EXPLORING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN TWO PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN KUWAIT

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Abstract

The private hospital industry in Kuwait is an important contributor in the economy of the country. There has been a major increase in the number of private hospitals and clinics in the past four years, and more hospitals are launching new services in the private healthcare sector. In order to succeed in this sector, it is important for an organization to focus on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) for thriving in the competitive market. A customer relationship management strategy is believed to give a competitive edge to hospitals, as customers nowadays make their decisions based on the type and strength of the relationships that they have with their service providers. Due to the nature of hospital environment, the products and services offered are merely the same in most of the private hospitals. Therefore, in order to differentiate the services offered, CRM should be implemented in hospitals seeking the delivery of high service quality for both its internal and external customers. The quality of the delivered services is reliant on one of the most crucial elements in any service organization structure hence, the employees. Other elements such as processes and technology are also vital for a successful the implementation of CRM.

The objective of this research is to explore the Customer Relationship Management strategy development and implementation by examining the components that lead to successful implementation in two private hospitals in Kuwait. The researcher used the qualitative method through conducting in-depth interviews with management staff and other respective middle and lower management in AlSeef and Royale Hayat private hospitals. The study analyzes the primary data collected using a computer software called NVIVO, v.10. The dimensions of CRM strategy and implementation, which were proven in previous research, were assessed in this study. The researcher concluded that the two private hospitals researched developed a CRM strategy to encapsulate CRM among their business strategies; however, they have weaknesses in implementation in some of the dimensions. This research helped in defining a new dimension to fill this weakness observed, which is CRM *strategic aligning*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Customer Relationship Management is defined by lots of researchers as a planning process that impacts organizations. In the literature reviewed, it seems that there is no consensus on what constitutes key components of CRM. A lot of scholars agree that there are key components that should be present to have a successful CRM implementation. Whether these components are applicable to private hospitals in Kuwait in terms of how they are defined, is an issue for further investigation. The building of sustainable successful relationships with a large customer base with CRM is not an easy task because CRM has a direct impact on many core business operations, especially on the processes therein. The issue here is not exclusively a technical one. According to Osarenkhoe and Bennani (2007), the creation of long-term relationships with potential customers, which was led by many factors such as globalization and internationalization, and the wide advancements in information technology, started as a response to new forms of competition (p. 159).

CRM strategy development is a new approach to the private hospitals in Kuwait. It is not only about software implementation, sales or customer service either. Rather, it is more about the resulting interaction of entire business processes with customers. Baashar et al. (2020) noted that there is a substantial gap that exists in the healthcare environment in respect to the knowledge of using CRM (para. 5). Customer relationship management (CRM) is an approach that tends to manage the customers' relationships by combining the people, processes and technology to understand a company's customers (Ur-Rehman, Raza, Ilyas, Faisal, & Zia, 2020, p. 140).

This paper explores the strategy development and implementation of CRM in two private hospitals in Kuwait, Royale Hayat and AlSeef hospitals. The two cases researched implement a CRM strategy to achieve a competitive advantage. Successful implementation is a dilemma to many hospitals, mostly because CRM requires the whole organization to be customer-focused, which needs a cross-functional business process re-engineering.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is perceived by some organizations as an information technology (IT) tool. In the Healthcare services industry today in Kuwait, private hospitals and clinics are operating a highly complex and rapidly changing environment. Leaders of healthcare organizations recognize the importance of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to the organization's overall performance. As a result, many private hospitals are emphasizing more on customer relationship management to compete for an increased market share.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Problem Definition

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategy is an unexplored topic in some of the private hospitals in Kuwait. There is a lack of understanding of how CRM strategy should be implemented in the hospital environment. Royale Hayat and AlSeef private hospitals in Kuwait are the main hospitals who adopted a CRM strategy back in 2009. Therefore, the two hospitals are researched to evaluate the management of customer relationship strategy based on parameters such that it contributes in the development and implementation of CRM. The project focuses on evaluating the potential of the CRM system in the two organizations pertaining to the parameters of successful implementation to optimize the use of CRM in the healthcare hospital environment.

2.2 Customer Relationship Management Definition

During the past decades, the world's economies have shifted from industrial into the service economy. The marketing history in correspondence has shown a great shift in the paradigm from obtaining market leadership by the development of the production efficiencies and cutting down operational costs per unit, into dominating market shares by building sustainable strategies aimed at satisfying customer's needs by building long term profitable relationships with them (Nguyen and Mutum, 2012, p. 412). Marolt, Zimmermann, Žnidaršič, & Pucihar, 2020, p. 39) argued that creating a social customer relationship strengthens relationships with potential customers based on providing best quality, customized dialogue and innovation is a sustainable strategy that is harder to imitate by competitors; and that while the 4Ps marketing tools remain important tactics to attract and retain customers, the research into the subject of CRM needs to expand to capture the mechanisms and instruments to employ its strategies.

Customer relationship management (CRM) became a strategic tool towards strengthening organizations' relations with their customers aiming at creating comparative advantage against the aggressive competition among their rivalries. Organizations from scattered business environments strive to summarize CRM among their business strategies, while more companies are in the processes of implementing it to overcome their weaknesses existed in their communication channels with customers (Alt and Puschmann, 2004, para. 4).

The importance of this concept began as a result of competition which can be attributed to various factors including globalization of businesses, deregulation, openness in the global markets, directions towards internationalizations, noticeable advancement in technological means, shortened life cycles of products and realization of importance of CRM in term of customer retention, loyalty and the organization's overall profitability. All of these factors created the need for creating beneficial relationships with customers and the necessity of providing more customized products and services (Al-Motairi, 2008, para. 4). While there has been a wide consensus among business firms on the urgent need to incorporate CRM systems within their strategies, some were disappointed with the significant failure in the implementation processes. A report published by Gartner Group indicated the failure of 70% of CRM projects that forced scholars to identify reasons behind such failure and introduce main CRM success factors that should implemented to attain the planned goals (Foss et al., 2008, p. 75). There are numerous definitions that are used to describe Customer Relationship Management (CRM). Some authors defined CRM as a process, while others summarized it more as strategy, a philosophy, a capability, or as a technological tool (Zablah, Bellenger, & Johnston, 2004, p. 285). However, it has become apparent that CRM is more than technology. Most authors understand CRM as a combination of information system and strategy that focuses on customers in order to serve them better.

In the marketing literature, CRM has been placed in the overall context of marketing thought and especially that of relationship marketing strategies. CRM was proven to strategically link practices that govern marketing relationships and IT resulting into long-term profitable relationships with customers and stakeholders through facilitating the utilization of available data and information that helps in triggering customers' preferences and co-creating value with them. According to Payne and Frow (2005), the impact of the integration of processes, people, operations, and marketing capabilities is enabled by information, technology, and applications (p. 169).

2.3 Conceptualization of CRM

Customer relationship management (CRM) conceptualization showed significant disagreements around CRM definitions that resulted from the widely spread and diverse academic backgrounds of CRM scholars and practitioners. This relatively new concept in the field of Marketing and Information Systems has attracted the attention of researchers and it has inspired multiple definitions but at the same time lacking consensus among a unified definition (Al-Motairi, 2008, para. 1). This can be attributed to the fact that CRM relates differently to different people depending on their perceptions and understanding for CRM (Alt and Puschmann, 2004, para. 3).

Authors who tried to define CRM have adapted different approaches; the technological approach that considers CRM as a strategic tool towards improving the organizational computing capabilities enabling firms to successfully managing its customers' expectations (Chen and Chen, 2004, p. 340); the business philosophy approach that influences customer behavior towards improved customer retention, acquisition, loyalty and profitability and the business process approach that focuses on developing marketing, sales and services when dealing with customers (Zablah et al., 2004, p. 289).

Many researchers built their definition on CRM's main components resulted in conceptualizing it as a business strategy that combines people, processes, and technology in order to build long- term, profitable relationship with customers (Al-Motairi, 2008, para. 1). The Importance of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) stemmed from its significant impacts on the firms' performance and financial statements. It has been widely debated and proven that CRM utilizes a strategy to create value through the implementation of technology, data and customer knowledge for the firm and its customers (Payne & Frow, 2005, p. 71).

In addition, CRM confirmed to enhance customer loyalty through exchanging of trust among parties involved in business relationship as well as promoting honest dealing, openness, support and dialogue with the existed customers (Osarenkhoe and Bennani, 2007, p. 141).

2.4 Core Dimensions of CRM

Donaldson and O'Toole (2002) defined the core dimensions of CRM that are needed to achieve a sustainable CRM (as cited in Osarenkhoe and Bennani, 2007, p. 142). These dimensions are all discussed below.

Invest in People

An exploratory study conducted by Al-Motairi (2008) revealed that skillful staff plays an essential role in the success of CRM projects with their diverse abilities, knowledge and expertise (para. 5). Such internal relationships exchanged between the top management and employees could be translated into a key success factor in external relationships with customers fueled by extensive training programs tailored towards developing skills in excellent communications with customers, practices altering behaviors encouraging resistance against change, motivating staff and boosting willingness of information sharing among the organization's staff. Nevertheless, full commitment by the organization's management and staff is not less important in ensuring effective CRM implementation aiming at better served customers and fulfillment of their needs (Cunha and Heckman, 2010, para. 6).

Relationship-Based Interface

Relationship-based interfaces are the platforms allow the exchanging of information both internally and externally. Business enterprises adapt this orientation to accommodate customer, both internal and external, in a responsive and effective way to respond to possible changes in their needs. This type of orientation is found to be more powerful and successful than using ones with predominately external focus thus, various scholars considered it be an essential key success factor in implementing CRM projects (Osarenkhoe and Bennani, 2007, p. 148).

Maintaining Dialogue with Customers

Under the presence of open markets, free movement of goods, elimination of both monopoly and limited access to information, customers became a rich source of competence for business enterprises therefore, corporations started to engage their customers in a dialogue proven to be a dialogue of equals (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, p. 81). This type of dialogue is characterized of being active, explicit and continuous to successfully dealing with customer diversity and establishing individualized experience among them. Donaldson and O'Toole (2002) stated that listening to customers and tackling their preferences helps organizations maintain long-term relationships with their customers, which helps in shifting them into loyal customer which is the target of any profitable business (as cited in Osarenkhoe and Bennani, 2007, p. 147). Nowadays, with the emergence of social media the adoption of social customer relationship management has expediated the customer engagement process and customer data management process, and this has a positive effect on customer relationship performance (Marolt et al., 2020, p. 48).

Setting Realistic Targets and Assessing Performance

Companies implementing CRM should ensure establishing SMART goals or targets that serve as fundamental basis for future performance assessment discussions. To achieve those goals mutual efforts by employees and managers should be directed towards identifying customers' needs, expectations and perceptions of offered products which are core elements of successful CRM systems (Donaldson and O'Toole, as cited by Osarenkhoe and Bennani, 2007, p. 150).

Customer Relationship and Customer Satisfaction

Customer's lifetime relationship represents a great value for any corporation encouraging enormous efforts to explore the cause and effect of customer knowledge and relationship on the antecedent customer satisfaction. Those findings and others in the same domain have shifted the marketing concept from a brand-centered focus to a customer-centered approach that is mainly

established over the basis of dynamic customer knowledge (Fornell, Mithas, & Krishnan, 2005, p. 205). Being aware of the customers' behaviors helps firms in gaining insight into their tastes and needs and help in delivering better outcomes that satisfy their expectations resulting in achieving customer satisfaction and positive economic performance of the firms (Marlot et al. 2020, p. 50). According to Fornell et al. (2005), customer satisfaction tends to have an adverse impact on customer complaints, switching behavior and negative word of mouth. On the other hand, it also impacts customer loyalty, future revenues, usage behavior and consequent customer retention positively (p. 207).

Service Quality

Service quality has been defined as a concept associated with goodness (Crosby, 1979, para. 6). This term can be easily evaluated and assessed in tangible products but very difficult to be conducted in service offerings due to the characteristics of services including intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability hence gathering information on the customers is an essential tool towards identifying their needs and inspirations what should be fulfilled through the organization's offerings (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985, p. 42). Due to the complexity of this term, authors of marketing literature varied in identifying its main constructs. Leblanc and Nguyen (2012) identified corporate image, internal organization, physical support of the producing structure, customer communication and attained level of customer satisfaction as the five components of service quality (p. 58). Looking into the main components of service quality demonstrates the importance of realizing a successful relationship with customers through extracting valid and comprehensive information about the customers and using it to create profits through fulfilling the customers' needs (Hwang, Kim, & Suh, 2003, p. 13). Healthcare technology self-efficacy, perceived risk, and perceived service level are also important antecedents of perceived ease of use (Tsai, Hung, Yu, Chen, & Yen, 2019, para. 10).

2.5 Successful Implementation of CRM

The topic of CRM has been and is still of high interest for companies and organizations mainly those operating in the service marketing whereas customer perspectives on CRM expectations and perceptions are strongly attached to the success of the company. Despite the huge emphasis on the necessity of implementing CRM and strived efforts spent by firms to implement it, CRM became a matter of concern for many due to the high failure rate associated with its implementation. Saini, Grewal, and Johnson (2010, p. 71) noticed that the failure rate for CRM initiatives has exceeded 50% while kale (2012) pointed out that this rate ranged between 60-80% (as cited in Mukerjee, 2013, p. 120). Furthermore, Mckinsey and company reported that more than two-thirds of investment in CRM programs found to be disappointments (Hazard, Roberts, & Raymond, 2005, p. 75). Reasons behind this high rate were attributed for not implementing relevant strategized CRM solutions properly or for the failing in equating CRM with its right components (Mukerjee, 2013, p. 119). According to Foss et al. (2008) poor planning, absence of clear targets and inability to cope with business changes are among reasons for CRM failures (p. 69). To identify important elements required for the successful implementing of CRM programs, companies should sketch their CRM process to serve as layout for its involved areas and in turn it will identify those with need for more focus. Hazard et al. (2005) screened precedent literature to draw a model describing corporate and marketing requirements for a successful CRM solution and created a comprehensive model illustrated in figure 1.1 (p. 80).
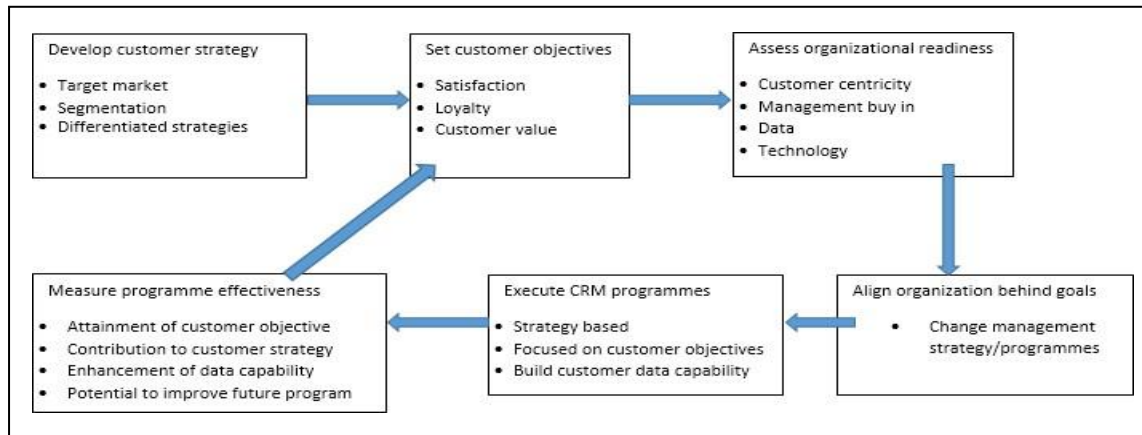
Fig.1: CRM Process Model
Source: Adapted from Hazard et al. (2005)

Authors in CRM found that coherent coordination among all organizational, technological and human components of CRM is the main driver towards the success of implementing CRM (Dimitriadis & Stevens, 2008, p. 507). The following section will elaborate extensively on those main components and explain how they should be integrated strategically to achieve the core purpose of CRM.

People

The first constituent of successful CRM is the human capital including both senior top officials and employees who interact with each other on a daily basis leading into the success of collapse of any organization.

Staff: Employees serving at both front or back lines are found to be the essential elements for executing any CRM initiatives through their interaction with their ultimate customers therefore, ensuring the presence of necessary communication skills, adequate knowledge of organization's products and receiving related training programs are required to achieve the organization's overall targets.

Leadership To ensure the alignment of staff with the organization's overall CRM program, top management should be responsible to design the strategy to be followed by the company which is the pivotal elements in the success of CRM. This strategy should clearly state the company's customer-centric vision, sets mid to long-term objectives and decides on the level of offered customization that needs to be met through CRM. Nevertheless, the formulated strategy should be communicated throughout the whole organization as well as the day-to-day interaction with the customers (Al-Motairi, 2008, para. 5). Gordon (2002) added that the need of employees should be addressed in the way that value wanted from the corporation is captured as well as empowering them to take more control over their careers and its development is also essential to ensure successful implementation of CRM (para. 8).

Process

For a successful implementation of CRM, effective and integrated communication among the organization's internal divisions should be achieved. This cornerstone can only be realized through a specially designed organizational environment whereas both cultural and structural elements proven to play a strategic role in reengineering business process by enabling cross-functional coordination. This in turn influences relationships with the customers either directly or indirectly and creates synergy among different organizational channels (Dimitriadis and Stevens, 2008, p. 499). According to Gordon (2002, para. 3) strategized processes promote embedding business rules into CRM-related databases that enable customers' behaviors triggering appropriate action reflecting on the organization's performance. Albers et al. (2009) suggest that CRM should integrate processes, people, operations and marketing capabilities that is aided through information, technology and application. According to Mendoza et al. (2007), marketing, sales and services are the main businesses processes needed to be addressed while implementing CRM (as cited in Al-Motairi, 2008, para. 7).

Technology

Information Technology system as defined by (Dimitriadis and Stevens, 2008, p. 510) as a "computer hardware, associated software and middleware used by organizations". It is also known as "all computing capabilities enabling firms to gather, organize, store and retrieve data about their customers" (Al-Motairi, 2008, para. 7). This indicates that there is a need for CRM to be data-driven to assist in analyzing and interpreting customers' behaviors. Technologies also found to facilitate CRM process through leveraging of data and supporting IT infrastructure. An empirical study conducted by Day and Blute (2002) on US businesses with over 500 employees indicated that information about both customer data and information technology along with company's orientation and configuration are the main constructs of customer relating capability (p.35).

2.6 Implementation of CRM in Healthcare Organizations

Implementation of CRM systems is found to be practiced in almost every industry including banking, entertainment, healthcare and even SMEs after its impact has been widely recognized by the marketers shaping their customer-oriented strategies. In this section we will focus on CRM implementation in hospitals in particular and healthcare sector in general. All organizational activities directly or indirectly are ended to customer related services which is the case in hospitals where the customers or in another word patients are playing critical role in their businesses.

Baashar et al. (2020) noted that patients are like customers who possess different behaviors and attitudes; hence their expectations are quite high and deferent (para. 3). Therefore, the importance of implementing CRM systems to gather information about the patients and develop relevant communication to create superior value for both healthcare providers and customers especially when known that patients have little information to decide the type of service or treatment, they need thus they leave this mission to medical service providers to provide the required information and determine what kind of sickness they are suffering from (Tsai et al., 2019, para. 17).

To successfully conceptualize CRM and its implementation in hospitals, Monem and his colleagues initially mapped the organizational success factors into three elements that are: employee, management and resources and named their model as the "Egg Model". In this artificial model, authors imagined the central point of Egg represented in CRM is growing over the time while the rest of the egg feeds the kernel, and this could not be realized without the contribution of the three dimensions. Further to his research, the model was then expanded to include two more elements which are software factors and patient involvement which resulted in a new holistic model needed to be taken into consideration when creating IT-CRM software for hospitals (Monem et al., 2011).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research uses a multiple case study strategy. This strategy will help in understanding the development of the customer relationship management strategy as it is perceived and practiced by two distinct hospitals that adopt CRM strategy. The selected strategy is the most suitable strategy to conduct such a research because of the nature and context of the hospital environment, which is part of this research. The use of case study approach will aid in better analyzing the research problem as it gains inferences from different perspectives. Furthermore, the case study is quite useful in giving answers to Why, What and How questions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, A. 2019 p. 156).

3.2 Research Method

Given the exploratory nature of this research, the research used a qualitative research method. Saunders et al. (2009) mentioned that qualitative method can be used mostly as a methodology to collect data through conducting interviews (p. 130).

The selection of this method has aided the researcher in providing textual descriptions of how people in the hospital context experience CRM that is needed to gain further

exploration of the subject of research. Interviews have been selected as to gather information from the participants. The framework under this study is adapted from the discussion of the conceptual models as discussed in the literature review. The methodological framework is represented in the form of a table for the purpose of our study to examine the key success dimensions of CRM strategy development and to link these dimensions with CRM implementation:

Table 1: Research Framework

Source: Adapted from Donaldson and O'Tool (2002) and Al-Motairi (2008)

Elements	Dimensions
People (Internal: Employee/ External: Customers)	Customer Service
	Training
	Perception/Attitude
	Knowledge Capability
	Trust of the customer
	Customer Satisfaction
	Dialogue/Communication
Technology	Data Quality
	System
	Security/Privacy
Process	Workflow Integration
	Measurement of goals
	Performance Assessment
Management	Awareness
	Readiness
	Support of CEO
	Involvement

For further understanding of the dimensions highlighted above, the below table 1.2 describes each dimension in the context of the hospital environment.

Table 2: Description of the dimensions

Source: Adapted from Donaldson and O'Tool (2002), Al-Motairi (2008), Monem et al. (2011) and Writer (2020)

Dimension	Description
Customer Service and Satisfaction	The effectiveness of the CRM system in the two hospitals is gained through providing superior customer service to the customers. Understanding the expectations that a prospect customer expects prior to using the medical services provided in the hospital is important to reach satisfaction.
Training	The Training dimension of the CRM system contributes in generating enhanced customer satisfaction. Experienced, trained and qualified staffs are important to the successful implementation of CRM strategy.
Perception/Attitude	The perception or attitude of internal staff towards the hospital contributes in delivering a customer-centric proposition, as this helps in designing teams to work together within the organization to deliver the customer relationship proposition.
Knowledge Capability	CRM activities within the hospital are reflected by its staff in being mutually beneficial to the customer by enhancing the knowledge and expertise of the internal people.
Trust of the Customer	The dimension of trust is effectively addressed by the CRM system through providing high quality customer services through the continuous interaction with customers that helps in building a trusting relationship with the customer.
Dialogue and Communication	This dimension focuses on building long term relationships with customers, hospitals are aware that they need to listen and adapt to preferences of individual customers. This dimension is important for the success of CRM strategy implementation as it enhances the interaction between the hospital and the customers.
Data Quality	Quality of data is important in hospitals. The right quantity and quality of information is needed to help meet the customers' needs.
System	This dimension focuses on the integration of different departments in the hospital through a common interface to meet the general objectives of CRM and the main organization's objective as well as the other departments.
Security and Privacy	The dimension of security and privacy information about the customer within the hospital environment is important to enhance the trust building relationship.
Workflow Integration	This dimension facilitates proper process in exchanging information. between departments in the hospital to ensure proper delivery of customer service.
Measurement of Goals	Measuring CRM goals is hospitals is done through customer service satisfaction surveys, external research companies who conduct surveys with customers and prospect customers, and internally through complaints or feedback monitoring.
Performance Assessment	For CRM proper development, Royale Hayat and AlSeef hospitals define this dimension as having an understanding of customer perceptions and expectations towards their services to ensure proper assessment of the performance of CRM implementation.
Management Support and Involvement	This dimension is vital to ensure the alignment of the CRM strategy within the hospital. Top management involvement and support promotes a culture of commitment that enhances CRM.
Management Readiness	Management readiness prior to the development of CRM is important to ensure proper implementation across the hospital departments. Readiness of the hospital is defined by its capabilities of human, technology and processes inside the hospital to deliver a CRM strategy.
Management Awareness	This dimension focuses on the continuous follow-up of top management to provide resources needed to cope with this change, as CRM management is about change management to ensure a successful implementation of CRM within the hospital.

3.3 Sample
Selection of Cases

Currently, there are seven top private hospitals operating in Kuwait. The selection of the two hospitals was based on a couple of factors: the year of initiating a customer relationship strategy, and the comparability in size of the hospital. The sample comprised of the following cases (see table 3.3 below):

Table 3: Selected research cases

Source: Writer (2020)

Royale Hayat hospital	The first hospital in Kuwait to start a Customer Relationship Management strategy.
AlSeef hospital	The last entrant to the private hospital industry in Kuwait. Made CRM part of its strategy.

Selection of the Interviewees

Interviews were conducted in the hospital with the respective staff after taking appointment from them. The initial contact was with the CEO of each hospital and then coordinated an interview with him through their administrative secretarial office. Before conducting the interview with the CEO of each hospital, the need for the interview and who needs to be interviewed was explained the CEO. The target population was middle management, such as managers from marketing department, public relations department, information technology and other departmental heads. In addition to the department heads, employees handling. The details of the research and the need for the interview and how the data would be used (stressing the ethical issue on confidentiality) was explained to the interviewees before each interview.   A total of 10 interviews for each case was carried out.

4. DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

The data collected in this research is analyzed using computer software called NVIVO, v.10. NVIVO also helps to ask the right questions of the data. The software helps to structure questions and determine answer to these questions. Since all the information is stored, searching and retrieving the large amount of data becomes easy. The use of the software aids in generating a graphical model based on which ideas and concepts that are built from the data can be showcased. The use of graphical representation also allows better representation of the research framework. Based on these various approaches that NVIVO provides, the outcomes of the research can be achieved. In the case analysis conducted, at Royale Hayat and AlSeef hospitals, the analysis shows that each hospital follows a different Customer Relationship Management strategy. In brief, the CRM strategy followed by the two hospitals is described below:

AlSeef Hospital: An implicit CRM strategy is followed at AlSeef hospital. The CRM strategy of AlSeef is focusing on delivering main services like customer satisfaction, quality of healthcare services, patient comfort, accessibility and convenience to the patient, customization of the services to the local needs, establishing collaborations with international institutes to provide quality services at the hospital. The CRM strategy of the organization is implicit in nature such that it focuses on using the internal staffs like nurses to require an understanding of the needs of the patients and thereby generating services in a customized fashion. However, there is evidence of a communication gap in the organization such that there is lack of follow-ups and also effective integration of the different departments to generate The lack of effective integration between the different departments thereby generate hindrances for effectively meeting and servicing the needs of the customers. This implies that the management is trying to build CRM using a bottom-up approach. However, the lack of integration of CRM between the departments, for example Patients relationship and Marketing or Public relationship department, hinders the communication among internal divisions. Lack of dialogue between the patient relationship and marketing and public relations make it harder for the management to potentially reflect its customer servicing potentials to the larger market. Similarly, it fails to synchronize the customer servicing and patient relationship activities thereby creating greater inefficiencies in customer service management. Further the hospital organization lacks effective perception of the needs of customers through the use of the customer satisfaction surveys. This lack of perception makes it difficult for the management to be responsive to meet the consumer demands. This inhibits continuous learning and innovation in the hospital, which is one of the strategies of AlSeef hospital.

Royale Hayat: This hospital follows an explicit CRM strategy. In this strategy a questionnaire is prepared based on different aspects of customer satisfaction but there is also personal and face-to face interaction with customers which is done by SMS and digital marketing. These interactions form the basis of developing better customer relationship and preparation of training modules. Explicit communication is practiced by the Royal Hayat communication with the external customers through marketing the services rendered with the use of digital marketing tools and also with the mode of sending messages to the customers in their mobile phones. The organizational culture of the organization reflects a more customer focused and responsive work culture in that different levels in the organization reflect flexibility in the services provided to meet external needs. The overall customer service atmosphere pertaining to all the divisions at Royale Hayat drives customers to have more trust in the services provided. Exceptional customer service reassures the customer that staffs are knowledgeable and trained, and this reflects that the management of the hospital is practically involved in the implementation of the CRM strategy. It is perceived that the overall strong culture of service at Royale Hayat hospital acts as a stimulator of trust for the customer, as it ensures positive interaction and experience within and across all divisions. Moreover, Royale Hayat CRM strategy is integrated through the use of different channels, while ensuring a coordinated message to the customer. This reassures the customer that there is close management at every contact point between the customer and Royale Hayat, as well as ensuring that any communication customers receive through different channels are well coordinated and tailored to their interests.

The critical key success components of CRM strategy for both the hospitals was understanding the factors responsible for customer satisfaction and integrating the work according to the information derived which can lead to better customer focus and satisfaction. Based on the information derived from brochures, SMS and other methods, training modules were prepared which helped in integration of the different departments which together to provide better service and satisfaction to customers. The upper management of the organization is required to effectively communicate the CRM strategy to other management layers in the organization like the middle and lower management. Linking the different management levels in the organization would effectively contribute to generating customer satisfaction.

In this section, the framework of CRM implementation within the hospital organization is presented through aligning the same with the overall strategic goal of the organization. Based on the results of the interviews in both of the hospitals, the following framework is proposed.
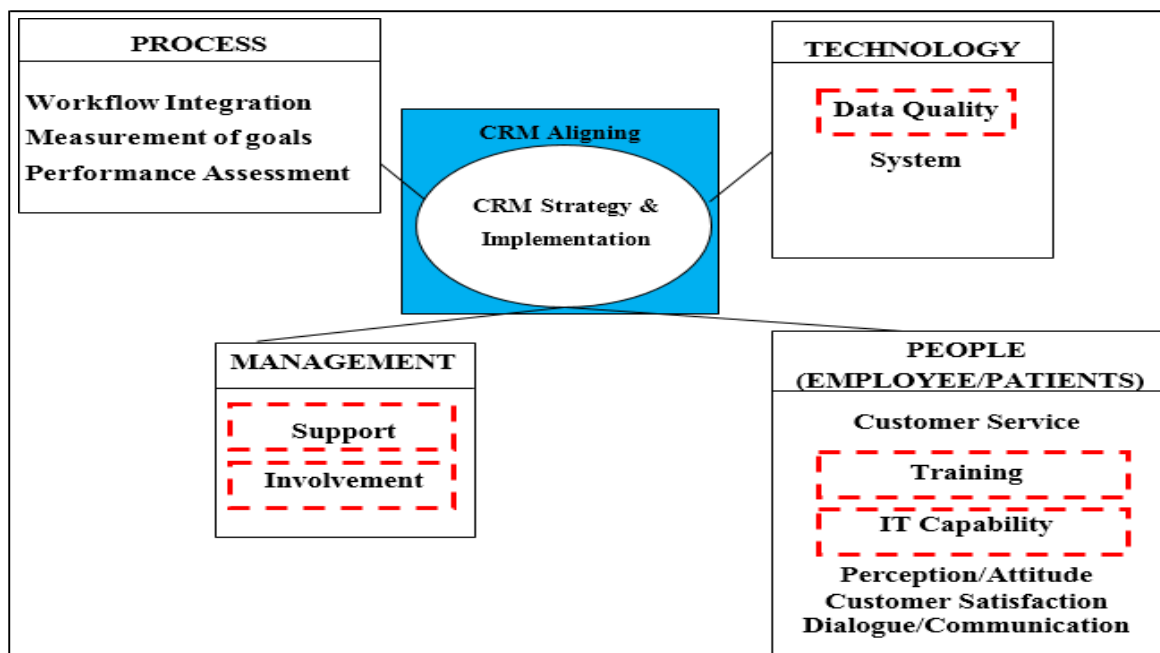

Fig.2: CRM Strategy and Implementation Framework
Source: (Writer, 2020)

The data analysis conducted suggest that Customer Relationship Management (CRM), though not supported by an efficient information technology system in both the hospitals analyzed, tends to be addressed both in an implicit and explicit manner, respectively. Interaction and communication are maintained with the customers through the use of customer satisfaction survey forms and also through communication developed between the nursing staff and the patients for AlSeef and use of digital medium and sending messages to customers through use of mobile by Royale Hayat hospital. The performances of the different departments for the two hospitals is evaluated based on assessing of customer satisfaction levels gained through the filing up of the satisfaction forms. Finally, knowledge and expertise development of the staff is enhanced in Royale Hayat through training to generate effective customer services. Integration of the different departments in the two hospitals is made to help in fulfillment of the CRM goals and objectives. The results gained from the customer satisfaction surveys is utilized by the Royal Hayat management for rendering training to the customer servicing staffs on the areas that require potential improvement. This strategy contributes to helping the organization retain customers and also in enhancing greater customer satisfaction.

5. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

It is observed from the research conducted in both the hospitals that the success of a CRM strategy implementation requires effective aligning of the CRM strategy. It is defined as aligning of CRM strategy, and not alignment, as implementation of strategy should be dynamic with the organizational mission and strategy to aid its potential implementation. For implementation of the CRM, the CRM objectives and goals need to be further communicated with the different elements in the organization, like internal people or staff relating to the different departments, the system processes used for rendering effective customer services and the incorporation of CRM technology for an effective integration and communication between the different departments in order to gain the holistic cooperation needed for meeting the CRM goals. To achieve the effective accomplishment of the CRM objectives, the components of CRM; people, process and technology, are required to satisfy the different dimensions like quality enhancement, investment in human resources, generating effective customer services to generate customer satisfaction, relationship with both internal and external stakeholders, measurement of performances based on realistic goals and achievements of CRM and finally maintaining a dialogue with the customers in either implicit or explicit form.

The accomplishment of the objectives and goals of CRM for the two hospital organizations, Royale Hayat and AlSeef are measured and evaluated based on the level of communication maintained by the management with the customers and patients. Developing communication with the customers and patient parties contributes in enhancing the level of understanding relating to their expectations and demands from the healthcare services provided by the organization. Enhancement of the knowledge related to customer expectations and needs helps the management in training the internal staffs to help provide effective customer services to the patients and consumer groups. Further the middle management is made highly aware of the CRM objectives of the organization by the upper level management body. Increase in the level of CRM awareness of the middle management contributes in making them ready to act as effective facilitators in the change process. Continuous interaction developed with the customers contributes in the enhancement of trust and loyalty on the part of the customers. Similarly, sharing of potential information related to CRM objectives and goals with the internal people or employees contribute in the enhancement of the knowledge dimension in the organization. The activities of the different departments in the hospital are integrated to help in the enhancement of services related to helping in patient registration activities for consultation and admission purposes. Moreover, the integration of activities of the different departments also contribute in reducing the waiting time of the patients relating to receiving of consultation and other healthcare services in the hospitals. The inferences gained further reflect the absence of effective information technology relating to supporting of CRM activities in the organization. As well, the support of the higher management is not gained for sustaining CRM activities in AlSeef hospital, while it is observed to be existent in Royale Hayat hospital. On the same note, the absence of a CRM manager in the organizational structure, which is indicated in both the hospitals, served as a weakness in strategically achieving the core purpose of CRM and reduced the element of control which is essential to ensure successful implementation of the CRM activities in the organization.

For the effective implementation of the CRM activities in the hospital organizations, it is highly recommended for the hospital organizations to ensure strategic aligning of CRM. The aligning of the CRM strategy is required to be made by the hospital organizations to effectively integrate and drive the needed strategy across all divisions and functions in the organization. This aligning would contribute to the monitoring of the effective implementation of CRM activities to generate effective customer services. In addition, CRM strategy implementation requires full support and commitment of the CEO to act as a potential facilitator in ensuring effective aligning. The CRM system in use would contribute to the effective dissemination of communication relating to CRM aspects with internal and external stakeholders and thereby would generate needed readiness in the customer servicing process.

The management of the hospitals in Kuwait needs to be more focused in generation the right quality of customer services to the patients through the effective development and implementation of CRM goals. Servicing of customers is needed to be taken as the core goal and objective of the CRM processes and hence it must not be only limited to the production of brochures and catalogues of customer and healthcare services generated. The higher management of the organization is required to formulate an effective CRM strategy and thereby potentially communicate the same with the different organizational levels. Effective communication between the different levels contributes in generating greater responsiveness and readiness for the different levels to meeting of consumer demands and expectations. Potential integration achieved with the different organizational levels based on the incorporation of backend and front-end activities of the different departments in the hospital such that the same would help the different levels to effectively communicate in generating effective customer services. This function would help in needed understanding of the benefits and advantages that the use of information technology helps in generation of the right amount of integration of the organizational functions to generate potential customer services.

Further research that can be contributed to this direction is the incorporation of quantitative research through the use of structured questionnaire forms to generate needed inferences based on the options generated in a multi-dimensional or Likert scale approach. The inferences gained based on the use of the Likert scale would be presented in the form of graphical representation through the use of charts and graphs to enhance the understanding. Similarly, the use of statistical tools in the research activity would contribute in enhancing the quality and specification of the research objective in understanding the efficacy of development of CRM goals and objectives linking the same with organizational goals and existing resources bases in the form of people, process and technology.

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