

Foreword

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

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

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

The adoption of customer-focused strategies and practices may significantly increase an organization's capacity to generate knowledge. In this context, customer knowledge management (CKM) can be seen as an enabler for the development of

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

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

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Dr. Luciano Batista is a lecturer in operations management at the Open University Business School, The Open University, UK. His academic degrees comprise a BSc in computer science, an MSc in management and a PhD in information systems management. After graduating in computer science, he worked in the industry for 11 years. During this period, he worked 3 years as computer programmer, 4 years as systems analyst and 4 years as CIO. After obtaining a master's degree in 1998, he moved his career from industry to academia. Dr. Batista obtained his PhD from the Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester, UK. His PhD research focused upon the applicability of CRM systems in the government context. During his PhD, he has actively contributed to the development of the CRM National Project in the UK, a government project commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). After his PhD, he worked as associate research fellow at the School of Business and Economics, University of Exeter, UK, where he developed research on service processes and integrated CRM / BPM approaches, as well as taught operations management. Throughout his academic career, Dr. Batista has co-authored important government reports and published in journals and international conferences in Europe, USA and Latin America. At the Open University, he has been teaching and researching operations management-related issues concerning CRM, process innovation, applicability of digital technologies, and logistics and supply chain management.