customer feedback. Moreover, Millard argue that if the employee is not capable of solving the problems, the negative feedback leads to stress. Varca (1999) agree on this by stating that a lack of right competencies increase employee's stress levels. Importantly, Varca determine that the high stress levels have a direct negative impact on service quality. Thus, work stress decrease both employee satisfaction within the service profit chain and service quality directly. Therefore, stress is a significant factor that needs to be taken into account in order to improve customer service. The backstage can decrease the stress of the customer interface by actively offering support.

In summary, this section explained the process of customer service creation. The basis of the discussion was structured around the service profit chain framework, which illustrates the contribution of internal capabilities to customer service performance. In detail, employee satisfaction and loyalty have a major impact on customer service as well as financial performance. An updated version of the chain was presented and the main difference was the applicability to the B2B markets, since business relationships were emphasized. Further, this section considered the challenge of improving employee satisfaction and loyalty, and noted that for example the work environment and stress have an important role for employee satisfaction and loyalty. Customer participation and better support from backstage employees presented in order to reduce stress of customer service employees in frontstage (=customer interface).

2.2.5 Communication and knowledge management

"Communication is transfer of understanding" (Hayes and Dredge, 1998, p. 41). The communicative interaction is the core of B2B customer service (Woo and Ennew, 2005; Zhu and Zolkiewski, 2016). In order to understand and meet the customer needs during development projects, professional communication is essential (Korkala et al., 2006; Bjarnason and Sharp, 2015). Further, Amrani et al. (2010) amplify that during complex ETO projects the customer shall be integrated in the process in order to enhance communication and knowledge sharing. However, they stress that this external communication is inadequate and internal communication is needed within knowledge intensive projects. In particular, efficient cross-functional communication is significant in terms of successful ETO projects. In other words, cross-functional communication is essential for cross-functional collaboration, which is, in turn, a requirement for complex development projects (Nätti et al., 2006).

Nätti et al. (2006) offer another perspective. They claim that effective communication leads to not only successful projects, but better customer relationships as well. This is due to the importance of "customer-specific knowledge", which is gained by close interaction. In addition to relationship building, possessing customer-specific knowledge improves both customer service (Nätti et al., 2006) and value creation (Hong et al., 2014). Altogether, communication is essential for successful ETO projects in the B2B markets in terms of customer service and value creation. Therefore, the following discussion will explain the concept in detail and give insights for improvement areas.

To begin with, this thesis will clarify the main dimensions of communication and knowledge in general. First, knowledge can be tacit or explicit: Polanyi defines the former as invisible knowledge, whereas the latter refers to codifiable information (Gerler, 2003). In detail, tacit knowledge means complex knowledge, such as human skills and competencies, which cannot be transferred in written form. On the contrary, explicit knowledge such as product requirements can easily be codified and transferred. Customer service and customer experience skills are often tacit and based on the long-term customer relationship, which creates a challenge for this thesis (Steen, 2017).

Second, communication can be formal or informal, which means that communication is performed either through a specific and planned channel or informally without planning (Khan and Khan, 2011). They explain that formal communication often occurs in large organizations and high hierarchies, whereas informal communication is associated with flat and customer-oriented organizations. Furthermore, they state that informal communication fosters customer service capabilities and customer orientation, as well as improves the internal working environment and reduces stress.

Third, communication can be instrumental or expressive: the former means necessary communication that advances the project, whereas the latter type of communication is motivated by personal and social interests rather than project goals (Thomas et al., 2001). Importantly, they state that expressive communication consists of sharing experiences and being humorous, and it occurs often during informal interactions.

In practice, a communication medium is required for knowledge transfer and interaction. The medium means a method or channel for communication, such as face-to-face or e-mail. Korkala et al. (2006) suggest deciding on the right medium for a certain purpose, since they all differ from each other. Media richness theory (MRT) offers assistance for the decision (Daft and Lengel, 1986). They amplify that richness means the medium's ability to achieve mutual understanding, which is measured by the time span. Each medium has a certain level of richness in MRT. For instance, face-to-face is the richest medium, whereas numeric documents are lowest in richness, and thus the fifth medium on the MRT scale. Daft and Lengel define the basis of richness as the ability to transfer rich information, such as body language and behavioral clues, as well as instant feedback. Importantly, they claim that complex problems should be communicated via rich media, whereas standard issues require relatively less richness, and thus so called lean media. In fact, communicating standard issues via rich media might be even inefficient and detrimental as per the MRT. Moreover, Korkala et al. (2006) claim that many companies use e-mail or similar lean medium to solve both standard and complex issues, which result in higher defect rates. Nevertheless, lean media and utilization of information and communication technology (ICT) lower knowledge sharing barriers and improves access to information in general (Hendriks, 1999). In this respect, customer service in order-delivery processes requires multiple media depending on the issue in question. Further, the same media richness theory is applicable for internal communication and cross-functional collaboration as well.

A rich medium is particularly appropriate to customer service and customer experience, since behavioral clues such as tone of voice or facial expressions can be utilized. Indeed, behavior is a significant way to improve customer experience, and thus differentiate from competitors (Bacon, 2004). Furthermore, MRT claims that rich media transfer emotional content as well (Korkala et al., 2006). As a result, extremely important customer emotions can be understood through rich media in order to improve customer experience. In addition, the ability to get instant feedback from the customer is essential for continuous improvement of customer service.

Olsson and Olsson (2000) studied distance communication by reviewing past successes and failures. Their findings are significant for the case company, since all the customers are operating from a distance. Most of them are abroad and the challenge of time-zones is salient. Olsson and Olsson synthesize four different factors that effect on communication:

1. Common ground – A characteristic of the players
2. Coupling in work – A characteristic of the work itself
3. Collaboration readiness – Willingness to communicate
4. Technology readiness – Organizational infrastructure

These factors help to understand the underlying causes for poor communication, and thus enhance customer service improvement as well. Olsson and Olsson (2000) explain that *common ground* refers to “knowledge that the participants have in common, and they are aware that they have it in common”. The concept is similar to cognitive distance, in which the communicative distance between people is evaluated by means of difference in knowledge and competencies (Bjarnason and Sharp, 2015). *Coupling in work* means the complexity of the work itself, which has a direct impact on required communication. Tightly coupled work refers to an ambiguous and interdependent set of tasks, whereas loosely coupled work is routine and clear. *Collaboration readiness* denotes employees’ willingness to communicate and share knowledge. Olsson and Olsson argue that incentive structure must support motivation to collaborate. *Technology readiness* refers to the level of organizational supporting infrastructure, such as adoption of ICT. However, utilization of ICT requires human capabilities in addition to plain tools. Altogether, Olsson and Olsson identified these factors in order to identify causes for poor communication and improve distance communication. The customers of the case company are invariably communicating from a distance, and therefore, these factors might offer assistance for customer service improvement.

The theory by Olsson and Olsson (2000) mainly focuses on facilitating efficient communication by means of presenting possible causes for poor communication. However, Kang and Huyn (2012) emphasize positive customer interactions and the contribution of communication to them. They argue that customer orientation and communication skills are both significant factors for customer interaction. Importantly, the way and manner of the interaction is highlighted instead of the content or infrastructure. Kang and Hyun explain that this is beneficial, since the outcome is positive interaction. Consequently, positive interaction leads to long term relationships with the customers. Finally, they state that these relationships are essential in service marketing.

Although Kang and Hyun (2012) researched the B2C markets, this thesis evaluates their findings valuable, since customer communication occurs between people in the B2B markets as well. They substantiate five different communication styles as well as their impact on customer experience and customer service. The findings are in the following list, and further discussed within the next paragraph.

- Contentious communication has a negative impact on service experience.
- Relaxed behavior and communication improves perceived service experience.
- Open communication enhances trust towards the service provider.
- Attentive behavior in communication result in better customer experience and improved efficiency of customer service.
- Strong impression and memorable experience leads to customer loyalty.

Contentious communication leads to decreased customer experience and dissatisfaction from customer service (Kang and Hyun, 2012). They add also that this type of communication leads to reduced persuasive power and overall effectiveness of the service employee. On the contrary, their empirical study revealed that *relaxed communicative behavior* creates calm and peaceful emotions for customer, and thus improves perceived customer experience. Additionally, they claim that employee's competence and experience enable professional and relaxed approach to communication. Varca (1998) supports this finding by arguing that lack of right competencies leads to work stress that reflects to individual customer service performance. Further, the study indicates that an *open communication* style improves customer experience by enhancing trust between the parties (Kang and Hyun, 2012). Trust is especially important for improving customer experience and customer service, since a customer is willing to share tacit knowledge and personal emotions to a trustworthy partner by dialogical interaction (Lusch et al., 2008). *Attentive behavior in communication* enhances the efficiency of communication, and thus improves the overall customer experience. They note that attentive behavior can be implemented through commiserating empathy and showing commitment to the interaction.

The previous discussion covered mainly communication, whereas the following tackles knowledge management. As a concept, knowledge management is wide and comprises anything that aims to leverage knowledge (Ruggles, 1998). Knowledge, in turn, is defined as "a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight" (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Additionally, they report that knowledge is often embedded in organizational processes, routines, practices and norms. However, knowledge exists still in both human minds and written documents. All in all, both possessing knowledge and knowledge management are essential factors in terms of successful business (Ipe, 2003) and effective service creation (Nätti et al., 2006).

Within this thesis, the purpose of knowledge management is highly related to exploring customer knowledge and exploiting it. This definition is especially applicable for professional service organizations, since gathering knowledge from the customer is an essential operation for customer service (Nätti et al., 2006). However, before the gathered customer knowledge can be utilized, it must be shared within the organization in order to upgrade individual knowledge to organizational knowledge. Such process from exploring customer knowledge to efficient leveraging is a real challenge for companies, but the outcome fosters the current and creates new organizational capabilities.

Nätti et al. (2006) offer a supportive tool for this challenge: key account management. They argue that KAM is appropriate method for communicating and gathering customer knowledge. A channel for interorganizational communication is an important success factor for the interaction and a KAM team could represent this channel. Furthermore, they claim that a key account manager is responsible for sharing the customer knowledge throughout the company. Regardless, efficient knowledge sharing within an organization requires active cross-functional communication, but consequently, ability to create customer experience improves (Bitner et al., 2008).

Although Bitner et al. (2008) agree on the importance of cross-functional perspective, they present service blueprinting as a facilitator for the cross-functional communication. As discussed in this thesis (2.2.3.1), service blueprinting assists to understand the overall process that includes different functions. Furthermore, Bitner et al. add that a "service blueprint" is created in a cross-functional workshop that is based on communication and knowledge sharing between the functions. Similarly, Nätti et al. (2006) notice that team-based work and highly functional organizational structure creates barriers for cross-functional knowledge sharing and collaboration. Therefore, an approach for better cooperation is usually needed within functional organizations. Bitner et al. claim that service blueprinting could be this approach. In addition, they state that service blueprinting enhances management's ability to communicate with functions by the same customer-initiated language. Consequently, utilization of service blueprinting could improve customer service and customer focus within the whole organization.

Efficient cross-functional communication and knowledge sharing between individuals lead to organizational learning (Bartol and Srivastava, 2002). They highlight that knowledge is initially embedded in the individuals and organizational capabilities can only be achieved through communication. The challenge in terms of customer-specific knowledge sharing is the long information chain from the frontline employees, which might result in lost information (Korkala et al., 2006). Khan and Khan report that informal communication enhances sharing of tacit knowledge, which supports organizational learning.

Ipe (2003) identifies four different factors that effect on knowledge sharing in organizations, and presents a model based on the factors. As the Figure 13 illustrates, nature of knowledge, motivation to share and opportunities to share form an overlapping area where knowledge sharing occurs. Importantly, organizational culture covers the other factors, which means that knowledge sharing without a right culture is difficult. Moreover, all the four factors are important, but not sufficient alone. Therefore, the combination of all the factors is the key to success in knowledge sharing. Based on Ipe's model, this thesis presents that organizational culture needs to support knowledge sharing. In particular, customer-specific knowledge must flow through the whole organization in order to create relevant orientation towards the customer. As Ipe argues, organizational culture should identify values for information, support motivation to share and create the required opportunities that are both formal and informal.

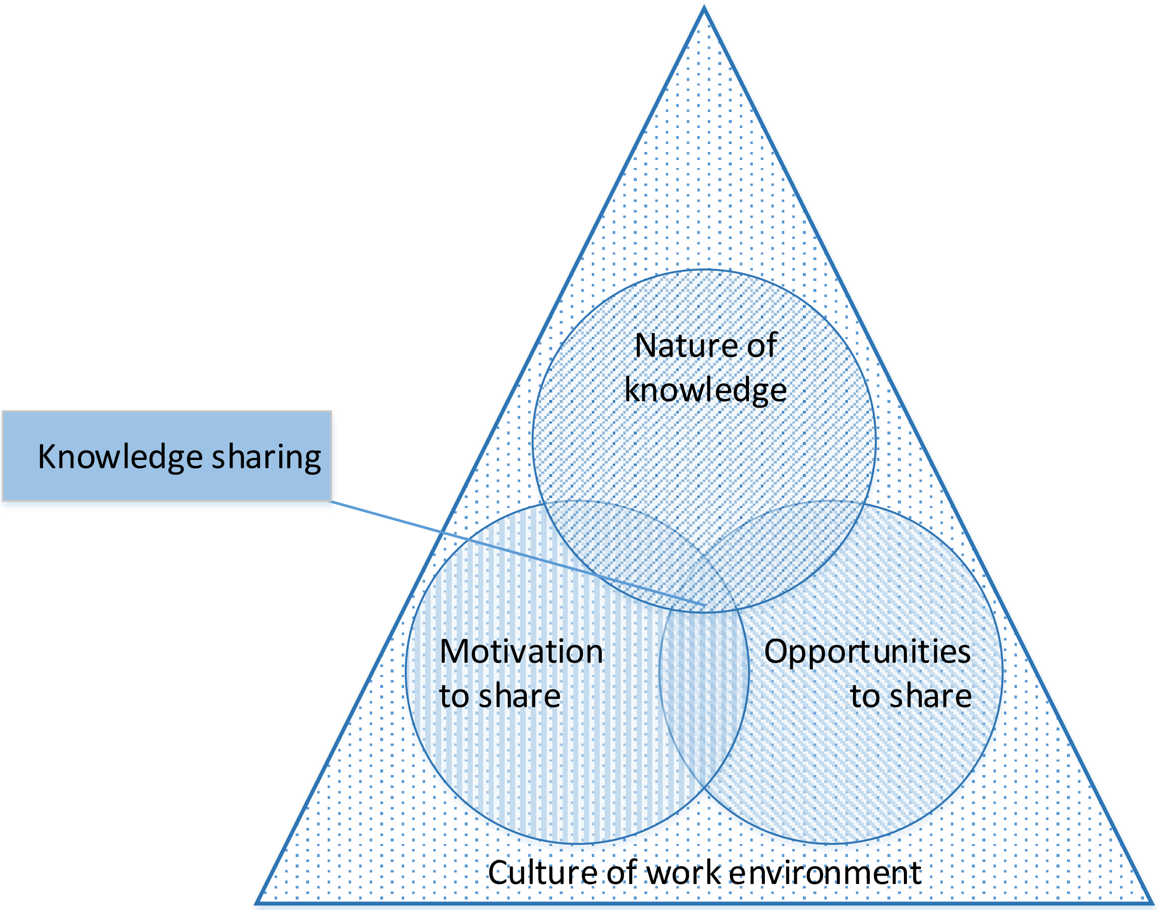

Figure 13. The triangle of knowledge sharing. Importantly, the organizational culture covers the other areas of effective knowledge sharing. (Ipe, 2003)

As this thesis has discussed, companies are seeking for organizational knowledge, and especially knowledge originated from their customers. This requires a process that includes exploring, sharing and learning new knowledge (Ipe, 2003). Finally, such a knowledge management process result in organizational capabilities, including ability to create excellent customer service, to manage long term relationships effectively and to innovate productively (Nätti et al., 2006). Furthermore, the concept of service profit chain (see 2.2.4) is based on organizational capabilities, and thus internal resources and capabilities are the core of customer service as well.

Korkala et al. (2006) suggest that development teams should rely on intense and meaningful communication. This requires utilization of rich media, such as face-to-face meetings. Consequently, the number of misunderstandings and defects decreases, efficiency of the work increases and learning enhances. In addition, they claim that even for agile software development is beneficial to focus on rich communication, although it might prolong the time span of an iteration circle.

In summary, communication and knowledge management play a major role in customer service and customer experience creation. The communication literature recognizes different types of knowledge, media and styles of communication. Further, both geographical and personal distance affect on efficiency of communication. In addition to everyday communication, knowledge management is an important practice in terms of customer service. In general, knowledge flow from customers should be established and managed effectively, which requires gathering and sharing of knowledge. Both key account management and service blueprinting might assist in this process. Finally, an efficient cross-functional communication and knowledge sharing improves organizational learning, and thus organizational capabilities are enhanced. These capabilities can be utilized directly to customer service creation, but they are the basis of service profit chain as well leading to satisfied customers. In this respect, communication and knowledge management are significant factors in terms of customer service and customer experience, and thus they represent a major area for improvements as well.

2.2.6 Appropriate business orientation

In the past, manufacturing capabilities and products were enough for most of the companies; however, a requirement for product-service systems emerged due to increased complexity of the markets (Gebauer et al., 2010). Teboul (2006, p.113) presents a timeline that illustrates the different stages of service evolution. As the Figure 14 shows, importance of service has evolved over the years. The plain *product* was first complemented by additional service, which led to the occurrence of *product-service systems*. Thereafter, customer service begun to displace traditional product-centered manufacturing completely. The outcome of this phenomenon is *customer service orientation*. The next step was to start charging the customers based on *solutions* instead of services during the process. The case company of this thesis aims to improve customer service as a complement to the product, which means that they are currently in the product-service systems -phase. Nevertheless, they desire to upgrade the business to the customer service orientation in order to reduce the focus on the product. Therefore, this section offers insights for future decisions and directions in terms of customer service orientation.

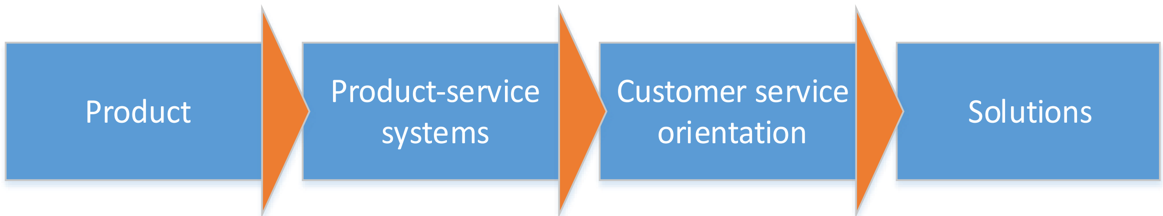

Figure 14. The industrial service life-cycle. The case company is currently transforming from product-service systems to customer service orientation. The figure is an illustration of the theory by Teboul (2006, p.113)

The B2B customers still expect and value high manufacturing performance, but requirement for additional customer service increases constantly (Hong et al., 2014). In addition, they argue that ever changing customer preferences create demand for customer service orientation as a method that assists to meet the customer needs. Furthermore, customer service orientation is especially relevant for industrial solution providers, such as the case company of this thesis, since it helps to understand the customer needs, and desired behavior and practices (Kohtamäki et al., 2015). Customer service orientation and supporting organizational culture create sustainable competitive advantage, since the change is difficult to imitate and it improves active co-creation of value (Gebauer et al., 2010). However, right orientation is difficult to achieve, since it requires commitment of the whole organization (Martin, 1992), changes in organizational structure, different human resource management, as well as new processes and measurement practices (Gebauer et al., 2010). Further, customer service orientation requires decentralized decision-making power, since employees are operating near the customers (Ziegenfuss, 2007, p.120). Altogether, implementing customer service orientation is a complex task that requires careful preparing.

Since everything begins from the customers, Hong et al. (2014) suggest companies to establish a strategic orientation towards their customers. In detail, they report that companies need to focus on the competitive market environment, understand their customers, and finally, implement a strategic customer service orientation (SCSO). This orientation refers to organization-wide long-term commitment to produce customer value in accordance with the real needs. The core idea is to improve operational performance by means of lean practices. They found a positive equivalence between human and technical lean practices and operational performance outcomes. In detail, they divide these lean practices in human and technical practices. Human lean practices refer to social and behavioral aspects of process improvement, whereas technical lean practices are based on technologies, such as computer and data management systems. Hong et al. argue that human lean practices, such as workforce empowerment and continuous improvement, are required when customer service is complex and many people are involved. Therefore, the case company of this thesis should focus on human aspect in terms of improving customer service, which is already an objective of this thesis.

In addition to SCSO and customer service orientation in general, many authors suggest companies to implement customer orientation in order to improve their customer service (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; McCrory et al., 2017; Valvio, 2010, p.60). Although customer orientation improves business performance (Hennig-Thurau, 2004), many companies still focus on sales, manufacturing and profit rather than their customers (McCrory et al., 2017). Millard (2006) claims that it is difficult to create a customer focus, since the fundamental way of doing business is the opposite. The approach of customer orientation takes the customers in the center of every operation. Valvio presents three notions that define the concept of customer orientation:

1. I do not know everything about the customer.
2. I cannot predict the customer's behavior.
3. I actively try to narrow this knowledge gap.

In addition to these notions, Valvio (2010, p.67) highlights the importance of listening, which is important for implementing customer orientation. Although merely customer interface is emphasized in the study by Hennig-Thurau (2004), they mention that companies that can generally behave in a customer-oriented way will perform better. Furthermore, successful customer orientation requires the support of the whole organization (Kohtamäki et al., 2015; Valvio, 2010, p.63). The concepts of customer orientation and customer service orientation are close to each other, and thus this thesis aims to combine both concepts. Customer service orientation represents the objective of the business, and customer orientation is an essential part of implementing the former. Therefore, this thesis suggests the case company to implement both concepts in parallel.

McCrory et al. (2017) argue that continuous improvement is an integral part of improving customer service. Continuous improvement is related to customer orientation, since the conceptual basis is on the notion that the customer is the important factor and driver for better customer service. Importantly, they claim that customer service literature still emphasizes profit as an outcome of good customer service, whereas the customer should be in the center of all activities. Despite the conflict, McCrory et al. present continuous improvement as a method for improving customer service. In detail, continuous improvement means that every employee has responsibilities of improving their fair share of customer service process. In order to implement the concept, the employees need to understand their purpose within the organization and contribution to customer service process. As a result, continuous improvement seems to be effective way to improve customer service if it is integrated and implemented in parallel with customer service orientation. The following discussion will clarify the implementation of customer service orientation in practice.

Customer service orientation can be divided into different levels in the organizational culture. For instance, Gebauer et al. (2010) concerns it at managerial and employee levels. Further, they insert a distinction between service-oriented values and behavior. For instance, managerial values is one of the service-oriented distinctions in their article. Additionally, Teboul (2006, p. 1) divides all the company's operations in two: 1) frontstage and 2) backstage operations. In detail, he claims that traditional management disciplines, such as marketing and operations management, merge together under these two stages. Providing effective customer service requires the both stages, although the actual service interaction occurs only in the frontstage. The backstage has an important role in supporting the frontstage and enabling production. The next two sections 2.2.6.1 and 2.2.6.2 concern the two stages individually. Finally, the section 2.2.6.3 combines front and backstages into one concept, which is organizational culture. Teboul (2006, p. 140) states that frontstage and backstage should be integrated together in order to improve the overall customer service performance.

2.2.6.1 Frontstage

Frontstage is a part of an organization that focuses on the market and customer relationship (Teboul, 2006, p. 140). Further, the customer experiences the service performance in the frontstage (Teboul, 2006, p. 19). In other words, frontstage is the main contact point between a company and its customer. Therefore, plenty of information goes through frontstage and it has a significant responsibility in customer experience and customer service creation. In this thesis, frontstage and customer interface are the same, and thus both names are used based on different authors.

The frontstage of a company is remarkably important, since it has a major role in customer interaction (McLean-Conner, 2006, p. 66). She argues that the frontstage has the responsibility to seek input and knowledge from the customers continuously. Effective communication is essential for this aim. Another reason for its importance is the notion that 68 per cent of customers quit the collaboration due to careless attitude of the frontstage employees. Careless attitude is not surprising, since a strong focus on products leads to lack of understanding of the real purpose and significance of the frontstage (Teboul, 2006, p. 31-32). He claims that product-centered organizations use the frontstage merely as a channel of distribution. This approach leads to cost-plus pricing, which means that the price is based on production costs with an added markup. Nevertheless, by means of effective customer service oriented frontstage, the company might be able to apply the value-based pricing. In other words, the company might increase their profit by adding value to the customers, and thus ask higher price. Consequently, it is beneficial to utilize the frontstage with orientations towards customer service and the customer in particular.

In order to demonstrate the practice of frontstage, Hennig-Thurau (2004) conceptualizes customer orientation of service employees (COSE). He presents a four-dimensional construct of COSE, and validates its impact on customer retention. As seen in the following Figure 15, COSE consists of the frontstage employee's technical skills, social skills, motivation and decision-making authority.

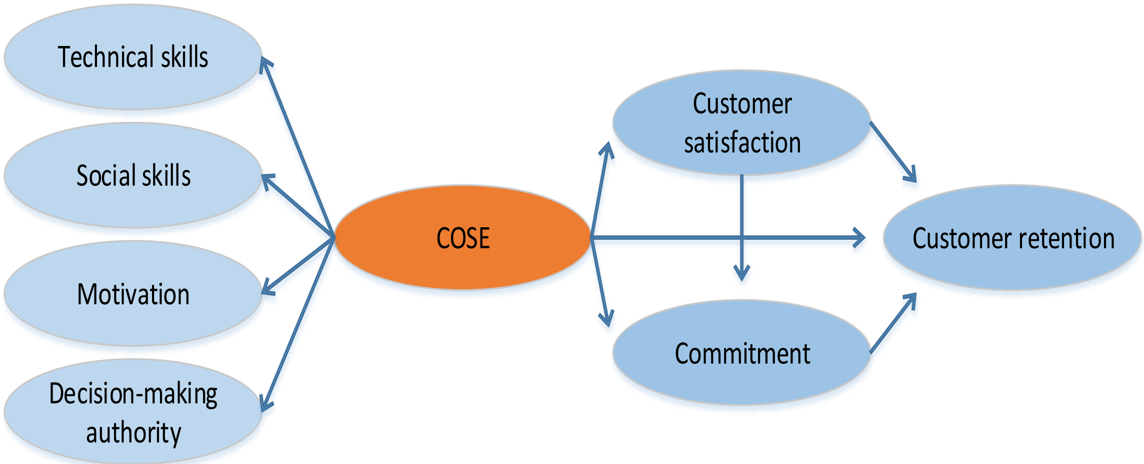

Figure 15. The left side of the figure presents the factors that create customer orientation of service employees (COSE, whereas the right side describes the importance of COSE for the business. (Hennig-Thurau, 2004)

Hennig-Thurau (2004) explicates the dimensions of the concept deductively. *Technical skills* are the required knowledge and competencies to meet the customer needs during the service interaction. In other words, the customer service employee possesses these skills, and they can be applied instantly without relying on an information storage. *Social skills* refer to the employee's ability to understand the customer. He amplifies that social skills consist of three layers of empathy: 1) visual (the customer's perspective), 2) cognitive (the customer's thoughts), and 3) emotional (the customer's feelings). As discussed in the section 2.1, understanding the emotions that the customer feels is critical for improving customer experience. In addition to required skills, *motivation* is necessary for utilization of the skills in order to behave in customer-oriented way. Similarly, *decision-making power* is needed when the employee's skills are transformed into customer-oriented behavior and customer service that fulfills the customer needs. This is supported by the theory of strategic customer service orientation by Hong et al. (2014), which is discussed previously in this section. In summary, Hennig-Thurau conceptualizes customer orientation of service employees (COSE) by presenting four dimensions for it. In addition, he validates the hypothesis that COSE influences customer retention. This thesis benefits from the conceptualization, since improving the customer service performance and increasing customer orientation of the frontstage employees are part of the objectives.

Further, since customer service is intangible and interactive by nature, the frontstage employee's behavior affects on the perceptions of service quality (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). For instance, optimistic behavior improves problem solving, and hence improves customer service within complex processes (Valvio, 2010, p.37-39). In addition, positive thinking towards the customer as well as presenting difficult issues in a positive way improve customer experience and customer service (McLean-Conner, 2006, p. 65; Valvio, 2010, p. 37-39). Furthermore, Valvio highlights the importance of openness, honesty, genuine and natural behavior, humbleness and proudness within frontstage operations. However, he also reminds that a frontstage employee cannot be too humble and some proudness of own work and responsibilities are important. As a conclusion, Valvio states that enthusiastic behavior is the most significant success factor for frontstage employees in general.

2.2.6.2 Backstage

Backstage is a side of the company that is invisible for the customers (Teboul, 2006, p. 23-24). More specifically, the main purpose of backstage is to maintain production and the actual product. Raw materials are transformed to final products by means of backstage operations, such as design, production scheduling and manufacturing. Performance is tangible and measurable, and objectives are established factors, including just-in-time production and aim for zero defects. Nevertheless, Teboul states that backstage operations are significant supporting activities for effective customer service. In other words, frontstage and the overall business relies on the backstage operations and employees' possessed knowledge.

In fact, this knowledge possessed by backstage employees is critical for improving service quality. Millard (2006) report that a lack of knowledge in frontstage results in work stress. Consequently, due to increased stress, frontstage employees' ability to deliver high quality customer service reduces. Therefore, the support from backstage is essential in order to maintain excellent customer service and friendliness towards the customer (Ziegenfuss, 2007, p. 136). Furthermore, he argues that the strong organizational support prevents employees from descending into burnout. Consequently, backstage plays a major role in service profit chain as well, since it has an impact on frontstage employees' job satisfaction.

Another way of contribution to customer service is a concept of internal service. In general, it means the practices of collaboration within the whole organization (Valvio, 2010, p. 75). Internal service consists of tangible help and friendly behavior between individuals (Zieenfuss, 2007, p. 126). Importantly, Valvio claims that firm's customer service performance cannot exceed the level of internal service. Therefore, in order to improve customer service, companies need to focus on improving internal service as well. By means of internal service and support towards the frontstage, the backstage can improve customer service of the case company of this thesis.

Martin (1992) presents practical suggestions for backstage's participation to customer service improvement. He suggests companies to perform functional workshops, which considers their own role and contributions for customer service. In addition, the second approach is to identify the collaborative relationships between different functions. In other words, each function should understand their cross-functional relationships within the whole order-delivery process. This thesis applies similar workshops for every function at the case company and this method is described in detail in the section 3.3.

In addition to cross-functional collaboration, appropriate utilization of technology enables backstage to support customer service (Patricio et al., 2008). They argue that technology is currently important for both frontstage customer service interactions and backstage supporting operations. However, they remind that technology and customer perspective must be completely integrated in customer service design and management in order to create desired value.

The Figure 16 demonstrates an interactive customer service process by means of front- and backstage. The line of visibility distinguishes the two stages. In this case, the customer has first *requested information*. Second, the representative of the *customer interface facilitates the communication* with the backstage. Third, the backstage employee, such as mechanical engineer, utilize his or her *knowledge* in order to generate a *professional answer* for the customer. Therefore, delivering professional answers requires the support from the backstage. In the optimum case, the answer enhances perceived *customer experience*. The model is adapted from the article by Patricio et al. (2008). Although it is originally designed for B2C customer service, it might be applicable for B2B as well. In fact, the practices and structure of the case company's organization resemble this illustration.

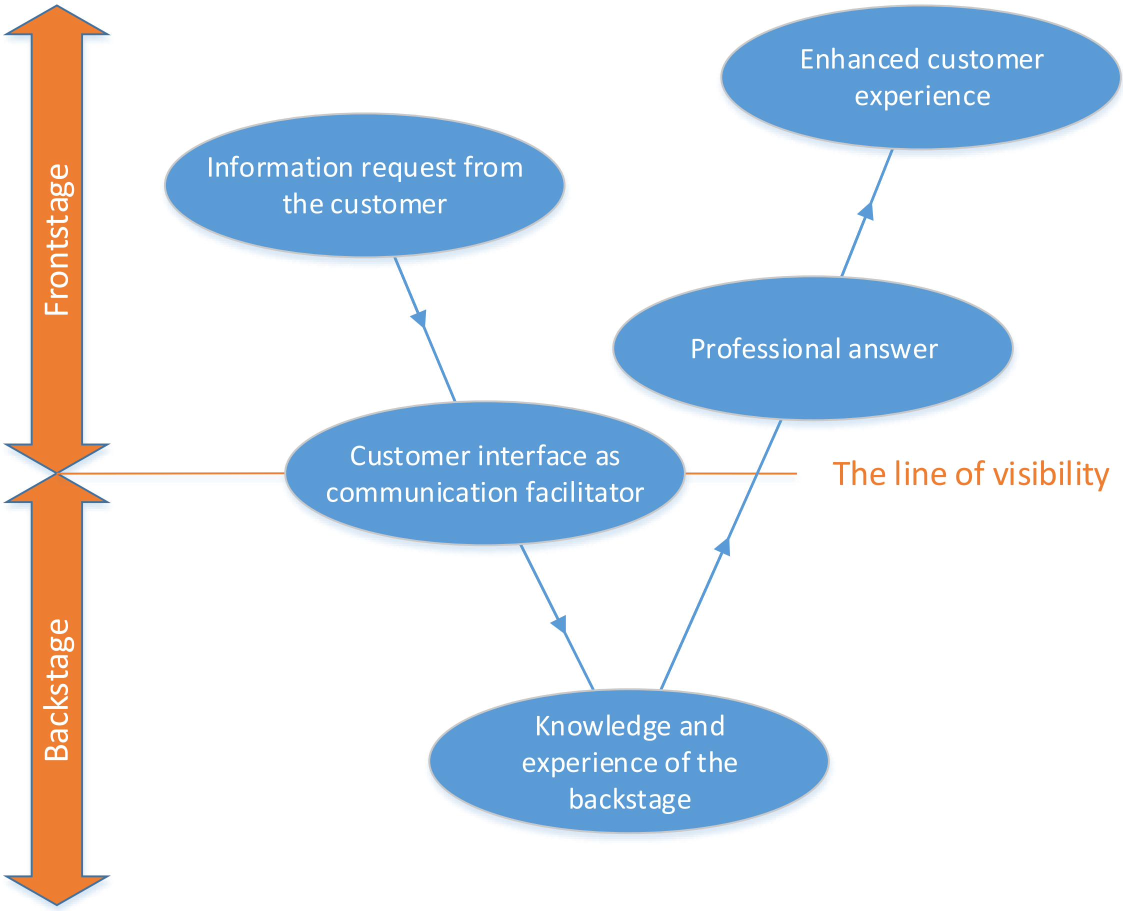

Figure 16. The interactive customer service process. The frontstage represent the customer interface and the customers, whereas the backstage refers to all the supporting functions, which are not visible for the customers. The line of visibility distinguishes the backstage from the frontstage. (Adapted, Patricio et al., 2008)

2.2.6.3 Organizational culture

Organizational culture means the shared norms, values and assumptions within the company's employees that have impacts on the individuals' behavior (Schein, 1996). Importantly, organizational culture is a company-wide concept. In order to improve customer service, it is not sufficient to focus merely on frontstage employees and their culture (Kohtamäki et al., 2015). Moreover, the whole organization needs to be customer oriented before the customer can completely trust in the collaboration (Valvio, 2010, p. 63). As discussed previously, trust determines the business relationship, as well as enhances dialogical interaction and sharing of important emotions (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007, Lusch et al., 2008). However, involving every employee in such change towards customer service orientation requires creation of a supportive organizational culture (Martin, 1992). This culture aligns all the employees to work towards the same goal with the same values.

In particular, companies need a customer service culture, since most of the customer complaints originate from service issues (Martin, 1992). More specifically, since customer service is difficult to define, and thus transfer in explicit form is a challenge, an organizational culture is required to support the service improvement. Moreover, many backstage employees believe that they are not responsible for customer service, although Martin claims that everyone is responsible for it. Indeed, the customer service process that the customers of the case company receive consists of multiple backstage services, such as creating engineering documents and expert statements. Further, every employee is responsible for internal service as well, which enhances the customer service capabilities. Therefore, the cultural change could help to commit the whole organization to customer service orientation and improve both internal service and cross-functional collaboration (Martin, 1992).

However, cultural change is extremely difficult to implement within an organization (Kohtamäki et al., 2015). They state that changing mindsets and behavior is a long process that requires total commitment. Additionally, cross-functional communication is essential in order to spread the new culture. In fact, McCrory et al. (2017) report that company's intranet is not sufficient communication medium in terms of cultural change.

Management has a significant responsibility for implementing cultural changes (Martin, 1992). In detail, they need to be committed and display consistent positive attitude towards the change. As mentioned in this section, managers' and employees' customer service orientation is distinguished from each other (Gebauer et al., 2010). In practice, managers need to understand and communicate the company's strategy and values throughout the organization by their own behavior (McCrory et al., 2017). More specifically, they argue that managers should direct, guide and motivate the employees rather than dictate and merely give orders. Further, they must expect customer service orientation from their employees (Ziegenfuss, 2007, p. 121). In order to outline the process of cultural change, Ziegenfuss (p.194) presents the most important steps of the process:

- Build an organizational culture that says "customer service is important".
- Establish customer service as a core value and set specific goals for improvement.
- Establish rights and rituals that recognize and support service.
- Identify and create customer service heroes.
- Establish a cultural network of people that are excessively and obsessively service-oriented.

- Monitor customer service threats and opportunities outside the organization's boundaries.

In addition, identifying the root causes and reasoning the cultural change for employees are essential for successful change (Martin, 1992). Further, Hayes and Dredge (1998) highlight the importance of a clear mission as well as enthusiastic leadership for fostering cultural change. However, Martin reports that the challenge is to match behavioral change, operating processes, systems, procedures, and ever changing customer needs and corporate strategies with the cultural change. Too often companies deliver a message to their customers that they are customer service oriented and the customers are appreciated, although the practices are not aligned with this orientation (Valvio, 2010, p. 64).

In summary, this section considered customer service orientation and customer orientation as concepts. More specifically, the section first clarified the definitions and purposes of the phenomena, and then frontstage and backstage were distinguished in order to deeply understand the organization and its underlying customer service processes. Finally, organizational culture was presented as a combining concept that makes it possible to implement organization-wide changes in customer service practices. Consequently, an appropriate organizational culture is essential for establishing a customer service orientation, and thus required for service improvement. Since overall customer experience is an outcome of customer service, this thesis adapts the concepts of customer service orientation and customer orientation to improving customer experience as well. Empirical function specific focus groups aim to gain understanding of current customer orientation capabilities as well as spreading the message of change in organizational culture.

2.3 A summary of the literature

The literature review of this thesis focused on customer experience and customer service. Both concepts are remarkably important for businesses in every market, however, their ambiguous natures make it difficult to implement or improve them. The ambiguity is based on several different definitions, which are discussed in the literature review.

Customer experience is a personal interpretation of a touch point. Touch points, in turn, refer to interaction between a company and its customer. Depending on the author, touch points are defined differently. For instance, some authors argue that touch points occur only in direct interaction such as customer service, while others claim that promotion, business partners' processes or even communication between customers may be defined as touch points. Consequently, the definition of customer experience is as ambiguous as the definition of the touch point.

Nevertheless, the literature agrees that touch points together create a customer journey. Importantly, each touch point is significant and shall be designed well. However, the whole journey matters most, hence a few excellent touch points among poor ones is an insufficient approach. This perspective supports the fact that customer experience is created through a process. Consequently, a constant process of customer service create customer experience through several touch points. The order-delivery process is therefore a set of customer service touch points, which together create the customer journey. This journey creates the overall customer experience from the process.

After the general definition of customer experience, the literature review followed by presenting characteristics of customer experience. The first and most significant characteristic is subjectivity of customer experience. Subjectivity means that each customer perceives the same interaction in a different way, and thus standardizing the best practices is impossible. In this respect, customer service is similar to customer experience.

The discussion related to the characteristics of customer experience include a distinction between functional, mechanical and humanic characteristics. The main point of this distinction is that customer experience can be created by several mechanisms, hence all the possible details must be taken into account with the customers. In practice, some customers prefer better human interaction, whereas others appreciate better tools. The importance of each characteristics vary, since customer experience and customer service are both subjective.

Although customer experience is presented as a recent concept, its roots are far in the past. Customer experience is a synthesis of decades-old concepts, including customer satisfaction, service quality and relationship marketing. Therefore, some companies may have focused on customer experience through these concepts without understanding the big picture. Importantly, the connection between customer service and customer experience is found again.

Since relationship marketing was one of the roots of customer experience, the literature review offered academic knowledge focusing on business relationships. First, the importance of relationships for customer experience is discussed, and second, practical approaches are presented in order to support the case company. The most significant practical approach was key account management (KAM). KAM is an integral part of B2B customer relationships and it enhances customer orientation. Consequently, KAM has a significant role within the creation of customer experience. Another discussed approach was customer relationship management (CRM), which aims to benefit from the customer relationships. However, this company-centric approach was not suitable for the case company, since they desire customer-orientation, long-term business relationships and value creation for the customers in particular.

Finally, the customer experience section presents customer experience management (CEM). This approach is a way to improve customer experience strategically. Importantly, CEM emphasizes touch points during the journey, which is in line with the previous discussion. The different characteristics of customer experience are taken into account in CEM planning. However, a significant note was found from the literature: neither CEM nor customer service can substitute a good product and competitive pricing in the B2B markets.

The second section of the literature review focused mostly on customer service. Although both a good product and price are essential in every business, increased competition and ever demanding customers have driven manufacturing companies to seek competitive advantages from customer service, for instance. The second section presented definitions for customer service, supported measuring customer service performance and offered practical approaches for implementation. Furthermore, the concept of service profit chain was introduced in order to offer insights into the root causes of poor customer service. Communication and knowledge management were discussed as well due to a strong link with both customer service and customer experience. Finally, different business orientations are discussed in order to assist organization-wide change towards better customer service.

This thesis created a general definition for customer service, which is based on several different theories. Customer service as an interactive process that utilizes operant resources, such as personal knowledge and skills, in order to create value for the customer. Further, customer service is produced and consumed simultaneously. Many authors identify B2B customer service as a process of interaction. Customer experience is the outcome of this process.

Despite the previous definitions, customer service is an ambiguous concept, and thus its measuring is complex. This thesis aimed to distinguish different dimensions of customer service in order to simplify measuring the performance. Generally, customer service can be divided in operational and customers' perspectives. The former is important for improvement, however, the latter is the only that matters in terms of customer experience. Further, customer service consists of soft and hard dimensions, which may assist identifying the real improvement area of a company. Additionally, service quality is a measurable perspective of customer service as well. SERVQUAL instrument is designed for measuring service quality and it includes 5 dimensions: responsiveness, reliability, assurance, tangibles and empathy.

This thesis presented two practical tools for implementing better customer service. Since high service quality in the B2B markets requires both efficient and reliable approaches, service blueprinting and relational dialogue were introduced. Service blueprinting aims to visualize the service process and each touch point, which supports understanding of customers' pain points and cross-functional processes. Relational dialogue, in turn, aims to establish a strong and interactive relationship with the customer. It is rather an approach for better two-way collaboration than an actual tool. Both of these tools are significant for customer experience as well.

Communication and knowledge management were discussed, since both of them are needed in complex ETO processes. Effective customer service requires cross-functional communication as well. The discussion introduced different communication media and offered support for selecting the most appropriate for each situation. Behavior is reported as one of the most important communicative factors in terms of customer service. Knowledge sharing, in turn, is essential for improving current processes, since the customer knowledge must flow within the whole organization in order to enable organizational learning. This improves not only customer service, but customer experience as well.

Lastly, the section gained understanding of different business orientations. At a general level, service life-cycle illustrates how companies have transformed from pure manufacturers to service providers. At a more specific level, companies and their employees have to implement customer service orientation or strategic customer service orientation in order to engage the whole organization to improve customer service. In addition, customer orientation is presented as another option, since the case company desired to be more customer-oriented.

Business orientation must cover every operation and every employee throughout the organization, and thus customer interface and backstage are discussed. These sections include definitions for customer interface and backstage as well as required skills and specific practices. Importantly, a significant cross-functional link between the customer interface and the backstage is presented. Effective support from the backstage towards the customer interface improves customer service directly. Especially, complex ETO processes require cross-functional collaboration. The discussion was followed by introducing organizational culture as the main enabler of better customer service and customer experience. The best practices cannot be standardized due to the subjective natures of customer service and customer experience, hence organization-wide orientation is the right approach to improve the current order-delivery process.

Altogether, the literature review illustrated that customer experience as well as customer service are ambiguous concepts without clear and standardized definitions. Moreover, the specific B2B markets alongside complex ETO processes create a gap in the existing literature. This gap represent the main source of motivation for this case study. Additionally, investigating the case company’s own customers is significant due to the subjective nature of customer experience and customer service. The following chapter (3) describes the empirical research process of this case study, which aims to understand the case in detail in order to improve the order-delivery process through better practices.

3 Gaining understanding through empiricism

Academic research needs motivation. In order to motivate the empirical research of this thesis, the literature review offers several existing gaps. As long as these gaps exist in the literature, there is motivation for further research. However, all the research gaps are not relevant for research, and hence the business of the case company is taken into account. In other words, the case company's business environment and needs were compared with the existing gaps in the literature in order to find the relevant research areas. The following discussion amplifies these gaps more specifically.

Firstly, the business environment of the case company creates the main gap. In fact, customer experience literature has focused merely on the consumer markets, while the B2B markets are less studied. This lack of research creates a gap that motivates further research on this environment. Moreover, the B2B markets are more specific than the B2C markets, which makes it challenging to create and apply standardized theories (Benazić and Došen, 2012). This specificity leads to a need for specific research based on the own customers. In other words, effective improvement of the process requires focusing on the own customers in particular rather than applying existing theories. In addition to the B2B markets, the case company is delivering complex engineer-to-order (ETO) projects, which is a good example of the specificity of the B2B environment. Consequently, this thesis performed empirical research in order to validate the existing theories within the context and to find valuable improvement ideas directly.

Secondly, based on the subjective nature of customer service and customer experience, the literature suggests companies to study their own specific customers (LaSalle and Britton, 2002). Understanding the own customers and their preferences is significant, since the same customer service process might be perceived differently by different customers (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). Indeed, customers appreciate different things and customer value is also a personal measure (Hakola, 2013). Therefore, the knowledge related to these concepts is either universal or standardized, which makes it challenging to apply existing theories without own research. Accordingly, this thesis applied customer survey in order to identify the specific preferences of the customers. The results of the customer survey were justified by analyzing the past customer satisfaction feedback. The conducted functional focus groups supported the previous results as well, since the internal opinions are based on the customer needs. In order to deepen the understanding of the customer preferences, both a project manager and a key account manager of the case company were interviewed qualitatively.

Thirdly, the case company desires to change the company towards a more customer-oriented culture, which offers motivation to identify the improvement areas based on empirical results from the real customers. These results shall be the input for improvements if the customer orientation is pursued. In other words, theoretical knowledge or internal improvement do either support the aim of customer orientation or give a holistic understanding of the situation.

The structure of this chapter is divided in four main parts. First, research design (3.1) presents and justifies the utilized research method and data collection methods. In addition, the general introduction clarifies the empirical research framework. Second, all the different data collection methods are discussed individually (3.2;3.3;3.4). These sections include justifying the method selection, introducing the practices, and analyzing the results. Importantly, each section presents the results of the data collection method, since the synthesis of this chapter (3.5) focuses on analyzing all the results together. The synthesis aims to combine and compare the data in order to identify the final results and increase their reliability.

3.1 Research design

Case study was selected as a research method of this thesis, since the scope was outlined narrowly. More specifically, focusing on the B2B markets, complex ETO processes and the case company's own customers created a research gap that motivates empirical case study. Case study in general aims to understand and gather knowledge related to specific case (Yin, 2009, p. 4). The case may be for instance a project, partnership or relationship (Yin, 2009, p. 33; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 115). In this thesis, the studied case is the order-delivery process between the case company and its customers. As the literature suggests, the case was studied within the context rather than separated from it (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

The case study aimed to answer to the two main research questions and two subquestions, which are presented below. The question design is validated by the case study literature, since case studies focus on what and how questions (Yin, 2009, p. 2).

1. How to improve customer experience in the order-delivery process?
    1.1. Which factors have the greatest impact on customer experience in the B2B markets?
2. How to improve customer service in the order-delivery process?
    2.1. What are the most significant improvement areas in terms of customer service?

The research questions 1 and 2 represent the main target of this thesis, while the research questions 1.2 and 2.1 support the former ones. The latter research questions were answered by the data collection methods directly, whereas the research questions 1 and 2 were answered by means of analysis and profound discussion.

Case study is a continuous process, which combines theory and practice by an abductive approach (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 121). Importantly, the process is flexible and iterative, which means that data collection methods can be selected or changed during the process (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 127). Commonly, a case study includes several data collection methods, which support each other and offer holistic knowledge from the case (Eisenhardt, 1989). The utilization of multiple sources of evidence refers to triangulation, which is the strength of case study method in general (Yin, 2009, p. 114). A case study often combines qualitative and quantitative data, hence this thesis aimed to collect such data (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 127). A characteristic case study includes several stages of analysis, which aims to identify overlaps between the data sources (Eisenhardt, 1989). As a result, this thesis utilized several data collection methods, the results were analyzed after each method and the literature had a major role in the research due to lack of existing applicable theories. Importantly, the collected data was analyzed in several separated stages and compared with the other data sources.

In order to implement the case study method appropriately, this thesis utilized three different data collection methods.

- Customer survey (3.2)
- Focus groups (3.3)
- Qualitative interviews (3.4)

Within the sections (3.2; 3.3; 3.4), the detailed discussion for each data collection method begins with an introduction, which clarifies the motivation to utilize the method in particular, describes the objectives of the method, and amplifies the target research question. After the introduction, two topics are considered for each method, which are:

1. Planning and data collection
2. Analysis and results

The *planning and data collection* phase describes the general planning of the method as well as practices of the data collection. These practices of data collection, such as justifying of target group and appropriate questions, enhance the reliability of the method. The *analysis and results* phase clarifies the process that transforms the collected data into valuable information. Based on this information, preliminary results are introduced. Importantly, the results are discussed under each data collection method and their summary is presented in 3.5.1. All the data sources are compared and merged together in the synthesis in 3.5.2, which presents the main empirical results.

The data collection methods of this study were partly adapted from Martin (1992). He studied the process of creating customer service culture, and his paper reports that identification of the key issues is a major part of the process. The key issues represent the most important issues in terms market efficiency or internal efficiency. For this purpose, he suggests companies to conduct in-depth customer research, operational audits and service awareness workshops. As per his article, in-depth customer research aims to identify the critical customer service factors and opportunities, for instance. Operational audits aim to understand the impact of different functions on customer service. Lastly, service awareness workshops aim to clarify the role in terms of customer service for each function. Hence, a customer survey and qualitative interviews were conducted in order to deeply understand the customer preferences. Furthermore, the aim of the functional focus groups was similar to both the operational audit and service awareness workshops.

The following figure Figure 17 demonstrates the whole case study. The literature review offered the basis for understanding the concepts before the empirical research. During this phase, existing knowledge and theories were collected in order to compare them with the empirical results. This aim represents inductivity of the thesis. The actual empirical research was based on three data collection methods, *customer survey*, *focus groups* and *qualitative interviews*. These methods enabled the inductive approach, since they aimed to identify applicable practices within the case company's business in particular. In addition, the analysis of the past customer satisfaction feedback is presented under the customer survey, since this supporting method validated the survey results. Finally, all the collected data was discussed together in the synthesis. Although the process was partially deductive, the main reason for conducting the research was that the existing literature was insufficient, and thus improving current practices required studying the customers of the case company especially. Consequently, the empirical research generated new knowledge and guidelines for the case company, which means that the process was inductive as well. Thus, the overall research process was abductive, which is a combination of deductive and inductive approaches.

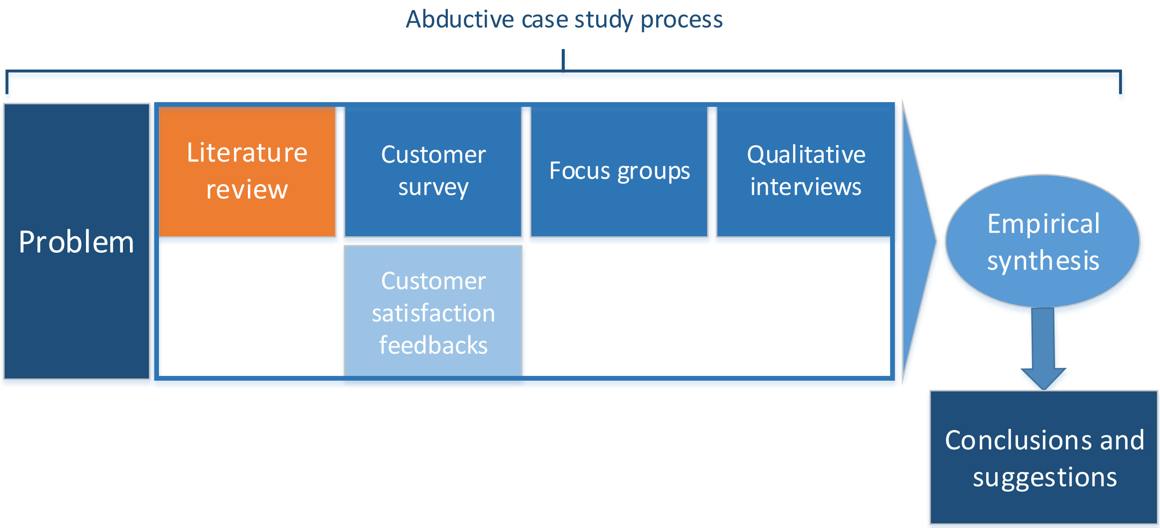

Figure 17. The research process of this thesis. The whole process was abductive, since it combines both deductive and inductive approaches.

One of the challenges of case studies is the analysis phase due to lack of applicable techniques (Yin, 2009, p.127). This may be the reason for the notion by Eisenhardt (1989) that a gap exists between collected data and appropriate utilization. Moreover, case studies often aim to understand the cases or test existing theories within a specific context (Eisenhardt, 1989). This approach is insufficient for this thesis, since the target is to improve the order-delivery process by creating better practices for the case company. In other words, the current order-delivery process cannot be improved by merely understanding the case, hence this thesis required the employees of the case company to identify the best practices.

Due to the previous limitations and since the main target of this thesis is to improve customer experience and customer service in the current order-delivery process, *action research* was selected to represent an approach for the case study method. Action research is applicable for research processes that are highly integrated in businesses (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 193-209). More specifically, they report that action research is particularly applicable when researching process-related problems in organizations. Therefore, the main aim of action research is process improvement, thus the approach is applicable for this thesis.

In general, action research is an approach, which engages the target group of people to the mission of improving real-life business processes (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 193-209). More specifically, the aim is to identify better practices and implement them within an organization. Within this case study, action research approach was applied, since the employees had a major role in identifying the new best practices, which were collected to the handbook. In particular, focus groups engaged the employees to the improvement and the main results were collected to the handbook. The handbook is the outcome of the action research approach. By means of the handbook, the processes of the case company are improved. Consequently, the action research approach illustrates the fundamental way of conducting the data collection and analysis of the results.

Furthermore, the handbook is later utilized in the training phase of the Superior Customer Experience program. This means that the employees were not only involved in the creation of the research results, but they participate in the implementation as well. Although this thesis ends before the implementation, the researcher's voice is still an integral part of the trainings. Case study was the main research method, but action research defined the way of conducting the research and achieving the targets. Importantly, case study and action research are consistent with each other, and thus the parallel utilization is possible.

The whole research process was planned, designed and implemented in collaboration with a *project group of five people*. The project group is introduced here due to two reasons. First, the reliability of the research process improved as a result from the collaboration with the internal professionals. They knew the case company's product, operations and customers in a profound manner, which was significant for the planning. However, the second reason for introducing the project group is that they had a strong influence on the research practices. Some of the decisions during the process were made based on their opinions rather than objective justification. The project group consisted of the following employees: Head of Project Management (2), Strategic Sales Manager, and Sales Support Manager.

Before the methods are discussed in detail, it is valuable to clarify the research framework that defines the scope of this study. In general, the case company desires that the current order-delivery process is improved in terms of customer service and customer experience. Therefore, reviewed literature in the chapter 2 focuses mostly on these concepts, which creates a basis for understanding the research framework. Further, the business context of the case company narrows the research framework. Customer service and customer experience are studied in B2B environment and during complex ETO projects in particular. Finally, the case company expects to improve the human side of the process, which means that for example behavior, communication and relationship building are emphasized over the traditional service dimensions, such as quality and delivery time. As a result, the traditional hard factors were not emphasized in the conclusions.

In summary, the empirical research framework is outlined by 1) focusing on the concepts of customer service and customer experience, 2) identifying the business context, and 3) taking the case company's needs into account. Furthermore, the gap model (Figure 18) by Parasuraman (1998) is forming the research framework and giving practical insights into the implementation. In general, companies can improve their practices by closing the gaps of the model, and hence this thesis aims to identify the gaps. The customer survey aims to identify the service quality gap between customer's service expectations and perceptions. This is significant, since the results may offer direct recommendations for improvement. Therefore, identifying the service quality gap answers to the research question 2.1. The internal focus groups, in turn, aim to identify the market information gap between the customers' service expectations and case company's understanding of these expectations. This approach offers understanding of the internal strengths and weaknesses in order to support the identification of the most significant improvement areas. In this respect, the aims of the customer survey and internal focus groups are supported by the gap model, along with the Martin's article (1992). A part of the whole gap model is presented below.

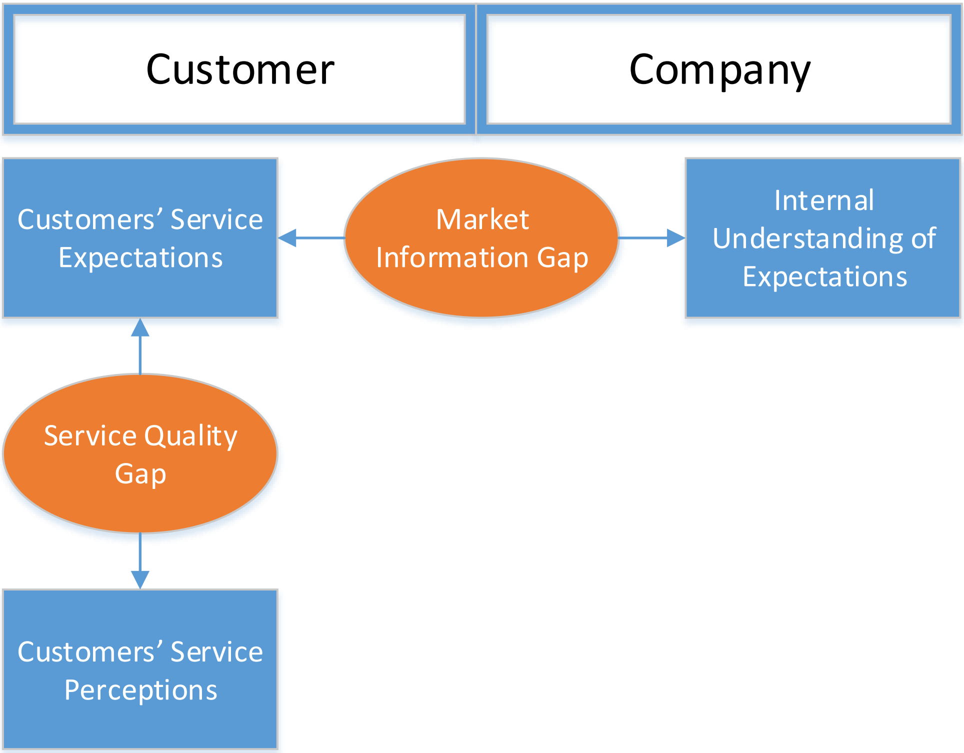

Figure 18. A part of the original gap model. The whole gap model can be seen in the Figure 10. (Adapted, Parasuraman, 1998)

Importantly, the above figure is merely a part of the full model. This thesis aims to identify the orange gaps in particular. The value for the case study is that if the gaps exists, they are presented as improvement areas, which answers to the RQ 2.1. However, if the gaps are narrow or do not even exist, the improvement potential is elsewhere. Finding the real cause for poor customer service may require further research.

3.2 Customer survey

A customer survey was conducted, since the customers' perspective is essential for the process of improving customer experience and customer service (Johnston and Kong, 2011). In fact, they argue that customer perceptions only matter, regardless of whether the internal process is effective or not. Therefore, an internal development always requires guidelines based on the customer preferences. The customer survey clarifies the customer needs in order to direct the improvement process. Indeed, the results may be directly used for organizing the training materials for the employees of the case company.

In addition, the gap model by Parasuraman (1998) offers motivation to conduct a customer survey. He argues that companies should aim to close the gaps in order to improve customer service. One important gap in the model is the service quality gap between customers' service expectations and perceptions. Consequently, the customer survey of this thesis aimed to measure the service quality gap as well in order to identify relevant improvement areas.

The main objective of the customer survey was to understand the customers' perspective in terms of customer experience and customer service. Therefore, the survey aimed to identify the most important issues, strengths and weaknesses, as well as gather additional thoughts related to customer experience and customer service. Additionally, the objective of the implementation was to reach different customers and different respondents internationally. Consequently, the target of the survey for the whole research process was to gain understanding of the concepts as well as identify the most significant improvement areas. The customer survey answers to the research questions 1.1 and 2.1. The second question reveals the service quality gap.

3.2.1 Planning and data collection

The target of the planning and data collection phase was to plan the customer survey in a way that the objectives were fulfilled. In practice, a distribution medium, survey questions and target respondents were selected in co-operation with the project group. This section presents and justifies the made selections. Finally, the quality of the collected data was pre-analyzed, which led to a need of further research.

Accordingly, e-mail was selected to be the medium for spreading the survey among the customers. The first reason for this selection was the ability to reach international customers all over the world easily. E-mail is an asynchronous medium, and thus not dependent on time and space, which makes it an efficient medium to communicate from distance and between the time zones. Furthermore, the busy B2B customers of the case company prefer ability to decide when to send the answer (Höytölä, 2017). However, this may lead to a lack of concentration if the survey is filled during another meeting, for instance. The second reason for utilizing e-mail is that it is a common practice with the customers. In other words, the customers of the case company are familiar with using e-mail as a communication medium. Although e-mail is considered as a relatively lean medium, which means that the ability to transfer information is low (Korkala et al., 2006), it is possible to get qualitative answers through open questions. In fact, utilization of lean media may reduce knowledge sharing barriers, and thus improve the quality of the answers (Hendriks, 1999). The third reason to conduct an email survey was that the case company wanted to study the customers through email.

The customer survey was designed to be both approachable and qualitative. The former was achieved by selecting e-mail as applied medium, designing the survey as short as possible, and giving enough time to participate. The latter was achieved by means of open and general questions. The question were designed as such, since the concepts of customer experience and customer service are both personal by nature. As a result, it was decided to ask generally without any strict guidelines in order to receive wide variety of different answers. The questions of the customer survey are presented below.

1. How do you see, which factors have the greatest impact on customer experience? (think about different project phases: kick-off, engineering, manufacturing, FAT, delivery – any examples of behavior, method, communication, situation etc.)
2. What would be the most significant issues in terms of customer service during projects which you would want us to improve?
3. How we have succeeded to create a good customer experience? (what have we done right - any positive examples)
4. Any other comments, feedback?

In detail, the first question simply aimed to gain understanding of customer experience in the B2B markets. As the literature review of this thesis states, B2B is less studied in terms of customer experience. Both positive and negative impacts were interesting in terms of this thesis and the research question 1.1. In addition, the complex ETO process makes it difficult to apply existing knowledge directly. Therefore, the question aimed to collect the important and specific customer preferences as well. Importantly, it was not focusing on the current weaknesses or direct improvement areas, but instead asking the most significant factors impacting on customer experience.

The second question aimed to gather direct improvement areas in terms of customer service. Although customer service is also less studied in the B2B markets, this thesis believed that the customers can share their opinions on this matter. In other words, the thesis expected that the customers are familiar with the concept of customer service, and hence they are able to answer to such a direct question. Importantly, the first questions was supposed to preface the second. Indeed, the aim of this thesis is to improve customer service from the perspective of customer experience in particular, and thus it is important to direct the respondents to the right direction from the beginning.

The third question aimed to identify the things that have created a positive customer experience to the customers. This is a valid approach, since the customers and projects are all different. Moreover, project teams and project managers differ between the projects, which means that every project has different practices. Consequently, it is important to identify which practices improve customer experience. Additionally, this question aimed to identify which significant factors from the first question are already considered as advantages.

Finally, the fourth question aimed to collect non-categorized ideas and thoughts, as well as anything related to customer experience and customer service. The open question was valuable, since both customer experience and customer service are ambiguous and subjective, which impedes answering to narrow and specific questions.

Before the actual launch of the customer survey, the project group decided on the target customers and other practices, such as time period of the survey. International customers were selected as target customers, since the objective was to spread the customer survey all over the world. These customers were key accounts, local sales units and subsidiaries of the case company. The survey was sent to different respondents in order to gather varying answers. In other words, the aim was to collect data not only from the customer interfaces, but rather from different employees from the customer's organizations. The selected time period for the customer survey was two weeks, since B2B customers require time for such surveys. Before launching the survey, an online follow-up table was created in order to keep track of sent surveys and received answers. Despite this follow-up table, the purpose of the survey was not to associate the customers with their answers, but rather collect general opinions anonymously.

In summary, the planning phase of the customer survey included selection of the implementation medium, design of the questions and selection of the target group of customers. The customer survey utilized e-mail as a spreading medium. Finally the questions were sent to international key accounts, sales units and subsidiaries. Importantly, the customer survey was spread by the two head of project management in order to enhance the motivation to participate.

In the data collection phase, all the answers were collected and pre-analyzed before the actual analysis. The survey was sent to 291 customers internationally and 16 answers were collected during the time period of two weeks. The participation rate was 5,5 per cent, which is low in comparison with constant customer satisfaction survey of the case company that has a participation rate of 34 per cent. This may be due to utilization of e-mail, since people may suffer from low motivation to answer such email surveys. Moreover, the survey requests were sent only once, since the case company wanted to avoid bothering the customers. Nevertheless, the answers came from the Nordic countries (5), North America (4), Asia (4) and Central Europe (3). Thus, the answers represent the main continents of the case company's business well. Furthermore, most of the answers were comprehensive with proper explanations, reasoning and suggestions.

All the answers were collected online, and then categorized per question. After the categorization, the answers were carefully read again in order to understand the points in profound. This stage included collaboration with the customer interface professionals of the case company. By means of deep understanding, the answers were distilled and keywords were created for each answer. More general keywords were created in order to narrow the information from the complex qualitative answers. The keyword represent the main content of the answer, and thus there may be several keywords for one answer. These keywords were collected into tables (Appendix 1) with more specific notes and suggestions. At this point, few answers that were out of the scope were excluded from the results.

Lastly, the first evaluation of the value and appropriateness for the research was performed based on the amount and quality of the answers. The quality of the answers was as good as expected, since the answers represented international customers and included qualitative explanations of the significant issues. However, the amount of the answers did not represent a sample that is large enough as such. Consequently, the past customer satisfaction data was decided to be analyzed in order to validate the survey results. This analysis is described more specifically in 3.2.3. Moreover, one key account was remarkably inactive, and thus the responsible key account manager was interviewed as a part of the action research process. This is discussed in detail in 3.4.2. In addition, one project manager was mentioned by name due to high performance in delivering customer experience and customer service. Thus, he was interviewed as a part of the research, which is discussed in detail in 3.4.1.

In summary, the survey data was collected from all the main continents and the answers were high in quality. The answers were analyzed in order to understand the messages both generally and profoundly. After this, the data was narrowed by creating keywords that represent only the main content. However, the survey received merely 16 answers, and thus additional research decided to be performed based on the past customer satisfaction data. The aim of the data analysis was rather to support the results of the customer survey than collect more data. Additionally, the follow-up table of the survey revealed that one key account was inactive, and hence the responsible key account manager was interviewed. Similarly, an additional interview was decided to be made for one project manager, since he was lauded as the best project manager in terms of customer experience and customer service.

3.2.2 Analysis and results

The target of this phase was to transform collected data into valuable information. This target was approached by applying different analysis methods, including *content analysis and identification of root causes*. Content analysis is a systematic, objective and quantitative approach to understand the contents of a message (Neuendorf and Kumar, 2015). In this case, the content analysis determined the frequency of each keyword. Identification of root causes, in turn, is a part of a root cause analysis (Rooney and Heyvel, 2004). This method aims to identify the underlying issues that create the causal effects. In this case, the identification aimed to understand the real root causes behind the problems of the case company. Importantly, the data was analyzed by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The analysis process was iterative, since case studies emphasize an iterative research processes (Eisenhardt, 1989). In practice, iterative approach was implemented by selecting the next analysis method based on the results of the previous. Additionally, the survey results revealed lacks of understanding, which led to further research. Before describing the details of the further research, this section clarifies the analysis of the received customer survey answers.

As mentioned, the survey answers were open and high in variety, and thus the keywords were created to represent the core message of each answer. In the analysis phase, these keywords were firstly modified into a more general shape in order to harmonize the content. Secondly, similar keywords were combined, and thus the total amount of keywords reduced. As a result, the data was appropriate for content analysis and overlaps did not exist among the keywords. The amounts of occurrences were aggregated in order to discover the frequency of each keyword. This analysis revealed the most common keywords throughout the customer survey, which means that these topics were most often discussed by the customers.

In order to simplify the results, all the keywords with less than two answers were excluded from the analysis. The same limit for the question of customer experience was three answers, since the answers were more unanimous on this question. Consequently, a clear list of the most frequent keywords was created. These keywords are equivalent to the most significant factors for customer experience and customer service. Visual color scale was utilized in order to illustrate the frequency. The results of the content analysis are presented in the following Table 3.

Table 3. The results of the customer survey. The light blue and orange illustrate the topics, whereas the red color scale indicates the relative frequency of the keywords.

Topic	Keyword	Frequency
Customer experience	Responsiveness	8
Customer experience	Documentation	7
Customer experience	Meetings	5
Customer experience	Product	4
Customer experience	Professional FAT	3
Customer experience	Accurate answers	3
Customer experience	Communication	3
Customer experience	Flexibility	3
Customer service	Documentation	5
Customer service	Professional FAT	4
Customer service	Responsiveness	4
Customer service	Communication	4
Customer service	Delivery time	2

As the Table 1 illustrates, *responsiveness* is the most important factor for customer experience. The most significant improvement area in terms of customer service is *documentation*, which is the second most important factor for customer experience as well. Further, *meetings* and *professional FAT* received attention in both categories, which is significant, since they are similar to each other. FAT is a specific meeting, and thus it could be categorized under meetings. Including professional FAT in the category of meetings would increase the importance of meetings for customer experience.

The next step in the analysis was that all the keywords were classified according to the responsible function. Classification was relevant, since the target of this thesis was to separately improve the performance of each function. However, it was noticed that each function is responsible for many of them, and thus the classification only created repetitive documents. Due to this repetition, all the keywords were targeted to all the functions. This is significant, since the target of the thesis is to spread the responsibility for customer experience and customer service within the whole organization. This classification indicated that every function is responsible for most of the keywords through their own operations. Consequently, the functional classification proved to be useless. The results of the content analysis were utilized as such in the analysis of focus group results, which are discussed in the section 3.3.

The analysis continued through identifying the real strengths and weaknesses. This was an appropriate approach, since the questions of the survey were formed differently. Each of the questions aimed to identify either positive of negative factors. The first question, *how do you see, which factors have the greatest impact on customer experience,* aimed to identify the factors that have the greatest impact on customer experience. Importantly, the answers did not take a stand on the performance of the case company. In other words, the factor with the greatest impact can be either a strength or a weakness of the case company. The second question, *what would be the most significant issues in terms of customer service during projects which you would want us to improve*, aimed to identify direct improvement areas related to customer service. In other words, the answers focused on weaknesses, which need to be improved. The third question, *how we have succeeded to create a good customer experience*, aimed to identify the positive experiences from the past. As seen, the questions generated not only the most important factors for customer experience and customer service, but strengths and weaknesses as well. Therefore, it was important to identify and distinguish these from each other.

In practice, the strengths and weaknesses were identified by comparing the results from the different questions. Firstly, the questions 1 and 3 were compared in order to identify the keywords, which are both important for customer experience and perceived positively. As a result, the keywords *responsiveness, product, communication, and flexibility* were identified by such criteria (see LIITE). However, if the answers from the question 2 are taken into account, it can be noticed that responsiveness and communication are reported as the main improvement areas as well. Additionally, few customers mentioned flexibility as an improvement area although it is not illustrated in the table. Consequently, the only factor, which was reported as important for customer experience, mentioned as a strength, and did not receive any attention as an improvement area, was the product itself. This is remarkable, since the case company has been product-oriented for long, and the target of this thesis was to improve the other factors in particular. In fact, it is extremely important for the action research approach that the customers agree on the targets, since the customers should be in the center of every improvement process (McCrory et al., 2017).

Interestingly, the comparison revealed that the customers commonly identify the same keyword as both strength and weakness. This finding supports the conceptual definition that perceived customer experience is a subjective matter (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). In addition, the project environment increases the likeliness of having variation in the answers. In fact, some projects are successful with the same factor than other projects fail due to low level of standardization.

The next step after the content analysis and the identification of the strengths and weaknesses, was to focus on the actual answers again in more profound. The previous steps narrowed the information in order to find the most important factors, whereas the profound analysis aimed to enrich the information again. In practice, all the keywords in the Table 3 were investigated separately in order to deeply understand the hidden messages and suggestions. The keywords that are not presented in the figure, were not investigated. In practice, the investigation of the keywords begun with collecting all the original answers, which mention the keyword in question, into tables (Appendix 1). A core problem was identified for each answer, and a negative impact on customer experience was derived from the problems based on the literature. Thereafter, the problems were analyzed by means of an identification of the root causes, which is a part of a root cause analysis (Rooney and Heyvel, 2004). Within the identification, internal processes were reviewed and relevant employees were discussed with in order to identify the root causes for the problems. The analysis aimed to truly understand the issues in order to create a concrete basis for improvement ideas. The final discussion of this thesis (4) tackles these problems and causes, and generates solutions based on the empirical research and the literature.

In addition to the qualitative investigations, all the main keywords (Table 3) were compared with the conceptual definitions of the literature. The target of this comparison was to validate some of the theories by identifying the matches between them and the survey results. This was significant, since most of the theories were originally aimed to the B2C markets. Furthermore, since customer experience and customer service are both subjective by nature, all the theories are not applicable or they need updates according to the specific customer needs. In addition, the same analysis revealed factors, which are supported by the literature, but not mentioned by the customers. This is significant as well, since customers may have difficulties describing what they want (Halvorsrud et al., 2016). Moreover, it is likely that the survey answers were written in a hurry, and thus some of the possible factors that may have an impact on customer experience were not mentioned at all. Consequently, the comparison between the survey results and the literature was appropriate for this thesis, since the literature offered clear lacks within the case company's operations.

In practice, a table was created and all the main keywords were listed on the vertical axis. On the horizontal axis, in turn, were presented the eight most relevant theories related to customer experience and customer service. In particular, theories that offer different dimensions of the concepts were selected. Thereafter, the table was filled by comparing the particular keyword with the theory in question. For instance, responsiveness was the most frequent keyword, while one of the SERVQUAL dimensions is responsiveness. Hence, there is a match between the survey results and the SERVQUAL instrument. A similar comparative analysis was applied to every keyword and every theory in order to reveal the matches and lacks.

As a result, most theories were supported by the survey results. This may be due to the fact that most of the dimensions from the literature are relatively general, and thus covering majority of the keywords. However, the analysis revealed some differences as well. For instance, *meetings, professional FAT,* and *accurate answers* are not supported by Aloini et al. (2013). On the contrary, four articles (Woo and Ennew, 2005; Grønholt et al. 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Gounaris, 2005) offered dimensions, such as *co-operation* and *using customer insights*, which are not mentioned in the survey. Altogether, every theory is on the right track, and therefore offer applicable insights for the case study. The SERVQUAL instrument emerged as the most relevant theory, although it was originally designed for the B2C markets. As a conclusion, this thesis approves SERVQUAL as an applicable instrument for the case company and the B2B market in question.

Importantly, the customer survey together with the literature revealed that all the different dimensions need to be taken into account when improving customer experience and customer service. Indeed, the survey results are easily distinguishable and they represent a wide variety of different dimensions. The dimensions are almost equally represented, which justifies that all of them are significant. However, it was noticed that hard, rational, efficiency and output are emphasized over soft, emotional and relational dimensions. This means that in B2B environment customers appreciate the hard factors, or at least the customers of the case company appreciate them. This notion was later justified by interviewing the key account manager of the case company (see 3.4.2). In this case study, it is relevant to continue improving the soft factors, since the case company is already performing well with the hard factors, including the product. In other words, hard dimensions are essential for the success, but due to the facts that soft dimensions are almost equally appreciated and more often found as weaknesses of the case company, it is relevant to improve them.

In summary, the analysis of the customer survey results offered several results. First, the applied content analysis revealed the most frequent keywords, which represent the most important factors for customer experience as well as the desired improvement areas of current customer service. Further, the strengths and weaknesses were identified in order to clarify if the keywords are frequent due to positive of negative feedback. This identification presents that the product is the only real strength, which received no negative feedback. The content analysis that revealed the frequency of the keywords was followed by a qualitative analysis for each keyword. The aim of this was to understand the keywords in-depth, and the analysis generated problems, causes and suggestions from the customers. Thereafter, the found keywords were compared with the theories from the literature. In practice, theories with different dimensions of the concepts were compared in order to identify the dimensions within this particular business environment. Hence, this analysis answered to the RQ1.1. The main finding was that the SERVQUAL instrument is applicable for the improvement as well although the original instrument was designed for the B2C markets. Finally, the analysis of the most frequent keywords revealed that the hard factors, such as product and delivery time, are emphasized over the soft ones.

All in all, the customer survey was successful and valuable for the research, since it answered to the target research questions 1.1 and 2.1. Furthermore, the results represent international customers from all the main continents, which is significant for the case company. The main results (Table 3) can be used as a basis for identifying improvement actions and suggestions. However, further research and analysis are required in order to be able to improve the current order-delivery process. The reason for this requirement is that the customer survey merely offered the most important factors or the main improvement areas, however, the actual improvement ideas are few and far between. In other words, the results of the survey are not applicable as such, since they do not offer any solutions. Nevertheless, the other data collection methods of this thesis complement and validate the customer survey. For instance, the most frequent keywords are compared with the data sources in order to validate the results. This comparison is discussed in the synthesis in 3.5.

Furthermore, the analysis and especially the comparison with the literature offered additional information, which is not directly related to the research questions. Indeed, the customer survey validated some of the theories that are originally designed for the B2C markets. For instance, the SERVQUAL instrument was covering the survey results perfectly. This finding may not validate the instrument for the B2B markets in general, but for the purpose of this thesis it seems to be an applicable tool. Consequently, right utilization of the instrument may assist the process of improving customer service, and thus this finding answers to the research question 2.

3.2.3 Analysis of the past customer satisfaction data

The past customer satisfaction data was decided to be analyzed, since the customer survey answers were few in number. Therefore, the target this analysis was to validate the results of the customer survey. This is a good example of the iterative case study process of this thesis. In fact, a characteristic case study is iterative, and thus it is relevant to follow the process and perform such additional research Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 127). Furthermore, analysis of the customer satisfaction data was an applicable supporting method to validate the customer survey, since customer satisfaction is one of the real roots of customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The analysis was similar to the analysis of the survey data, and thus comparable as such. The following discussion explains the phases of the analysis.

First, the past customer satisfaction data from two product groups, A and B, was read and understood well. This understanding was essential for creating similar keywords as from the customer survey answers. However, here we use a word “topic” in order to distinguish these from the previous keywords. The topic represent the main content of each answer, and one answer may include many topics. After collecting all the topics together, these were generalized in order to create a clear list of the main topics, without overlaps. This list was the basis for a content analysis.

The content analysis was conducted in order to identify the most important topics based on their frequency. In practice, the amount of answers focusing on each topic was first calculated, and this number represents the frequency of one topic. Thereafter, the frequency of one topic was compared to the total amount of answers in order to calculate the percentual share of each topic. The topics with larger share represent the most frequent topics as well as the most important topics for the customers of the case company.

The feedbacks were either green (positive) or red (negative), depending on the perceived satisfaction. As a result, a topic may be frequent due to positive feedback as well. Therefore, the analysis aimed to identify the frequent negative issues, since they represent the improvement areas. Furthermore, this analysis did not only generate a clear list of the improvement areas, but it also revealed that 40 per cent (group A) and 36 per cent (group B) of the feedbacks were red cards, which offered additional significant motivation for the action research approach. In other words, there is an obvious need for improving customer experience through customer satisfaction.

In order to identify the most important topics, points were given for them based on specific criteria. The criteria were 1) total frequency, 2) amount of red cards, and 3) relevance for the targets of the thesis. The points were given so that the most important topic got 1, the second got 2, et cetera. Further, the relevance for the thesis gave either 3 or 0 points. Altogether, every topic got relative points based on each criterion, and low amount of points indicated high importance. As a conclusion, *communication* was the most important topic in the group A by 4 points. In detail, it was the second most frequent topic (2p), it received the second largest amount of red cards (2p), and it is relevant for the targets of this thesis (0p). Therefore, it gathered 2+2+0 points and an “importance index” of 4. Similarly, *responsiveness* was the third most frequent topic (3p), received the largest amount of red cards (1p), and it is relevant for this thesis (0p). Therefore, it gathered 3+1+0 points and an “importance index” of 4, and emerged as the most important topic for customer satisfaction in the group B. The most important topics are presented in the Table 4.

Table 4. The most important topics of the past customer satisfaction feedback. The list is based on the criteria, which is described above.

The past satisfaction data	
TOP List A	**TOP List B**
Communication	Responsiveness
Documentation	Documentation
Responsiveness	Communication
On-time delivery	On-time delivery
Problem solving	Problem solving

As can be seen from the table, similar topics arose from the both product groups. Only the order of the ranking is different. Nevertheless, the aim was to merely identify the most important topics, and thus the right order is trivial. Additionally, for the same reason, this thesis did not focus on validating the calculation methods or identifying the possible margin of error. The case study does not emphasize these results, but they validate the customer survey as expected. The comparison is discussed next.

Since the aim of this feedback analysis was to validate the results of the customer survey, a comparison between the results is significant. The Table 5 below is a combination of the survey results and the results of the analysis of the past customer satisfaction data. The table represents the results of the customer survey, and the red and bolded texts represent the results of the satisfaction data analysis.

Table 5. This illustration combines the customer survey and the past customer satisfaction data. The equivalences are bolded with red.

Survey		
Topic	**Keyword**	**Frequency**
Customer experience	**Responsiveness**	8
Customer experience	**Documentation**	7
Customer experience	Meetings	5
Customer experience	**Product**	4
Customer experience	Professional FAT	3
Customer experience	Accurate answers	3
Customer experience	**Communication**	3
Customer experience	Flexibility	3
Customer service	**Documentation**	5
Customer service	Professional FAT	4
Customer service	**Responsiveness**	4
Customer service	**Communication**	4
Customer service	**Delivery time**	2

As the Table 5 illustrates, most of the keywords from the customer survey were supported by the satisfaction data. Therefore, the first finding was that the customer survey seems to be a relevant input for improvement, since it represents similar topics to the past feedback that was collected from a larger sample of customers, 142 in total. The second finding was that *meetings, professional FAT, accurate answers* and *flexibility* are missing from the most important issues for satisfaction. Nevertheless, all of these are without a doubt extremely important for both customer experience and customer service. Indeed, meetings and professional FAT represent clear touch points with the customers, and thus they have direct impacts on customer experience. Furthermore, accurate answers represent efficient information sharing, and flexibility can be associated with adaption, which are both major parts of B2B service quality (Woo and Ennew, 2005). The third finding from this comparison was that customer satisfaction is one of the real roots of customer experience, as Lemon and Verhoef (2016) state. This finding was made, since all the main topics from the satisfaction data are associated with the customer survey results. In detail, all the topics excluding problem solving were mentioned in the main keywords from the customer survey. Especially, customer service received a strong support, which means that customer satisfaction drives customer service, which eventually drives customer experience. Consequently, this thesis states that customer satisfaction drives customer experience - either directly, or through customer service. However, customer satisfaction is not a comprehensive approach for customer experience, and other factors have to be taken into account as well.

In summary, the target of this analysis was to validate the customer survey results, since the sample of the survey was small. The past customer satisfaction data was decided to be the input of the analysis, since customer satisfaction is one of the real roots of customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Furthermore, the analyzed sample of data was larger by 142 answers in total. This data was analyzed with similar methods to the analysis of the customer survey. In fact, content analysis was used and strengths and weaknesses were identified. In addition, the most important topics of customer satisfaction found by utilizing ranking points that represented the importance in terms of different criteria. These criteria were 1) frequency, 2) amount of red cards, and 3) relevance for the thesis topics. Finally, the results were combined with the survey results in order to find similarities and differences. The comparison generated three main results. First, the customer survey seemed to be relevant input for improvement process, since it is strongly supported by the satisfaction data. Consequently, the keywords of the customer survey can direct the improvement process of this thesis. Second, the keywords *meetings, professional FAT, accurate answers* and *flexibility* were not supported by the satisfaction data. Nevertheless, the literature offers support for these keywords as discussed above. This means that even these keywords are relevant, although they did not emerge from the customer satisfaction data. Third, it was found that customer satisfaction is one of the real roots of customer experience, since it was supported throughout the survey results. In particular, a strong equivalence between customer service and customer satisfaction was found (Table 5), which means that customer satisfaction has an impact on customer experience through customer service. Importantly, customer satisfaction is still only a small area of customer experience, and thus the overall improvement requires more comprehensive approach.

3.3 Functional focus groups

In order to take the internal perspective of the customer needs into account, this thesis applied a focus group method as a part of the empirical research. The focus group method is basically a qualitative discussion within a specific group of people, which aims to gather qualitative data, understand the topics in profound, and participate the people through interaction (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 173-192). According to their practical impression, a focus group is a group of individuals discussing or commenting on the same topic. Usually the people, 2-10 in total, have similar backgrounds or they have been selected based on the research aims. The discussion is directed by a facilitator, however, the idea is to enhance interaction between the participants. Importantly, this interaction is the key element that distinguishes the focus group method from group interviews. The group interview method emphasizes direct questions and strong control by the facilitator, whereas the focus group method emphasizes free conversation. This free conversation generates qualitative and unpredictable results. However, the bare answers are not the only aim, and focus groups often aim to collect behavioral observations, such as human reactions. Finding new perspectives is always one of the aims of focus groups.

Focus group method was selected for this case study, since it is suggested to be a part of an action research process which has several data collection methods (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 173-192). In particular, they report that the right way to utilize the focus group method is after a survey in order to implement change. In fact, the focus group method is especially suitable for change processes, such as improving service or working practices. Therefore, they argue that it is no surprise that focus group method is widely used as a part of action research in the B2B markets.

Additionally, the focus group method was selected in this thesis, since it emphasizes participation and engagement. In fact, the most important characteristic of action research approach is that the people are involved into the process in order to find solutions (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 193-209). Thus, functional focus groups were utilized in order to involve the responsible employees to find solutions for better customer experience and customer service. Furthermore, involvement to a focus group enhances the feeling of being an expert (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 173-192), which supports the idea of sharing the responsibility of the customer interface within the whole organization. Additionally, in order to improve customer service, it is essential to understand the creation of customer value by means of the underlying internal operations, especially the backstage operations. Therefore, it is significant to engage the whole organization to improve the process, which was also one of the purposes of the focus groups.

The focus groups had four general purposes for the overall case study. 1), the focus groups aimed to measure the level of internal capabilities in terms of customer experience and customer service. This analysis was made by comparing the results of the focus groups with the customer survey results. 2), the focus groups aimed to identify improvement areas for customer experience and customer service. In other words, one of the purposes of the focus groups was to find those significant factors for our customers that are not common practices of the employees. 3), the purpose of the focus groups was to engage the employees to the forthcoming cultural change. The idea was to begin the change process with activating employees' own thinking in order to commit them. Furthermore, one of the targets of the thesis was to engage all the functions to improve customer experience and customer service. Importantly, engaging all the functions shows that the customer interface is not the only responsible for improving customer experience and customer service. 4), the last purpose of the focus groups was to enhance knowledge sharing between individuals. Since customer experience is a wide and complex concept, it is rare that a single person possesses all the required skills, and thus gathering and sharing diverse knowledge from the co-workers is essential for each employee. Furthermore, this knowledge sharing finally enables organizational learning (Bartol and Srivastava, 2002).

In practice, the focus groups aimed to identify the value adding operations that each function performs in order to deliver customer experience and customer service. This information is mainly internal, and thus the analysis phase compared the focus group results with the customer survey results. This comparison gave insights into the internal capabilities and their match with the customer needs. Furthermore, the discussion of the focus groups offered an opportunity for everyone to learn the right practices, which finally supports organizational learning of these matters. In this respect, the focus groups of this thesis aimed to find answers for the research questions 1.1 and 2.1.

3.3.1 Planning and data collection

As Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 173-192) suggest, the focus group method must be planned well. The planning of this study begun with selecting the target focus groups. The selection was straightforward, since the aim of this thesis is to improve the performance of each function, and thus the internal functions represented the focus groups. However, the functions that are not supporting the order-delivery process were excluded. As a result, 16 focus groups were selected and they are presented below. The amount of functions is less than 16, since some of them included many focus groups.

- Sales
- Project management
- Mechanical engineering
- Electrical engineering
- Order planning
- Purchasing and production planning
- Production
- Research & Development
- Technology
- Insulation laboratory
- Quality and operational excellence

The next phase of planning was to design the questions. This thesis decided to use only two general and open questions in order to create an open and interactive discussion. The questions aimed to be clear and simple, since this improves understanding the topic and enhances the empowerment of the employees to direct the discussion. The questions focus on customer experience only, which is not a limitation due to overlapping meaning of the concepts. The two questions of the focus groups are presented next.

1. Which operations or factors have been recognized in own work, which have an impact on customer experience? (Which operations have positive or negative impact on customer experience?)
2. What is the direct or indirect added value through these operations for our (external) customers? (What are the benefits from the operations for the customers?)

In addition to the question design, the planning of the focus groups included other practical decisions as well. First, the time span of 30-60 minutes was decided to be enough for a compact qualitative discussion. Second, the vice president of the business unit wrote an introduction letter for everyone before applying the focus group method. The idea of this letter was to familiarize all the employees with the aims of the improvement process as well as commit them to participate actively. Third, a test round was conducted with one function in order to test the focus group design and implementation readiness. The research team met after the test, and a few changes in the questions were made, since the participants found them unclear. Nevertheless, the test was successful, and expected information was gathered through a rich discussion. Therefore, the test results were approved to represent the real results of the function in question.

Although Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 173-192) suggest that the researcher facilitates the focus group, the focus groups of this thesis were implemented by the functional managers. This practice was possible, since all the managers were highly aware of the ongoing case study. The targets and practices of the research process were understood in advance due to close collaboration in the planning of the Superior Customer experience -program. Regardless, a test round was conducted in a way that the manager facilitated the focus group, while the researcher made observations. The good results from the test round justified the used practices.

Finally, after the test round, the focus group method was implemented within the organization for the rest of the functions. Altogether, 16 documents were created based on the results during the focus groups. These documents reveal the operations that the different functions do in order to deliver customer experience. In addition, the documents list all the added value through the operations, which have either positive or negative impact on customer experience. The gathered data was clear and comprehensive, and thus only two topics required in-depth clarification afterwards.

3.3.2 Analysis and results

Appropriate analysis is significant for the success of a focus group research (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 173-192). In fact, they argue that the analysis methods shall be selected based on the research questions that are the target of the method. The analysis in this case relied on a comparison with the customer survey results. The reason for such analysis is that customer service is generally divided in operational and customer perspectives, and therefore, combining these perspectives will create the required information for improvement (Johnston and Kong, 2011). The comparison aimed to identify the most significant improvement areas for customer service, and the level of internal capabilities in terms of customer experience and customer service. Thus, the comparison answered to the research question 2.1. Furthermore, the focus group results gave direct answers to the research question 1.1, however, the customer perspective has to be taken into account in order to justify what actually is important for customer experience. As a result, a comparison is essential for finding answers for any of the research questions.

Furthermore, the comparison between the customer perspective and the internal perspective may support the identification of the market information gap (Figure 18). More specifically, the market information gap is between the customer expectations and internal understanding of these expectations. Identification of this gap is significant for the case study and especially for the action research approach, since it reveals the location of the problem. In fact, the problem may be that the employees just do not understand what the customers want, or that the employees are not capable of implementing the required operations. Therefore, the comparison method offered relevant information for the research questions 1 and 2 directly.

Regardless of the research questions, the first phase of the analysis was to comprehensively understand the gathered data. This included translations and organizing the data, as well as simply reading through the data again and again. In addition, a few unclear notes were clarified afterwards through discussions with the focus group members. Finally, keywords were created to represent the main content of each note, similarly with the analysis of the customer survey. These keywords enabled the comparison.

The aim of the actual comparison analysis was to find *similarities* and *differences* between the customer survey results and the focus group data. In practice, the results of the customer survey (Table 3) structured the comparison, since the keywords represented the "titles" of the content for each function. Thereafter, the data from the focus groups was categorized under the titles. As a result, each function had a chapter with titles based on the keywords from the customer survey, and content based on the focus group data. In other words, the customer survey keywords created a form for this document, which was filled with the operational knowledge from the focus groups.

This document reveals the similarities and differences between the internal and external perspectives. Some of the keywords from the customer survey were strongly supported by the focus group data, which means that these topics were focused during the discussions. However, some of the keywords were not mentioned during the focus groups, which is a significant gap between customer needs and internal capabilities. The research process aimed to fill the gaps in order to improve the practices. Finally, this document was the basis of the handbook, since it clearly presents the key areas of customer experience and customer service, as well as the internal best practices.

Regardless of the similarities and differences, the focus group data was directly utilized in the creation of the handbook, since one of the purposes of the focus groups was to enhance knowledge sharing between the individuals. Knowledge sharing through the handbook is relevant, since the function specific data from each focus group may not represent employees' individual knowledge. As a result, the handbook assists sharing and standardizing the best practices within the particular function. This supports organizational learning in terms of customer experience and customer service.

The focus group method was particularly suitable for the action research approach, since the interaction during the focus groups supported knowledge sharing already before the handbook. On the one hand, this is significant for organizational learning, since the focus group method supports equality in knowledge. On the other hand, open and free interaction within a focus group leads to innovative new ideas, perspectives and solutions (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 173-192). Indeed, a lack of pressure of answering leads to free idea generation, and thus innovative perspectives can be found through focus groups. In this case, the method generated several practical ideas, which are utilized in the handbook. All these insights are remarkable for the successful action research approach. However, gathering data for the researcher was not the only reason for applying the focus group method, but instead, the interaction supported initiating a successful change towards a better organizational culture

Finally, the focus group data offered direct answers to the research question 1.1. Although the customers' perspective is more important in this respect, measuring the internal understanding of customer experience is relevant as well. The relevance is based on the fact that the internal knowledge may represent the customer needs as well due to close collaboration with the customers or the customer interface. Consequently, the internal opinion is valuable, but insufficient as such. In fact, understanding the current awareness of customer experience is extremely significant for the case study. In addition, since the customer experience literature is in its "infancy" (Johnston and Kong, 2011), identifying the important factors by internal focus groups is a relevant method. Hence, the results of the focus groups were directly used for improving the customer experience of the case company. Indeed, the results were utilized either in the handbook or for direct recommendations for the case company. Importantly, the voice of the customers was still emphasized before presenting any major changes for the case company.

The main finding was based on the *similarities* and *differences* between the results from the customer survey and the focus groups. The comparison revealed that most of the keywords from the survey correlated with the internal discussions. These similarities indicate that the employees of the case company are aware of customer experience in general. In other words, the employees seem to know what they at least *should* do in order to enhance customer experience. Therefore, this finding suggests that the market information gap between the case company and the customers is narrower than expected, and thus the main improvement area may be elsewhere. Nevertheless, the results of the focus groups are still used for knowledge sharing through the handbook in order to ensure that everyone understands the best practices.

Importantly, the found differences between the results of the customer survey and the focus groups represent lacks of understanding. For instance, if a keyword was not mentioned in the focus group discussion, the employees are either unaware that the keyword is important for the customers at all, or they lack the right implementation capabilities. This is significant for the case study and action research approach, since the results offer clear improvement areas in terms of customer experience and customer service. Hence, the differences answer to the research question 2.1. Additionally, the similarities and differences together offer an overview of the internal capabilities, which supports the improvement targets.

The analysis of the similarities and differences revealed that the market information gap is the widest between the production functions and the customers due to high amount of differences. These differences may be caused by low motivation to contribute or lack of understanding of the customer needs. However, it is uncertain which is the real cause, and thus this is one of the limitations of the method (further discusses in the section 4.1).

In summary, the focus group data was analyzed by comparing the data with the results of the customer survey. This process generated similarities and differences between the customer expectations and the internal understanding of these expectations. Therefore, the results determined the market information gap. More specifically, the found similarities illustrate that the market information gap is narrow, whereas the differences proof that the gap exists. The differences represent significant improvement areas, and thus they answer to the RQ 2.1. The production functions represent the location of the widest market information gap. Nevertheless, the main finding from the analysis was that the market information gap is relatively narrow in general, and thus the need for improvement may be elsewhere. Additionally, knowledge sharing was an important reason to applying the focus group method. On the one hand, the interaction during the focus group discussion enhanced knowledge sharing within the function. While on the other hand, sharing the identified best practices by means of the handbook will enhance the knowledge sharing in the near future. This supports organizational learning and standardizing the best practices throughout the organization.

3.4 Key informant interviews

The case study process was iterative as the literature presents, hence an emerged need for more profound knowledge required two qualitative interviews in addition to the previous data collection methods (Eisenhardt, 1989). The collected data from customer survey and focus groups was insufficient for understanding the case, and thus additional data collection methods were utilized within the case study. Such flexibility is advantageous for the case study method in general (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 127). The reason for the first interview was that one of the project managers of the case company was mentioned by name in the customer survey. In fact, one of the customers was extremely appreciative due to great customer experience from the collaboration with this project manager in particular. Therefore, this case study became interested in his practices. The reason for the second interview was that one of the key accounts was inactive with the customer survey, and thus a need for further research emerged. An obvious decision was to interview the key account manager who is responsible for this inactive key account in particular. In addition, this interview also aimed to understand the role of key account management at the case company. Altogether, the motivation to conduct additional research emerged from the process, and thus this study was a part of the iterative process. The need for such interviews was based on a lack of in-depth understanding of the other results and the concepts in practice.

The interviews had three main objectives, which were 1) identifying the customer needs, 2) identifying the best practices, and 3) determining direct improvement suggestions based on professional knowledge. Importantly, both interviews aimed to gain understanding rather than collect more data, and thus this method mainly offered qualitative in-depth understanding and support for the other methods. By means of these objectives, this method aims to answer to the research questions 1, 1.1 and 2. The answers for the question 1.1 are based on the customers and their needs in particular, while the answers for the two other questions rely on the interviewees' own expertise as well.

Both interviews were implemented by using a constructionist and semi-structured approach. A constructionist interview emphasizes interactive discussion between the facilitator and the interviewee (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 80). Further, the discussion is not limited to the preplanned questions and it aims to identify profound meanings. For this reason, a constructionist approach utilizes *how* questions. The semi-structured approach means that the interview is only partially controlled by the researcher, which is well in line with the constructionist approach (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 82). Further, the topics and questions are planned in advance, but during the interview the interaction is free, which means that wording and the order of the questions may change. Importantly, the questions are both *what* and *how* questions, which means that the aim is to collect both informative answers and in-depth understanding. The interviews of this study followed these approaches as closely as possible.

The constructionist and semi-structured interview approaches were selected due to the following reasons. First, the constructionist approach was selected, since the aim was to create a qualitative discussion, which may exceed the expected outcomes. Since the need for these interviews emerged during the process, the actual expectations were slightly ambiguous. In addition, the focus groups already focused on the internal operations, and thus the interviews were conducted in order to profoundly understand the underlying issues within the case company's business and operations. Second, the semi-structured approach was selected, since the *structure* supports the constructionist approach. In other words, controlling the interviews at some level was essential for keeping the focus of the discussion on the right matters. Also the combination of *what* and *how* questions was selected, which is offering more control than a pure constructionist approach. However, a fully structured interview would have been detrimental for the in-depth results and emerging new perspectives. In addition, the free flow of discussion during a semi-structured interview may lead to completely new and innovative solutions, which is significant for the research questions 1 and 2.

Before the interviews, the questions were designed in co-operation with the project group. This process begun with the topics, that represent the focus of the interviews. Several questions were designed under each topic, however, since the interviews were semi-structured, the actual questions were less important than the topics. In addition, it was decided that each interview would approximately take 60 minutes. Finally, the participants were informed with a short introduction into the case study. This introduction included motivation for conducting such interviews as well.

During the interviews, the discussion proceeded as freely as planned. The topics and questions directed the content successfully, but the semi-structured approach enabled changes during the interviews. For instance, the discussion emphasized some topics more than others and the order of the questions changed. Both interviews were audio taped and the researcher did written notes during the interviews. The idea was to focus on interactive discussion, and thus the written notes merely supported the data collection. In other words, the written notes did not include any word for word answers. As a result, the collected data was qualitative and complex, even somewhat tacit. Nevertheless, the interviews offered wide understanding and completely new insights, as expected. The results are discussed in detail in the following sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2.

3.4.1 Results - Project Manager

The interview of the project manager had two main targets. First, this project manager received good feedback based on his skills on creating customer experience, and thus this interview aimed to identify the best practices at the customer interface. Second, this interview was a good opportunity to determine the needs for internal support from the customer interface's point of view. In other words, this interview aimed to understand the needed support from the backstage in order to deliver excellent customer service.

Since the interview was constructionist and semi-structured, this description offers merely the topics that were discussed rather than specific questions. The topics were 1) the own practices that led to the good feedback, 2) customer-based knowledge, 3) cross-functional collaboration, and 4) project management tools. The discussion emphasized the topics 1 and 3, since they offered most relevant information for the targets of the interview.

In addition to the interactive discussion, two separate assignments were given to the interviewee. First, he was asked to rank the answers from the focus group of project management in order to find the most important ones. However, this information was not utilized, since all the results from the focus group were decided to be relevant, and thus part of the handbook as such. Second, he was asked to identify a quick solution for each keyword that emerged from the customer survey. By means of this assignment, the case study found many applicable practices, such as limiting the maximum response time to 24 hours and involving engineers to the FATs.

The actual results were mostly divided in two, based on the two targets. These were 1) the best practices in the customer interface, and 2) the supporting roles of the backstage. The following paragraphs explain the main results. However, some of the results were small and practical, and thus they are not presented here. These results were directly utilized for the handbook contents.

In terms of the first target, the main finding was that responsiveness is the key to better customer experience. This finding is strongly supported by other data collection methods of this thesis as well. Secondly, the project manager emphasized customer-oriented way of finding solutions. In fact, the finding was that customer experience will improve if the representative avoids saying "no" and rather aims to find valuable solutions. Similarly with the first finding, the other data collection methods support this practice of finding solutions in a flexible and customer-oriented way. However, the actual implementation of customer-oriented flexibility may be somewhat tacit, and thus difficult to teach to other employees. Thirdly, the last main finding for the first target was that it is significant to continuously learn in the customer interface. This learning requires efficient internal and external communication, and for instance close F2F collaboration with other functions. In fact, cross-functional collaboration is essential for complex development projects (Nätti et al., 2006). Hence, the interview suggested the project managers to be more interested in the internal operations as well as the customer needs.

The second target generated many results as well. Importantly, the support from the backstage was found remarkable in general. The project manager supported the previous notion that each function has its own role and responsibilities in terms of customer experience. This role refers to supporting the customer interface through the backstage employees' own knowledge and expertise. For instance, engineering functions must offer technical answers to the customers by their skills and knowledge. Three main suggestions were identified, which help to implement the supporting role of the backstage. These were 1) Internal responsiveness, 2) participating professionals to FATs, and 3) management's support to the customer interface.

By *internal responsiveness* the project manager meant the way how the backstage organization reacts and responses to the requests from the customer interface. *Participating professionals* referred to technical specialists or engineers who could participate in these important touch points. They could share their knowledge and answer to customer's questions. However, the project manager highlighted the idea of presence in particularly. More specifically, he suggested that technical representatives could participate informally, without a specific reason or agenda. This would improve the collaborative relationship and trust between the case company and the customer. Lastly, the project manager emphasized *management's support to the customer interface* when the situation is difficult. Although this was one of the results, he also mentioned that this is implemented quite well already. Nevertheless, the literature strongly suggests that the management shall be committed and involved into the cultural change (e.g. Martin, 1992). Therefore, this finding is relevant regardless of the current level of support, and the practice shall be continued in the future.

In addition to these results, the interview revealed a few other issues, which are not related to the targets. First, the project manager described that the customer communication strongly emphasizes the hard factors, such as technical specifications, quality and delivery time. This means that the customers are interested in and the case company enjoys discussing these topics in particular. However, the finding also indicates that the soft factors, in turn, are less emphasized. This is a significant lack, since both sides are important for customer service (Valvio, 2010, p.79). Second, in the interview it was also found that the tools of project management are decentralized, and thus slightly ambiguous. Moreover, the customers are often not aware of all the tools. Improving the awareness of the customers related to such tool is essential.

In summary, this interview aimed to understand the best practices for the customer interface and the needed support from the backstage functions. Several results were found to both targets, which means that the interview was successful. For instance, responsiveness, customer-oriented flexibility, and communication were identified as the best practices, and technical support, participations in FATs and managerial support during challenges represented the support requirements from project management's point of view. In addition to the actual results, the interview revealed two other issues related to the case study. Firstly, the customer communication emphasizes hard factors over the soft, although both are significant for the customer experience. Secondly, project management tools are ambiguous for the case company as well as for the customers. Therefore, an integrated system could be created in order to centralize the project-based interaction.

3.4.2 Results - Key Account Manager

The motivation to conduct this interview emerged from the fact that one of the key accounts was inactive in the customer survey, and thus it was decided to interview the responsible key account manager. Therefore, the main target of this interview was to cover the missing answers and identify the most significant factors for the customer in question in terms of customer experience. Furthermore, this interview was a great opportunity to discuss with a customer interface professional, and thus gather direct suggestions for the improvement. In this respect, it was also significant to gain understanding of the general role of key account management at the case company.

Similarly with the first interview, this one was semi-structured, and thus this description offers merely the topics that were discussed. The topics were 1) key account management's role at the case company, 2) the most significant factors in terms of customer experience, 3) customer relationship building, and 4) cross-functional collaboration with the other functions.

Probably the main finding of this interview was that key account management is highly aware of the factors of customer experience, although it is not related to the main target of the interview. Due to this awareness, many things are done right with this customer in particular. For instance, utilization of rich media and effective co-creation could show example for any other function. Therefore, the actual finding for this case study is that key account management could offer knowledge and applicable practices to the other functions, especially to project management.

The two most appropriate practices are enhancement of direct communication between the customers and the backstage functions, and utilization of a task list through dialogical interaction. More specifically, the key account manager explained the direct communication so that their role is to merely facilitate the discussion between the backstage and the case company. In practice, they find the right people and initiate the interaction, but instead of actively participating, the key account manager leaves space for the interaction. By implementing this practice in the order-delivery process, the long message chains may shorten, thus improving responsiveness. The other appropriate practice, utilization of a task list, referred to key account management's tool, which enables co-creation through dialogical interaction. This type of collaboration is the key of value creation through customer service (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015). Consequently, a similar tool could be useful in project management as well in order to engage the customers to the process.

Furthermore, the interview offered valuable results related to the actual target. Indeed, this customer in particular appreciates trust, as well as communication, which is open, rich and personalized. Trust and communication are both strongly supported by the literature (eg. Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Woo and Ennew, 2005). Importantly, the key account manager seemed to be aware of the customer needs and preferences due to close collaboration, and thus this opinion is reliable. The following paragraphs explain trust and communication as well as current practices in key account management. These practices are applicable suggestions for the case study, and thus this interview offered more than expected.

This customer finds trust as the main source of customer experience. More specifically, trust is mainly achieved by open communication. In fact, the customer prefers open communication regardless of the challenges. For instance, they want to be disappointed at least as early as possible. Further, mutual honesty is taken for granted and the customer appreciates long-term commitment in order to enhance trust between the parties. The key account manager emphasized the importance of personal relationships for trust. A major element of trust is personal relationships through several years of collaboration. This is not a novel idea in human relationships, however, it is significant to find that trust in B2B environment behaves similarly. As a conclusion, the order-delivery process, and project management in particular, should implement similar open communication and long-term commitment to the customer relationships. Additionally, the personal side of these relationships shall be taken into account as well.

Open, rich and personalized communication is the other main source of customer experience. Open communication is significant for trust, as discussed before. Rich communication, in turn, is extremely important for the success of the collaboration. In practice, rich communication is implemented through phone calls, skype meetings, and constant F2F interaction in addition to emails. The idea of dialogical interaction is applied, which means that the communication happens mutually *between* the parties (Ballantyne, 2004). However, communication with this customer mainly focuses on technical issues rather than soft issues, such as feelings and emotions. Nevertheless, the key account manager assured that this way of communication is preferred by the customer. Customer preferences shall direct the way of communication, which leads to personalized communication. Importantly, this personalization should be based on tacit knowledge, and digital tools, such as CRM are not good enough to replace work experience from the collaboration.

Although the project manager interview revealed a lack of communication related to soft issues, this interview offered another perspective. In fact, the key account manager argued that the customer prefers technical topics. Therefore, it may be against the customer needs to emphasize the soft topics. In addition, the last finding related to communication was that the key account manager highlighted the importance of informal communication. This type of communication builds the important customer relationships, and is thus applicable for improving customer experience in the order-delivery process as well.

One of the key results from the interview was the notion that key account management does not collaborate with the order-delivery process. The lack of collaboration is a pity, since key account management obviously has a lot of knowledge to share. Especially, project management would benefit from this knowledge and practices. Therefore, this thesis suggests that key account management could take a more important role within the organization in terms of customer experience. In practice, they could design better practices as well as share their own knowledge on the customer preferences.

Altogether, the interview of the key account manager offered many results. The main finding was that key account management is highly aware of the practices that lead to better customer experience. As a result, their best practices can be directly utilized in order to improve the order-delivery process. However, the actual target of the interview was to identify the most significant factors in terms of customer experience. The discussion was focused only on one specific customer, since their representatives were inactive in the customer survey. The interview found two main factors, which were trust and communication, which is open, rich and personalized. Due to the in-depth discussion, the interview identified several practical suggestions in order to improve both trust and communication. Furthermore, the interview aimed to identify relevant suggestions and understand the role of key account management. Both of these targets were fulfilled, since the interview offered several practical suggestions as well as information related to the current role. As a result, this interview was successful and offered relevant knowledge for the case study. However, the interview had a limitation in terms of the whole research process. Indeed, the discussion focused on customer experience, while customer service was less emphasized.

3.5 Synthesis

This empirical synthesis was important for the case study, since the research process was complex and multifaceted. This thesis used several data collection methods in order to answer to the same research questions, which is characteristic for case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). Consequently, it is relevant to combine and compare the results from different methods. Furthermore, the overlapping results validate each other, and thus the results are more reliable. Overlaps in the evidence is one of the strengths of the case study method (Eisenhardt, 1989). This synthesis begins with a short summary of the conducted research, which includes the research questions. The summary is then followed by the *method specific-results* (3.5.1). The plain results of the data collection methods are then discussed, combined and compared with each other in the *combination* (3.5.2). Importantly, this synthesis has two main differences from the *discussion and conclusions* of this thesis (chapter 4). First, the synthesis focuses on the empirical research only, whereas the discussion combines the theoretical point of view with the empirical results. Second, this synthesis emphasizes the problems and other empirical conclusions, whereas the discussion offers solutions. In other words, the empirical synthesis answers to the research questions 1.1 and 2.1, whereas the discussion answers to the research questions 1 and 2. Nevertheless, the discussion of this synthesis is already profound and reflective, and thus similar to the final discussion.

The aim of the empirical research was to fill the gaps of the customer experience and customer service literature. This is relevant for the case study and especially for the action research approach, since improving the current processes require input information, which was lacking in the literature. Therefore, conducting empirical research was essential for the improvement. In practice, the research identified the most important factors of customer experience and customer service based on internal and external sources of data. In addition, the current capabilities were evaluated in order to identify relevant improvement areas. In order to clarify the targets, the research questions of this thesis are presented below.

1. How to improve customer experience in the order-delivery process?

    1.1. Which factors have the greatest impact on customer experience in the B2B markets?

2. How to improve customer service in the order-delivery process?

    2.1. What are the most significant improvement areas in terms of customer service?

The research questions 1 and 2 aimed to offer direct improvement ideas. However, since the customer experience literature is insufficient in the B2B markets and ETO projects, the RQ 1.1 aimed to understand the concept in general. This is supported by the case study literature (Yin, 2009, p.4). Similarly, the RQ 2.1 aimed to identify the most important improvement areas based on the specific customer needs. The findings of these questions directed the improvement process towards the right direction. In other words, the aim was to find the most important improvement areas for the case company, which are internal weaknesses as well. This is a good example of the need for comparison between the external and internal data, which was one of the methods of this synthesis.

This study was iterative and utilized several data collection methods, since a characteristic case study is iterative (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 127). Furthermore, a characteristic action research process consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Importantly, the reflection phase includes evaluation of the results, which may lead to further research. As a result, planning is resumed and the whole process is repeated. Consequently, action research is often a cycle of iterations.

In this thesis, the research process utilized three data collection methods methods, since case studies utilizes several sources of evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989). 1) A customer survey was conducted in order to identify the customer preferences. These preferences directed the whole improvement process. Furthermore, the past customer satisfaction data was analyzed in order to validate the survey results. 2) Focus groups were utilized within the organization in order to determine the level of internal capabilities. The found knowledge was particularly important for identifying the most significant improvement areas. 3) Two qualitative and semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to gain profound information. First, one of the project managers was thanked in the customer survey, and thus he was interviewed. Second, one key account was inactive in the customer survey, and thus the responsible key account manager was interviewed. The Figure 17 in the research design 3.1 illustrates the research process with all the three methods and the supporting data analysis.

3.5.1 Results of the data collection methods

This section summarizes the main results from the data collection methods. Following Table 6 offers an overview to the collected data. The first row presents the utilized data collection methods, customer survey, focus groups and qualitative interviews. The first column on the left side of the table presents the research questions of the case study. Consequently, the results from the data collection methods are categorized by means of the method itself and related research question. Importantly, this table only presents the raw data, thus research questions 1 and 2 are emphasized less. The information in this table is further analyzed in the synthesis section (3.5.2), which is the basis of the discussion and conclusions chapter (4). As a result, the data collection methods clearly support the empirical case study.

Table 6. The results from the data collection methods.

	Data collection methods		
	Customer survey	Focus groups	Qualitative interviews
RQ 1 & 2		Similarities with the customer survey represent the best practices.	Better collaboration between KAM and the order-delivery process is significant Cross-functional support
RQ 1.1	Responsiveness Documentation Meetings Product Professional FAT Accurate answers Communication Flexibility	A vast amount of significant things and practices for customer experience.	Responsiveness Flexibility Communication Trust
RQ 2.1	Documentation Professional FAT Responsiveness Communication Delivery time	Differences with the customer survey represent the market information gap.	
Others	SERVQUAL instrument is equivalent with the survey results		

The following paragraphs are structured by means of the methods, although the discussion adverts to the research questions continuously. Although the methods are discussed individually, the focus group paragraph combines the customer survey results with the focus group data, since it was part of the analysis of the data collection method. The aim is to create a basis for the *combination* (3.5.2) which combines and compares these different sources of data.

The main finding from the customer survey was the list of the main keywords based on the frequency (Table 3). For instance, *responsiveness* is the most important for customer experience, while *documentation* is the most significant improvement area for customer service. In addition, if professional FAT is seen as a meeting, the importance would increase rapidly. Therefore, meetings is evaluated as one of the main results as well. Further, the analysis revealed the real strengths and weaknesses, and the product was the only real strength. Thereafter, problems and causes for the keywords were identified, which are presented in the Appendix 1. All these results refer to the research questions 1.1 and 2.1, since they represent significant issues rather than finalized solutions. Additionally, the survey results indicated that both hard and soft factors are important for the customers, although the hard factors were emphasized slightly more. However, the comparison with the literature demonstrated that the soft SERVQUAL instrument correlated well with the customer survey results, which means that the soft factors are important as well.

The main finding from the analysis of the past customer satisfaction data was that the customer survey results are valid based on the overlaps between the past data. However, the analysis revealed some keywords that were not supported by the data. In fact, meetings, professional FAT, accurate answers and flexibility did not receive any support. Nonetheless, the literature of customer experience and customer service is strongly supporting these keywords, and thus the case study may utilize them as such (e.g. Woo and Ennew, 2005). These results answered to the research questions 1.1 and 2.1. Lastly, the analysis revealed that customer satisfaction is a root of customer experience, either directly or through customer service. This finding supported the notion that customer experience may behave similarly in both the B2C and the B2B markets.

The functional focus groups generated a vast amount of internal opinions of the important areas of customer experience and customer service. Therefore, the results answered to the research questions 1.1 and 2.1 directly. However, since the customers' perspective is the only that matters, the results from the focus groups had to be compared with the survey results. This comparison generated similarities and differences. Importantly, the similarities illustrated that the internal knowledge meets the customer expectations, and thus these were utilized as handbook contents as such. The similarities answer to the research questions 1 & 2. On the contrary, the differences represented the market information gap, and thus relevant improvement areas. In other words, these differences meant that the customer expectations and internal understanding of these expectations did not match, and thus these offered answers to the research question 2.1 in particular. In general, the overview of the similarities and differences gained understanding of the internal capabilities in terms of customer experience and customer service. As a result, the internal organization is well aware of the customer expectations due to the high amount of similarities.

The interview for the project manager validated the customer survey as well as offered suggestions for more effective internal support. More specifically, *responsiveness, flexibility* and *communication* were supported by the project manager. This offered answers to the research questions 1.1 and 2.1. Nevertheless, if the other project managers are not aware of these factors, a need for training occurs due to lack of internal capabilities. Consequently, the finding may support the research questions 1 and 2 as well. In addition, he argued that the customer interface needs support from the backstage by means of internal responsiveness, participation to FATs, and managerial support in difficult situations. These were direct improvement ideas, and thus they answered to the research questions 1 and 2. The interview also revealed that the customer interaction emphasizes the hard factors, such as the product and lead times, over the soft factors, such as feelings and emotions. This is interesting, since the soft factors were almost equally represented in the customer survey as well as in the literature. This may support finding the most significant improvement areas in terms of customer service, and thus answering to the RQ 2.1. Finally, the discussion identified a need for a more integrated tool for project management, which initiated a planning of a project portal for more efficient communication. The portal could include tools that enable customer communication, effective following of the process and sharing feedback.

The interview for the key account manager revealed that the concept of customer experience is well understood within the key account management team. Hence, the actual finding for this thesis was that their practices could be implemented in the order-delivery process as well, which answered to the research questions 1 and 2. Furthermore, the interview validated the importance of *communication* as well as added *trust* to the answers of the question 1.1. In addition, he emphasized the importance of informal communication for building business relationships, which represented an improvement area that leads to better customer experience and customer service. Therefore, this finding answered to the research questions 1 and 2. Lastly, the interview revealed a lack of collaboration between key account management and the order-delivery process. As a result, enhancing this collaborative relationship would improve customer experience and customer service by means of key account management's knowledge. This finding answered to the research questions 1 and 2.

3.5.2 Combination

This section combines and compares the sources of data. The discussion is the basis of the synthesis, since it identifies overlaps from the data, and thus validates the results. Importantly, these findings are the basis of the final discussion and conclusions of this thesis (chapter 4). In practice, this combination was made by two main steps. First, the empirical results were collected from each data collection method. And second, the overlaps and other clear connections between the results were identified. The following paragraphs demonstrate the main findings.

These overlapping results bind the data collection methods together. Furthermore, finding these overlaps justify the results of a single method. In other words, if the same result emerged from another method, the result is justified as reliable information. For instance, all the three methods emphasized the importance of communication, which means that the result is probably right. Importantly, the interview method was considered as two separate methods within the combination, since the interviews did not focused exactly on the same topics.

The first connections were found between the customer survey and the past customer satisfaction data. The five most frequent topics of customer satisfaction from both product groups (A & B) did find pairs from the keywords of the customer survey. As a result, *responsiveness, documentation, product, communication* and *delivery time* were overlapping with the customer survey results. Importantly, 4 out of 5 customer service keywords overlapped with the customer satisfaction data, which clearly shows that customer service and customer satisfaction are tightly related concepts. Similarly, 4 out of 8 customer experience keywords overlapped, which partially validates the connection between customer satisfaction and customer experience. In addition, it was found that the only overlapping soft factors were responsiveness and communication, and thus these were identified as the most important improvement areas. Altogether, these overlaps answered to the RQ 1.1, which offers input to the RQ1. Consequently, the overlapping keywords represent the titles of the handbook.

Further, a strong equivalence was found between the customer survey and the functional focus groups. The comparison analysis was made in a way that the keywords from the customer survey were used as category titles, and all the data from the focus groups was categorized under each title. As a result, most of the notes found an appropriate category, and thus correlated with the customer survey keywords. These equivalences were directly used for the handbook contents, since two of the data collection methods had validated them empirically. Therefore, the similarities answered to the RQ1.1. On the contrary, some of the keywords from the customer survey did not find any equivalences. These differences represent the market information gap between the customer expectations and internal understanding of these expectations (Parasuraman, 1998). The least supported keyword was flexibility, since the interview for the project manager was the only significant support for it. As a conclusion, the differences based on the lack of understanding of the customer expectations answered to the research question 2.1.

Some of the focus group results did not correlate with any of the keywords. These differences were analyzed case-specifically, and some of them were excluded and some were validated through other methods. For instance, an additional title, behavior and social skills, was added to the handbook, since the importance of social skills for the B2B customer service was justified by the literature (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). The cause for this difference may be the fact that the customers did not mention all the possible significant factors in the survey, and thus some of them were missing from the results. In summary, the comparison between the customer survey and the focus groups gained understanding of the most significant improvement areas (RQ 2.1) and internal capabilities in terms of customer experience and customer service.

In order to discuss the similarities and differences more specifically, the main findings are presented as examples. For instance, the most common overlaps were *documentation (19 overlaps), accurate answers (14), meetings (13), professional FAT (11), and communication (11).* The majority of the focus group notes were overlapping. On the contrary, the comparison identified far less differences. The most common difference was *flexibility (5),* which was correlated weakly. Therefore, flexibility is something that the customers expect, however, the organization is not aware of this expectation. Consequently, this comparison determined the level of internal knowledge, however, the results offered no direct answers to the research questions 1 and 2, which are the main targets of the case study.

Importantly, the differences represent lack of understanding, whereas the overlaps illustrate that the employees know which factors create customer experience. Understanding these factors is significant, but it does not proof whether the employees are able to implement their knowledge during the order-delivery process or not. For instance, documentation was the most common overlap by 19 overlaps, which illustrates that the employees are highly aware of the topic and its significance for customer experience. However, documentation was the most significant improvement area in the customer's opinion. This indicates that the employees know the importance of documentation, but they are not able to fulfil the customer needs.

The qualitative interview for one of the project managers offered overlaps with the customer survey, although the aim of the interview was to gain in-depth understanding of the best practices. Nevertheless, these overlaps are positive news, since they demonstrate that the internal capabilities may correlate with the customer preferences. In fact, *responsiveness, flexibility* and *communication* were the best practices based on the interview, and all of them were supported by the customer survey results. Consequently, at least this project manager knows what the customers expect, which is no surprise due to the positive feedback he received from the customer survey. However, the interview did not evaluate the knowledge related to every keyword and all the project managers were not interviewed. Therefore, generalization of high customer experience skills in project management cannot be made based on these findings solely. Regardless, these findings offered insights to the research question 1.1, and if the other project managers are not as aware as the project manager in question, these overlapping results can be used for the improvement process through the research questions 1 and 2.

Furthermore, this interview was in line with the focus groups as well, since all the functions appeared to be aware of the customer experience issues similarly to the project manager. This supports the finding that the market information gap is relatively narrow between the case company and the customers. Importantly, the fact that flexibility was found in this interview questions the previous finding of insufficient knowledge related to flexibility. In other words, the focus groups indicated that the organization is not aware of the importance of flexibility, while the interview for the project manager suggested that flexibility is one of his best practices. As a result, the awareness of the employees differs between the functions, and thus coherent training is relevant. Further, this difference highlights the importance of internal knowledge sharing and organizational learning.

In terms of overlaps, the interview for the key account manager was slightly different. Although the aim was to identify the preferences of the one inactive key account, the interview found only two preferences that are directly comparable with the customer survey keywords. These were *trust* and *communication*, and thus the interview answered to the RQ 1.1. Communication is strongly supported by all the other data collection methods, whereas trust is emphasized merely in the literature of relationship marketing (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007). As a result, this interview failed to validate the results from the other methods. Possible causes for this failure, or mismatch with the customer survey, are the facts that the method was explicitly different, only one customer was discussed with, and key account management is divorced from the order-delivery process.

Nevertheless, the interview was a success for the case study through several applicable improvement ideas. The discussion offered in-depth information related to customer experience, customer preferences, and for instance to relationship building. In fact, the interview found that key account management is highly aware of customer experience, and thus the order-delivery process could utilize their knowledge. This finding answered to the research questions 1 and 2. However, implementing the idea requires close cross-functional collaboration, which is currently not a common practice between key account management and the order-delivery process. Therefore, this thesis suggests closer collaboration between key account management and the functions of the order-delivery process.

Furthermore, this interview emphasized the importance of the business relationships. In detail, mutual trust is the basis of a strong business relationship. Mutual trust, in turn, is a consequence from several things, such as open communication, honesty, long-term-commitment, and personal relationships. Further, personal relationship are based on informal communication, and especially communication related to personal issues. Consequently, the interview suggested the customer interface employees to emphasize such communication in order to enhance the relationship. This strong relationship improves customer experience. In this respect, the interview offered direct answers to the RQ 1 as well.

Finally, an interesting equivalence was found between the two interviews. Both the project manager and the key account manager explained that the interaction with the customers emphasizes hard factors, such as the product and lead times. At the same time, soft factors, such as feelings, thoughts and emotions are hardly mentioned. The key account manager justified this practice by arguing that the customers prefer such communication on the hard factors. This justification represents the right customer-oriented mindset that should be in the center of every improvement action. However, emphasizing the hard factors was not supported by the customer survey or the focus groups. In fact, both the hard and soft factors were represented in the results of the survey and the focus groups. For instance, responsiveness, meetings, professional FAT, and communication are all related to the soft factors, and therefore, these could be improved by listening the feelings from the customers. Furthermore, the importance of soft factors was supported by the customer survey, since the soft SERVQUAL instrument correlated with the results. As a conclusion, the focus on the hard factors indicated the insufficient emphasis of the customer interaction, which described the current capabilities in terms of customer experience and customer service.

This combination offered several interesting equivalences and connections between the sources of data. As a results, the findings are more reliable due to the found overlaps. The empirical methods mainly focused on the research questions 1.1 and 2.1. However, even reliable answers to these research questions offered no answers to the research questions 1 and 2, since the answers were problems, lacks and important factors rather than applicable solutions. In other words, the results of this synthesis describe the most important areas of customer experience as well as the most important improvement areas in terms of customer service, which means that the results represent the problems. However, finding solutions and practical improvement ideas is necessary for the action research approach (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 193-209). Therefore, this research process requires specific discussion based on this synthesis.

4 Discussion and conclusions

This chapter aims to combine all the elements of this thesis. The discussion begins with a clarification of the motivation to conduct the case study. Thereafter, the main conclusions of the literature review are discussed in order to give perspectives for the discussion. The conducted empirical research is also briefly introduced, and then the main findings are presented and combined with relevant theories from the literature. The aim is to understand the specific case and find suggestions for the case company by answering to the research questions 1 and 2. Gaining new understanding of the selected case is the main aim of a case study (Yin, 2009, p.4) While finding applicable solutions for real weaknesses is the foundation of the action research approach (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 193). The discussion proceeds from short-term suggestions to long-term ones. The discussion also aims to ascend the thesis from the empirical to the theoretical level. Finally, the discussion offers evaluation of the reliability and limitations of the research in 4.1.

The main driver of this research process is the ongoing *Superior Customer Experience* -program at the case company. Therefore, the target of the case study is to improve the current order-delivery process in terms of customer experience and customer service. More specifically, the aim is to achieve better customer experience by improving customer service. The aim is relevant, since service quality is one of the roots of customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The Superior Customer Experience –program emphasizes humane perspective, including communication and customers' emotions, and thus they were emphasized throughout the process.

Although the case study aims to improve customer experience whether it is problematic or not, the case company has identified a few weaknesses in terms of customer experience and customer service. Firstly, the company has focused on products, engineering and manufacturing for a long time. Consequently, the case company desires to be more customer-oriented in the future. Secondly, the general understanding of the customers is insufficient. This lack refers to the needs and preferences in terms of customer experience and customer service in particular. Therefore, the empirical research of this thesis aimed to identify the factors, which have the most significant impact on customer experience and customer service.

The research process started by reviewing the past literature. This overview offered motivation to conduct empirical research, since the literature strongly focuses on the B2C markets, and discussion related to the B2B markets is a scarce. Additionally, many authors avoid to specify the discussion to either of the business contexts, which is questionable. Moreover, the case company's business consists of complex engineer-to-order (ETO) projects, which is a remarkably specific business environment. Consequently, applicable improvement actions were not available in the literature, and thus the improvement process required empirical research. The literature also recognizes several theories and definitions for both concepts, and thus it was significant to study the concepts within the specific business environment in order to validate or disprove the existing theories.

The literature review also found that the concepts of customer experience and customer service are close to each other. For instance, the functional side of customer experience is based on such factors as service quality (Wall-Mullen and Envick, 2015). Further, service quality drives customer satisfaction and building long-term relationships (Gounaris, 2017), which are roots of customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Consequently, similar factors create both concepts, and thus the development of both go hand in hand. In this thesis, the results from the data collection methods were merged together regardless of their focus on either of the concepts. The main idea behind this decision is that customer experience can be improved by customer service, however, customer service can be improved by better customer experience. Their interrelationship is a "chicken and egg situation".

One of the main findings from the literature was that internal capabilities drive customer service performance. The *service profit chain* demonstrates the contribution of management's support and employee satisfaction to customer service performance (Heskett et al., 1994; Theoharakis et al., 2009). Furthermore, internal service quality has an impact on customer service (Valvio, 2010, p. 75). In fact, the quality of customer service cannot exceed the internal service quality, and thus the improvement of the customer service has to focus on internal processes as well. Therefore, the case company has to improve their internal service as well if they desire to perform better at the customer interface. This requires efficient cross-functional communication and collaboration.

The empirical research of this thesis was conducted through three data collection methods, which all had specific goals. These methods were customer survey, functional focus groups, and qualitative interviews. The data and results are discussed in more detail in the sections 3.2; 3.3; 3.4, whereas their synthesis can be found in 3.5.2. The main findings from the synthesis are discussed here and combined with the literature. Importantly, each problem is approached by means of improvement suggestions. The empirical findings represent the answers for the research questions 1.1 and 2.1, while the improvement suggestions answer to the research questions 1 and 2.

The structure of the discussion is as follows. In the beginning, the discussion covers the short-term improvement areas, which are:

- Responsiveness
- Customer communication
- Documentation
- Flexibility
- Meetings

The discussion continues through presenting organizational culture as a long-term improvement suggestion. Organizational culture received no empirical attention, however, this thesis presents it as an enabler of the change. This finding includes the fact that neither customer experience nor customer service can be improved by identifying and standardizing the best practices. Right organizational culture and clear values are required in the future.

Thereafter, the discussion explains the process of collecting practical suggestions for the case company by means of the handbook and a list of recommendations. Only examples of the suggestions are presented, since the documents are not part of the thesis.

Lastly, the discussion ascends from the empiricism to a more theoretical level. The discussion presents an identified equivalence between the empirical research and the SERVQUAL instrument. Furthermore, contribution to the literature of the B2B markets is generally introduced.

Responsiveness

As introduced, the short-term improvement areas are discussed first. The customer survey indicated that responsiveness is the most important factor for customer experience and the third most significant improvement area of customer service. The problem is that the customers do not always feel the active support, which is caused by a lack of responsiveness. Technical inquiries are important in particular, but the time span of the answer is too slow.

Responsiveness is strongly supported by the literature as well. The SERVQUAL instrument emphasizes responsiveness as a part of service quality (Parasuraman, 1998), and project environment requires responsiveness especially (Aloini et al., 2013). Furthermore, responsiveness is a part of the updated service profit chain by Theoharakis et al. (2009). Accordingly, internal capabilities lead to relationship capabilities, which lead to service responsiveness. This knowledge assists improving the service responsiveness. As a conclusion, responsiveness was selected to represent one of the main improvement areas of the case company.

The root cause analysis revealed that the main reasons for this problem is the high workload of the customer interface as well as too long internal message chains. Lack of relevant support from the backstage to the customer interface was also identified as a root cause for low responsiveness. In addition, the updated service profit chain indicated that the problem may be caused by lack of management's supporting capabilities, or low employee satisfaction and loyalty.

Internal cross-functional collaboration was identified as one of the focus areas in order to improve responsiveness, since the project manager emphasized this area. At the ideal case, the whole organization would collaborate closely and the customers' requests would reach the right employees without any delays. Cross-functional communication would be efficient and internal needs for support would be widely understood, especially between the customer interface and the backstage. Internal service quality would be at high level, which means that for example technical answers would be handled effectively. Effective support between the customer interface and the backstage would reduce stress of the customer interface representatives, which improves their customer service capabilities directly (Varca, 1999). This ideal case requires a straightforward message chains, understanding of own and other functions' roles and responsibilities, and willingness to serve and support others within the organization.

As a conclusion, this thesis suggests four improvement actions. 1) An online portal could be used to facilitate the communication in a way that the customers and the case company's engineers would be closer to each other. This would shorten the internal message chain and enhance the cross-functional support towards the customer interface. Consequently, the online portal would improve the responsiveness of the case company. 2) Work load and stress could be reduced by hiring project engineers to take care of standardized work, such as documentation. This would improve customer service capabilities (Varca, 1999). 3) Collective and interactive coffee break every Friday would enhance cross-functional collaboration and internal support, as well as communication and knowledge sharing. F2F interaction would enhance sharing of tacit knowledge particularly, which is significant due to the fact that the key account manager explained that the customer interface knowledge is mostly tacit. Furthermore, this would improve satisfaction of the employees, and thus it may has a direct impact on customer service performance. 4) Management could participate as co-teachers in the training phase of the improvement process. This would direct the way of supporting the employees in the right way as well as show management's commitment to the change. Management's involvement is a major part of customer experience management (Grønholt et al., 2015) and cultural change (Martin, 1992).

Customer communication

Communication in general was highlighted in every data collection method, and thus both the internal employees and the customers recognized its importance. The customers emphasized communication related to the progress of the process. More specifically, they require constant communication, which is interactive and rich. They want to increase transparency of the operations through efficient communication. From the case company's point of view, the key account manager emphasized open, rich and informal customer communication, since such communication improves mutual trust. The empirical research identified three communication-related problems: 1) low responsiveness, 2) lean communication due to active use of emails, and 3) a lack of transparency of the process for the customers.

The literature conclude that communication is essential for customer service, successful projects and customer relationships (Woo and Ennew, 2005; Nätti et al., 2006). Especially, collecting the customer needs through communication is essential (Nätti et al., 2006). Further, efficient customer communication is essential for success, since the empirical research reported that the opinions of the customers varied. In other words, the same process or practice may generate either positive or negative customer experience. Exactly the same issue is supported by Sharma and Chaubey (2014). As a result, this thesis suggests that the best practices must be communicated with each customer independently. Communication must include relevant feedback for continuous improvement during the order-delivery process.

Furthermore, an appropriate communication medium has an influence on communication performance as well. The medium shall be selected based on the content and purpose of the communication (Daft and Lengel, 1986). More specifically, rich media, such as F2F interaction is suitable for complex issues, whereas lean media, such as email, is suitable for standard issues. Rich communication is particularly significant for customer experience and customer service, since it enables instant feedback, sharing of emotions, and observing reactions. However, the customer interface representative must behave well when using rich communication due to enhanced transparency. The most common medium at the case company is lean email, which is used with the customers in particular.

As a conclusion, case company's communication must be improved by selecting the right communication media. Active and one-sided utilization of emails within the case company's operations should be changed by emphasizing richer media. For instance, the customer interface could sometimes utilize phone or video calls instead of emails. This would improve openness, enable informal communication, and enhance dialogical interaction. Furthermore, important emotions and other soft issues can be discussed more easily through rich media.

The second improvement suggestion tackles the low responsiveness. This thesis suggests that the project manager should only facilitate the discussion between the customer and the backstage employee. Currently, the project manager is communicating with both parties, and for instance translating the internal technical answers to English before sending to the customer. Therefore, this thesis suggests that the backstage employees should create finalized answers to the customers in a way that these could be forwarded directly. This requires training of customer communication throughout the organization.

The lack of transparency of the process would be improved by means of the online portal. This thesis suggests that the portal could include a function that enables real time following of the process. The employees would be responsible for updating the status of their own work online, and so the customer would always be aware of the progress. Further, the customers would receive an automated message when a document is updated to the portal. As a result, the customer interface do not need to constantly update the status, and the customers would have more opportunities to participate and co-create through better status awareness. Furthermore, the customer communication could focus on improving customer experience and customer service, while standardized updates are automated.

In addition to these problem-initiated suggestions, this thesis suggests utilizing interactive customer communication in future improvement processes and continuous improvement. The interview for the key account manager gave insights that interactive communication between the case company and the customers would identify relevant improvement areas as well as offer applicable suggestions. Therefore, co-creation must be utilized in selecting the improvement areas and the actual improvement actions together with the customer. In practice, this thesis suggests the case company to implement an approach, which aims to continuous improvement by means of regular interactive meetings with the customers. These meetings could include feedback sharing, filling of journey maps with the customer needs and emotions, and creating task lists that illustrate and prioritize the required improvements. The online portal could facilitate such meetings and communication tools or at least store the documents.

Currently, the key account manager is utilizing similar methods, however, the interview revealed that there is a lack of collaboration between key account management and the order-delivery process. Therefore, this thesis suggests key account management of the case company to take the ownership of improving the customer experience in the order-delivery process as well. In practice, this responsibility includes collecting the customer needs and emotional feedback related to the collaboration. Further, this information must be shared with the order-delivery process. The literature clearly supports utilizing key account management for knowledge management and customer experience management (Nätti et al., 2006).

The interview of the key account manager indicated that the customer relationships are built and strengthened through dialogical communication in terms of both work-related and personal topics. The dialogue means effective two-way interaction, which enables efficient co-creation. Discussing on personal topics, in turn, improve the personal relationships, which leads to better business relationships as well. Improving the customer relationships is significant for customer experience, since relationship marketing is one of the roots of customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The key account manager suggested to implement open, rich and personalized communication, which is dialogical between the parties.

Documentation

Documentation was highlighted through the different data collection methods. However, a contradiction occurred, since documentation was the main improvement area in terms of customer service, while focus groups were highly aware of its importance. In other words, the customers desired to improve documentation, whereas the internal employees seemed to understand the needs. Either the customers demand simply too much or the employees have misunderstood the real customer needs.

The in-depth analysis for the customer survey results reported that the main issue in terms of documentation is too slow or delayed delivery. On the contrary, a detailed analysis of the focus group results revealed that most commonly the employees emphasize the quality of documentation or willingness to make changes. Therefore, documentation represents an example of the market information gap. In other words, the customers' expectations are misunderstood by the internal employees.

However, the reality of the order-delivery process requires constant changes in documentation, which are requested by the customers. Thus, the actual contradiction may be in the customer needs. They require both flexibility and timely delivery, which may be difficult to fulfil. This thesis suggests that the case company's representatives and the key customers meet and discuss on this matter. The aim of the discussion would be identifying the real needs in order to assist prioritization in terms of documentation. Further, if the customers want both flexibility and timely delivery, the case company has to either increase the resources or prune back the amount of projects in order to focus on each deeply enough. Improving efficiency of the documentation would also decreased the need for resources. If the problem is merely the delays in documentation, the case company must update their ways of measuring the performance. The employees must be guided by supporting indicators and reward system in order to change their objectives in this respect. All in all, the employees must know and profoundly understand the customer needs in order to prioritize their own work and deliver expected value for the customers.

Flexibility

Flexibility was identified as an example of the market information gap as well. In other words, the customers emphasized flexibility, whereas the functional focus groups did not discuss on that matter. Consequently, the internal knowledge does not meet the customer needs in this respect. The customers desire to rely on the case company's ability to solve their problems through flexibility. Flexibility was particularly emphasized by the interview of the project manager. Nevertheless, he identified flexibility as one of his strengths, and thus this thesis conclude that the internal capabilities differ between the employees and the functions.

Importantly, some focus group results, which concerned flexibility, were classified under documentation due to better relevance. Therefore, this finding may be skewed, and the identified market information gap may be narrower than reported. Nevertheless, the customer survey did not emphasize flexibility in documentation, and thus this thesis suggests that the case company should identify the areas that requires flexibility together with the customers.

The importance of flexibility is supported by several authors. For instance, Woo and Ennew (2005) report that flexibility is a major part of B2B service quality. Furthermore, Lusch et al. (2008) emphasize flexibility as part of dialogical interaction, which is, in turn, a basis for effective customer service (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015). Additionally, since customer experience and customer service are perceived subjectively, flexibility is more important than standardization (Carter, 2014). For these reasons, the case company should focus on improving flexibility towards the customers.

The employees of the case company needs to be more flexible and find non-standardized solutions for the customers. In practice, the organizational culture must enhance the attitude of finding solutions as well as support the practice. Supporting the practices requires empowerment of the employees by decentralized decision-making authorities and shared responsibility. A clear strategy is essential for this change, since the employees need to be able to prioritize the work as well as decide between flexibility and efficiency. A well-balanced combination of efficiency and dialogical collaboration with the customers should be the aim of the case company (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015). However, the employees' inner motivation to serve the customers through flexible solutions is the most important part of the change.

Dialogical collaboration with the customers leads to effective co-creation, which is significant, since customer service is always co-created (Lusch et al., 2008). Co-creation changes the company ideology from product-orientation to customer orientation, which is one of the goals of the case study. Furthermore, the outcome meets the customer needs more likely if the customer has participated to the process. Participating the customers to internal processes always requires flexibility. The qualitative interviews of this thesis suggested utilizing co-creation, however, co-creation is already a common practice in terms of the product itself. As a conclusion, customer experience and customer service during the order-delivery process should be co-created together with the customers as well. This thesis suggests a flexible approach for process development in order to improve customer experience and customer service.

The literature review suggests that customer service practices cannot be standardized (Carter, 2014). Therefore, an improvement process in which the best practices are first identified and then taught to the employees is an insufficient approach. Such process neglects the fact that customer service as well as customer experience are both subjective by nature (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). As a conclusion, the case company should implement an order-delivery process, which includes the identification of the best practices. Each process should be personalized according to the customer needs, which requires high flexibility. Altogether, learning new best practices is insufficient approach for effective improvement, and thus the case company should enhance the flexibility of the employees in order to modify each order-delivery process through dialogical interaction with the customer.

Meetings

The importance of meetings was emphasized in the customer survey. Especially, if the categories of professional FAT and meetings are merged together, the combination becomes the most important factor for customer experience. Professional FAT was seen as a significant improvement area in terms of customer service as well. More specifically, the customers desired better planning and preparations for the FAT day in general. Further, active problem solving during the meetings is important for customer experience. Therefore, improving FAT is one of the aims of the thesis, since in some cases it represents the only F2F meeting during the order-delivery process.

The literature supports the importance of meetings without a doubt, since meetings represents clear touch points that create customer experience (Rawson et al., 2013). Touch points have the most significant impact on customer experience, while companies' ability in terms of touch points is weak (Grønholt et al., 2015). Therefore, it is essential for the case company to improve the F2F touch points, such as meetings and FAT in particular. Although increased customer experience is a relevant reason for improvement, the touch points can be utilized for other purposes as well. For instance, well-prepared F2F touch points facilitate rich communication (Daft and Lengel, 1986), which enhances listening the customers' feelings and preferences. Both of these are essential for future improvement.

Since the customers prefer better planning and preparations for the FATs, the improvement suggestion for the case company is straightforward: planning and preparing such meetings must be taken seriously. However, the focus group results from the customer interface reported that the employees are already aware of the importance of the meetings. This may indicate that a market information gap exists in terms of the meetings. Therefore, this thesis suggests that the ideal FAT is planned together with the customers. Additionally, the interviewed project manager suggested that the backstage employees could participate to FATs as professionals, which would enhance the case company's problem solving capabilities and customers' perceived assurance.

Culture

The identified need for flexibility indicates that the improvement requires long-term perspective in addition to the short-term suggestions. In other words, the improvement must encompass the level of employees mind in addition to the improved operational practices. The main long-term suggestion is that the case company needs to design and implement a supporting organizational culture in order to truly improve customer experience and customer service. The case company admits that their operations are product-oriented, the customers are served inactively, and customer experience is less focused within the order-delivery process. Moreover, the focus groups reported that cross-functional collaboration and communication are insufficient at present. An appropriate organizational culture would lead the way towards better performance (Martin, 1992).

The empirical research revealed that the market information gap is relatively narrow, which means that the problem is not comprehensively solved by solely training the employees. This thesis conclude that case company's culture and values do not emphasize the right things, which leads to wrong prioritization in terms of customer experience and customer service. For instance, the case company may focus too strongly on efficiency approach and transaction-orientation although relational approach is as important for value creation and customer service (Ylimäki and Vesalainen, 2015).

Further, the analysis of the empirical results suggests improving the organizational culture rather than separate operations due to high amount of improvement areas. For instance, right customer-orientation would be much more effective approach for improvement than few standardized practices. Customer orientation was particularly suggested by the project manager during the interview.

The literature define customer experience and customer service as subjective concepts, and thus perceptions differ between the customers (Sharma and Chaubey, 2014). Therefore, the best practices cannot be standardized (Carter, 2014). Only a right customer-oriented culture and sincere aim to support the customers would improve the practices comprehensively. Customer orientation and empathy is especially significant, since the customers can rarely describe their real needs (Halvorsrud et al, 2016), and thus the case company has to be able to imagine their customers desires through empathy.

An appropriate culture helps to commit the whole organization to focus on customer experience (Martin, 1992). This is relevant for the case company, since one of the aims of the case study is distributing the responsibility of customer experience among the functions. Currently, the customer interface is the only real responsible, which reduces the internal support towards the customer interface. This thesis conclude that implementing such ownership culture throughout the organization, would enhance the internal support, and thus improve the case company's performance.

As a conclusion, the case company needs an updated organizational culture, which emphasizes at least the six different aspects that are presented below.

- Customer orientation
- Willingness to offer services for the customers
- Flexibility during the order-delivery process
- Distributed ownership of customer experience and customer service
- Internal service and support
- Communication and knowledge sharing

As the literature review claims, implementing an organizational culture is challenging. The case company could utilize the forthcoming training sessions in order to distribute such culture. In addition, management has the responsibility to implement cultural changes. For instance, functional managers have to offer abilities to prioritize for their employees. Lastly, the case company needs to update their measuring system, including the key performance indicators. The case company cannot demand cultural change towards customer orientation if all the performance indicators focus on the product, production and other transaction-based factors.

The handbook and other recommendations

In addition to previous discussion, this case study generated several other improvement ideas, which are only presented in the material that is delivered to the case company directly. The case company received a list of recommendations and the customer service handbook. The former presents recommendations that are only partially supported by the empirical results and inapplicable to the handbook as such. As an example, the recommendations include points related to the training phase, such as implementing a workshop that covers touchpoint design. The handbook, in turn, includes several small and practical suggestions that are mostly based on the internal focus groups. As an example, the handbook suggests that the employees should stay calm despite the situation, and avoid showing their frustration to the customers.

Theoretical level

In order to ascend the thesis from the empirical level to the theoretical level, the contributions to the literature are discussed here. The matches between the empirical results and the theoretical definitions of customer experience and customer service were identified as part of this thesis. This comparison revealed a strong equivalence between the SERVQUAL instrument (by Parasuraman, 1998) and the empirical results. Furthermore, due to the limited amount of studies focusing on B2B and ETO context, the findings of this thesis are valuable for other practitioners as well as other scholars in the field of customer experience.

Although the literature is limited regarding the B2B markets and ETO projects, this thesis found equivalences with the existing theories and the case company's business. As said, the best example was the SERVQUAL instrument. All the five dimensions of the instrument correlated with the customer survey results, and no keywords were left without a categorization. Therefore, the SERVQUAL instrument represents the same important factors as the case company's customers.

Many authors have criticized SERVQUAL. For instance, Woo and Ennew (2005) argue that the instrument neglects the service outcome. Moreover, Gounaris (2005) argues that the B2B markets are too specific and technology driven for such instrument, which emphasizes soft and relational aspects. Nevertheless, this thesis found that the instrument correlated with the customer needs. A possible cause for this inconsistency is the fact that the original SERVQUAL represents the dimensions of service quality only, whereas this research emphasized customer experience as well. This difference may cause the effect that the customers of the case company emphasized soft and relational factors as part of customer service, since they were led towards the perspective of customer experience. Regardless, this thesis may conclude that SERVQUAL can be utilized within the case company's business in order to improve customer service from the customer experience's point of view in particular. Generally, the instrument is applicable only if the soft and relational factors are emphasized and the outcome is neglected.

As a result, the SERVQUAL instrument is validated for the use of the case company. This is significant, since the literature is lacking applicable theories for the case company's business environment. The instrument may assist the training phase of the improvement process. However, this thesis cannot generalize the finding due to the specific business environment and process goals. Nevertheless, the empirical research gave insights for future research in order to create a generalized theory. Currently, the suggestion is that the five dimensions could be the foundation of better customer service and customer experience, which is then complemented with the specific dimensions of the user. These complementary dimensions can represent the outcome as well as the hard and efficiency-oriented aspects, which are missing from the original instrument.

The comparison between the literature and the empirical results generated other findings as well. For instance, the dimensions of B2B service quality by Woo and Ennew (2005) differed from the customer survey results. Responsiveness is missing from the theory although it is strongly supported by the empirical methods as well as the SERVQUAL instrument. This indicates that responsiveness may be more important in the B2B markets as expected. On the contrary, co-operation is emphasized in the theory, whereas the customer survey neglected its importance. The SERVQUAL is also missing co-operation, although customer service is always co-created with the customers (Lusch et al., 2008). Consequently, this thesis claims that responsiveness is important in the B2B markets and during ETO processes. Further, co-operation could complement the theory of SERVQUAL as well as the case company's operations.

Another finding was that potential service quality was completely missing from the survey results. Potential service quality refers to customers' understanding of suppliers' customer service potential (Gounaris, 2005). This is a significant finding, since Gounaris argues that potential service quality is especially required in the uncertain B2B markets. Consequently, the case company should focus on potential service quality and better communication in terms of the possibilities. This thesis conclude that efficient communication in terms of possibilities and limitations in terms of customer service would improve mutual trust, and thus have an impact on customer experience as well (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

In general, this thesis offered some contributions to the literature. The empirical findings found equivalences with existing theories and some significant differences were found between the theories and the empirical results. This study shed light on the less focused B2B and ETO contexts in terms of customer experience and customer service. This may be valuable for the practitioners or scholars in the future.

Future insights

Although the thesis contributed to the literature at some level, additional research is necessary in order to identify generalized theories for the specific B2B and ETO processes. The SERVQUAL instrument may represent the foundation of the future models, however, the instrument requires relevant additions. Therefore, one approach for further empirical research could be identifying the relevant additions to the SERVQUAL instrument. Both existing theories and customer understanding must be used in this process.

In addition, since this thesis concluded that a large-scale change in customer experience and customer service requires right organizational culture, further research is required in order to specify the cultural needs as well as clarify the implementation practices. Generally, the literature could identify the underlying issues in the connection between the organizational culture and customer experience.

From the case company's point of view, this thesis suggests that the strategy, values and organizational culture must all support the change towards superior customer experience. Implementing a right culture is much more important for the change than training the best practices to the employees.

Further, this thesis suggests that the case company should implement continuous improvement rather than a single research. The customers must participate in this continuous improvement through qualitative methods. For instance, focus groups or qualitative interviews, which were utilized in this thesis, could help identifying the real customer needs. Importantly, the continuous improvement has to be integrated in the order-delivery process.

Each customer journey could include a specific touch point, which focuses on improving the particular process.

4.1 Limitations and reliability

This section presents the limitations of the research process and discusses the reliability of the case study. The limitations emerged from the literature review, empirical research and analysis of the findings. Each limitation is discussed briefly in order to understand their impact on the whole case study. This understanding supports the evaluation of the reliability, which is discussed throughout the section and summarized in the end.

The literature review of this thesis caused the first limitations. The interrelationship between customer experience and customer service caused confusions during the research process. As a result, the survey answers related to both concepts were merged and analyzed together. This may cause some misunderstandings, and thus skewed findings. Moreover, the customer survey and the focus groups were compared together even though the focus group questions neglected customer service and merely emphasized customer experience.

Additionally, the literature review found that both concepts have several definitions based on different authors. This may be a limitation, and at least it increased the critical role of the researcher. In other words, the researcher's own opinions and subjective understanding of the concepts is salient due to the ambiguity of the concepts and lack of standardized definitions. Consequently, instead of merely presenting the best practices, this thesis reported that the case company should implement an organizational culture, which emphasize customer experience and customer-orientation. This approach would decrease subjective opinions of the researcher and emphasize customers' voice.

The three data collection methods offered a multifaceted approach to understand the concepts as well as identify the most significant improvement areas, which improves the reliability of the case study (Yin, 2009, p.114). The data collection methods focused on both the customer perceptions and the internal opinions. Furthermore, the methods were different in a way that enabled both quantitative analysis and gathering qualitative profound understanding. Finally, the data sources overlapped with each other, which increases their reliability. All the nine keywords from the customer survey were supported by one or more other data collection methods, which clearly shows that these are the most important factors in terms of customer experience and customer service. However, several limitations were identified during the process, which are described next.

The survey answers offered significant information from all the continents, and clear results were found from the data. However, the reliability of the findings is debatable due to small amount of answers, which is also the main limitation of the survey. Nevertheless, each customer opinion is unique and significant for the case company, since the customers are few in total and the projects are complex ETO projects. Despite the low amount of answers, the survey identified the most important areas of customer experience and customer service, and the answers started to be repetitive. Finally, the analysis on the past customer satisfaction feedback validated the main findings. Consequently, the customer survey supported the case study.

The analysis of the survey results created an additional limitation due to confusing categories. For instance, professional FAT was distinguished from other meetings although it can be seen as a specific meeting. This decisions distributed the customer opinions into two different categories, which decreased the importance of professional FAT and meetings individually. In other words, if the categories would have been merged together in the analysis, the most important factor for customer experience would have changed.

However, utilizing the past customer satisfaction feedbacks for validating the survey may cause a limitation. Since the survey focused on customer experience and customer service, the satisfaction data may be inappropriate. Although customer satisfaction is one of the roots of customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), the strength of the link between the concepts is unclear.

Another limitation was a lack of interaction between the customers and the researcher. The qualitative interviews illustrated the possibilities of semi-structured interaction in order to gain profound understanding. Similar interaction was missing from the survey method. In addition, the focus group method, in turn, illustrated the value of interaction between the participants, which was also lacking in the survey. Consequently, this thesis suggests that the case company should investigate the customers by means of qualitative interviews of relevant focus groups in order to gain profound understanding of their needs in the future.

The media selection was a limitation as well. The utilization of lean email may have lost some important information, and thus the case company should emphasize richer media in the future. As discussed in the section 2.2.5, rich media allows observing behavioral clues and tones of voice, for instance. Understanding the important emotions and feelings that create the customer experience would require rich communication, and thus F2F communication is suggested for the case company for similar customer researches.

These limitations clearly show that all the customers were not reached and probably some important information was lost due to the lean media and the lack of interaction. Nevertheless, instead of improving customer experience and customer service at once, this thesis suggests the case company to rather improve the process towards co-creation. In other words, the best practices must be identified case by case together with the customer in question. Customer service cannot be standardized (Carter, 2014). Therefore, this thesis is not limited due to missing information.

Although the focus group method increased the reliability of the customer survey as well as offered valuable information related to the internal capabilities, the method has its own limitations. Firstly, a group discussion is not suitable for everyone. For instance, shy and inarticulate people may find it difficult to contribute to the discussion (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 173-192). This limitation was salient in this research as well, which was noticed already in the test round. Some participants were more active than others, which may have an impact on the results. Nevertheless, this is natural in human interaction and the method was still approved to be a part of the thesis due to rich data from the test round.

Secondly, the focus group method may suffer from a lack of right focus without proper facilitation (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 173-192). Although open and free discussion leads to innovative outcomes, it is also vulnerable to straying from the right topic. This problem was noticed in this thesis as well. For instance, the idea of the second question of the focus groups was to identify the value for the customers from the internal operations, however, some of the groups turned the discussion back to the operations that were discussed already on the first question. Consequently, the customer value was less emphasized in the collected data, and thus in the final results as well.

Thirdly, one of the limitations of the focus groups was unequal motivation to contribute. This may have an impact on the findings due to incorrect emphasis. For instance, production groups were less active in comparison with the office groups. As a result, the data emphasizes the office functions in general although the aim of this thesis was to improve every function in the organization. This limitation led to another one: the analysis of the focus groups failed to identify whether the reason for a difference is low motivation to contribute or lack of understanding the customer needs.

Moreover, one limitation of the focus group methods was a lack of focus on behavior and reactions. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 173-192) report that a successful focus group study observes behavioral clues in addition to the actual topics and content of the discussion. Behavioral clues, such as reactions during the discussion, were not emphasized in this study. The collected data mostly represents the content and ideas that emerged during the discussion. Therefore, the findings may be incomplete due to lack of focus on behavioral clues.

Lastly, the researcher did not participate to all of the focus groups in this thesis, which may be a limitation. For instance, important behaviors and reactions were difficult to collect from the facilitators. The focus group literature suggests that the researcher should facilitate the groups in order to keep the right focus (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 173-192). Nevertheless, they argue that this is not a requirement for success, and the facilitator may be someone else as well. In this case, it is important to give clear instructions for this person. In terms of this thesis, the managers of the functions were facilitating the focus groups, which was approved as practice, since they are extremely conscious of the ongoing case study and its targets. Furthermore, it shows commitment of the management, which is significant for the cultural change (Martin, 1992). Regardless of their awareness of the research process, a clear instructions were given in written form to every manager in order to ensure coherent results. This practice was approved by a test round in which the researcher participated.

The last and probably the main limitation of the focus group method is related to the analysis of the answers. In detail, some of the results concerned flexibility in documentation, and these were categorized under documentation. As a result, the category of flexibility did not correlate with the focus group results. This issue led to the finding that flexibility represents the market information gap. However, the finding is not reliable due to the overlapping categories. The analysis of the limitation led to a conjecture that the customer preferences in terms of documentation may be insufficiently understood among the employees. The reason for this conjecture is that if the focus group results are moved from the documentation category into the flexibility category, the documentation category, in turn, begins to lack equivalence. Further, the preferred ability to solve problems through flexibility may represent the same thing as flexibility in documentation. Therefore, the case company may perform better as analyzed in terms of flexibility, while the market information gap may be related to documentation.

The in-depth qualitative interviews proved to be extremely valuable for the research, since they supported profound understanding. However, this data collection method have limitations as well, which may have an influence on the results. First, the selection of the interviewees caused limitations, since both of the interviewees represent the customer interface and the same customer. Focusing on the customer interface neglects the backstage's point of view. This is a significant lack, since the aim of this thesis was to improve the capabilities throughout the organization. Moreover, representing the same customer narrower the sample of the studied customers. Although the customer in question is the largest, diversification of interviewees would have offered better information in terms of empirical research.

Another cause for limitations was the selected data collection method. For instance, maintaining the focus during a semi-structured interview is challenging (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 77-95). In this case, the semi-structured approach offered valuable results, however, some of the topics were less emphasized due to sidetracked conversation. Moreover, such semi-structured interaction between the researcher and the interviewee may cause unwanted leading. In other words, a risk of manipulating the interview always exists when the discussion is less structured.

Although the interviews gained in-depth qualitative understanding, the sample of interviewees was relatively narrow. Interviewing more people would have gained wider understanding of the concepts. As the literature review concluded, the concepts of customer experience and customer service are ambiguous and most of the researchers have their own opinions and definitions. Therefore, some significant findings may have stayed unrevealed.

The three main limitations of the whole empirical research were 1) a lack of interaction in the customer survey, 2) unclear categorization of the focus group answers due to partially overlapping categories, and 3) both of the interviewees represented the customer interface and the same customer, which limited the findings. Moreover, a possible limitation may have been the complex research process by several data collection methods although diversity in the use of methods is seen as a clear strength as well.

The empirical findings are extremely valuable for the case company in order to improve their order-delivery process. The findings are the essential basis for improvement suggestions, which are presented in the chapter 4. However, the results of the empirical research could not be generalized throughout the industry, since all the collected data was based on either the employees or the customer of the case company. Further, the two reasons for conducting the research process was the specificity of the business environment of the case company as well as subjectivity of customer experience. Therefore, the findings of the research are unlikely applicable for other businesses directly. Despite these issues, the empirical findings supported the utilization of the SERVQUAL instrument in the B2B markets as well, which may offer insights for other practitioners of the B2B markets. However, each business and each customer base have to be analyzed case-specifically, and thus no theory is applicable as such for improving customer experience.

After the empirical data collection and analysis, the creation of the handbook caused additional limitations. The process of creating the handbook emphasized the internal point of view, which is an obvious limitation. Although the customer survey results were utilized in order to structure the handbook, most of the contents were based on the functional focus groups. This may be relevant for knowledge sharing purposes, however, the customer voice shall be heard better in order to gain real competitive or relational advantages. Moreover, the qualitative interviews were evaluated as valuable methods, and thus this thesis suggests similar methods to be used in the future with the customers in particular. The reason for this suggestion is that the customer survey merely offered the most important areas, however, the results lacked real improvement ideas. Therefore, utilizing F2F interaction in the future with the customers may enhance information gathering in terms of their real needs.

A practical example of this limitation is the discussion related to documentation. The customers find it important and poorly implemented, while the employees clearly understand its importance. The analysis indicated that documentation is one of the strengths due to high amount of overlaps between the customer expectations and internal understanding of these expectations. The market information gap supposed to be narrow in this respect. However, the only reliable result is that documentation is an important factor for customer service. The employees might not know the customer preferences or the organization prevents them to work according the customer needs. Similar situation may occur with different keywords as well, and therefore, the case company should discuss the keywords through with the customers in order to identify the required practices.

Another limitation is that implementation phase is not a part of this thesis. In other words, this thesis merely offers empirical conclusions and suggestions for improvement process, but the actual improvement process begins after the thesis. Implementation phase would be valuable experiment on the applicability of the suggestions. This would enhance the reliability of the thesis, since currently the suggestions are based on the impressions of the researcher rather than unquestionable data. All the identified best practices are written in the handbook, which means that improvement still requires implementing the practices.

The process includes several limitations, but the implementation phase will give further information of the applicability. Therefore, it is significant that the case company continues the process together with the customers in order to validate the suggestions in real use. This thesis answered to the research questions successfully, the results are not based on one data collection method only, and both internal and external perspectives are taken into account. Additionally, the case company was satisfied with the results, and thus this thesis fulfilled its purpose.

However, the findings are applicable and reliable only for the case company. The specific business environment through complex projects limits the applicability of the findings for other businesses. As a result, the findings and suggestions cannot be generalized. This thesis suggests that all practitioners shall study their own customers within their own business environment in order to benefit most.

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Appendix 1. Qualitative analysis of the survey answers

1.1 Responsiveness

Important for customer experience	Problem	Root cause	Negative impact on CX and CS	Possible solution
Response time	PM has a long response time	Heavy workload	Feeling of importance suffers / own operations might be frozen during the waiting period	Dividing sales and project management in two / using project engineers as practice
	VTT takes a long time to respond	Prioritization	Customer only perceives prolonged response time if we don't explain the situation well and keep updating	Closer collaboration
	Lack of responsibility/ownership	Too many participants / ambiguous roles	Frustration	Messages directly to the "owner" of the case, smart use of to/cc fields, clarified roles
	Long response time	Long message chain --> distance to knowledge	Frustration	Knowledge should be close to the request --> direct contact between the customer and specialist?
Responsiveness	No answer from project manager	Lack of understanding	Feeling of importance suffers, nobody likes to be ignored	Practice of sending the first message without an answer must be implemented
Feeling of support	The customer feels buying only the product / "left alone after the purchase order"	Lack of supporting organization behind the project manager	Creates a selfish and distance image on the client --> no customer orientation	Closer cross-functional collaboration during the projects / understanding why we need other teams and organizational support
	The problem is not always the speed of the actual response, but lack of first answer, agreed schedule and keeping that, which is remarkably important in B2B	Lack of schedule / lack of prioritization / lack of understanding how important the issue is	Lack of responsibility of the business from client's side	An implemented practice of sending a first message without an answer, but estimating and communicating schedule for the actual response

1.2 Documentation

Important for customer experience	Problem	Cause	Negative impact on CX and CS	Possible solution	Value and positive impact on CX / CS
Fast documentation	Handling of documents	Heavy workload	Customer is strugling with the open issues / some operations migh be frozen during the waiting period	Right use of resources --> documentation trainee could handle the simplest cases and support the senior employee	Efficient handling and delivery of documents: Effectiveness of business and collaboration increase both CX and CS
	Delivery is never soon enough for the customer	Lack of mutual understanding with the customer	The big picture suffers --> The client does not support their customers businesses	Better communication and estimated delivery dates, transparent operations --> enables better planning for the customer	Since we cannot do things fast enough, we can still agree clear delivery dates in advance, and thus help the customer to plan their own processes --> supports the customer's own business
Timely documentation	Delayed documentatio	Lack of planning capabilities	Frustration / need for additional reminders / difficulties with schedules	Tools for estimating time consumption/instructions to prioritization/missing responsibility&ownership/internal buffers before the delivery/less workload	Less stress and more trust that the documents are delivered on agreed due date: Ease of making business and scheduling operations

1.3 Meetings

Important for customer experience	Problem	Cause	Negative impact on CX and CS	Possible solution	Value and positive impact on CX / CS
Kick-off/engineering meetings	Inflexibility	Lack of applicable engineering solution	Creates traditional one-sided company->customer arrangement --> no co-creation	Co-creation, clarified scope/possibilities, more innovation	Innovative solutions that meet the customer needs / enhanced collaboration
	Another problem is an ambiguous order, which needs clarifying	Customer-sales-pm collaboration during the sales phase	Ambiguity / dissatisfaction / extra work	Simply having a kick-off meeting/participating in such, and going through the order	Clear order and scope --> no surprises / successfull end solutions
Meetings during the order-delivery process --> feeling of importance	Lack of updates and co-creation	Wrong focus!	Feeling of being outside and far away from the operations	Implementing customer orientation/having biweekly meetings	The customer feels important / the project seems to be prioritized / feeling of being updated
FAT	Lack of preparations	Heavy workload/not prioritized	Overall opinion of ABB suffers / stressful business trip / relationship weakens	Emphasis on customer touch points such as FAT (organized schedule, invitations, arangements)	The most important touch point for many project: better CX and customer care
	Postponing of FAT	Production delays	Schedule changes, delays	Buffer, better planning, close following of production in advance, virtual participation	Fixed schedules (no changes) / no delays / trustworthiness
FAT: Right/quick resolution of open points	Delays, issues remain open	Long information chain, no responsibility, lack of communication	Feeling of being ignored or less important / careless image of the client as a partner	Root cause analysis --> responsible people or better knowledge of responsibilities --> increased ownership of these employees to solve the issues quickly	Professional end of the delivery process --> satisfaction and trust / feeling of high quality / ease of making business in the future

1.4 Product

Important for customer experience	Problem	Cause	Negative impact on CX and CS	Possible solution	Value and positive impact on CX / CS
Competitive product	Quality, price and performance	Lack of knowledge related to customer&market needs, lack of capabilities	In B2B environment, the customer just buy from another supplier	Effective customer communication and knowledge sharing/HR/cross-functional collaboration/co-creation --> in addition to current operation	Competitive product: B2B customer appreciate a competitive offering that reflects directly to their perceptions of CX
Accurate product	Does not meet the specification/customer needs	Inefficient communication/The client don't know the needs/careless work	Frustration --> brand suffers / extra work / long waiting for repairing operations	Transparency --> problems visible asap/communication/careful working	Accurate product: Inaccuracy and defects creates additional stress and frustration for the customer

1.5 Communication, accurate answers, flexibility and delivery time

Important for customer experience	Problem	Cause	Negative impact on CX / CS	Possible solution	Value and positive impact on CX / CS
Communication					
Constant communication	"Quiet periods"	Lack of understanding	Feeling of importance suffers / lack of updates --> difficult to continue other cases --> annoyed customer	Customer orientation, training	Feeling of importance / less stress and ambiguity / feeling of importance
Good and interactive communication	One sided, weak (e.g. almost all the issues are solved through e-mail)	Customer-company relationship --> lack of customer orientation	No feeling of participation / feeling of not being heard	Co-creation/customer orientation / proper use of different media	Understanding/problem solving / interaction and participation increase the perceptions of CX and CS / innovative solutions
Communications related to quality issues	No transparency	Shame?	Low CX and trust when figuring out later	Open communication whatever happens, responsibility	Information, trust
Accurate answers					
Accurate answers	Inaccuracy leads to reduced feeling of support/backup	Careless work (workload?), misunderstandings	Reduced feeling of backup, which is important part of B2B CS / Extra work --> frustration /	Careful work, less stress, better communication: instant feedback?	Professionalism / Ease of making business / effectiveness
Consistent answers	Different practices --> weaker customer relationship	Lack of knowledge related to correct methods and practices	Difficult to communicate or understand messages	Standardization of answers as per customer's needs	Consistent collaboration: If appreciated --> better relationship & re-purchase
Flexibility	Problem	Cause		Possible solution	Value and positive impact on CX / CS
Flexibility	No barriers to deviate the customer needs	Lack of customer orientation/not enough responsibility	Feeling of being an outsider / customer's voice is not heard	Decentralized decision-making/implemented customer orientation	Personalized solutions/value creation/innovations --> strong impact on both CX and CS
Delivery time	Problem	Cause		Possible solution	Value and positive impact on CX / CS
Delivery time of the documentation	Focus on the delivery time of the product	No measuring practices	Difficult to make business with other parties without documents --> frustration	Customer orientation/ability to measure documentation efficiency	Timely delivered documents --> ease of making business

Appendix 2. Creation of the handbook

The handbook is an informative guide to better customer experience and customer service. It is targeted to every employee of the case company whether they work close to the customer interface or not. The contents of the handbook are based on the empirical findings, literature, and researcher's own impressions of the best practices. The handbook has three targets. First, it aims to share knowledge between the employees. Second, it gathers and shares the customer needs in order to improve the internal capabilities in terms of customer experience and customer service. Third, it assists changing the organizational culture towards the right direction.

The handbook was created in parallel with the empirical research. First, the customer survey results were added in order to structure the contents. The keywords from the survey represented the titles, which required specific contents. Therefore, the data from the functional focus groups was categorized under each title. All the functions were covered separately at first, and then the contents were compressed into four chapters: 1) Customer interface, 2) backstage, 3) production, and 4) management. In addition, the points that repeated throughout the handbook were collected into general guidelines in the beginning of the handbook.

The general guidelines include four significant approaches, which represent the customer preferences, and thus the desired direction of the case company. In other words, all the knowledge from the data collection methods, and especially from the customer survey are compressed into these four approaches, which are presented below. The two former represent the soft service quality, whereas the two latter represent the hard service quality.

- Ease and convenience of making business
- Feel of importance and support
- Professionalism
- Reliability

The handbook is utilized mainly for two practical purposes. 1) The handbook supports the training phase of the improvement process. The contents are used as the basis of the training materials. 2) The finalized handbook will remain as information package regarding customer experience and customer service for later use.

As the overall research process, this handbook has limitations. First, the presented practices are not based on the customers' own thoughts, since the customer survey merely offered the titles for the handbook. The actual contents are based on the internal point of view, which is insufficient for comprehensive improvement. Moreover, the presented practices may not meet the customer needs although the title would be important as such. Second, the handbook is only a book, which needs a reader in order to benefit the case company. Further, reading and assimilating are not sufficient either, but the employees have to be able to apply the practices to their own work. Thereafter, it is essential to ask customers' opinions on the new practices in order to continuously improve the order-delivery process.