Organisering för strategisk CRM
Lärande om kundrelationer i en B2B-organisation

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt förvar i S205h, Samhällsvetarhuset, Umeå universitet fredagen den 11 september, kl. 13:00.
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Organising for strategic CRM. Learning about customer relationships in a B2B-organisation

Abstract
In marketing research, customer relationship management (CRM) is often described as a strategy for collecting customer information through an IT-infrastructure in order to manage customer relationships (e.g. Boulding et al 2005; Keramati et al 2010; Nguyen and Mutum 2012). Most of the existing research within CRM has focused on IT-infrastructure and implementation issues rather than on how CRM can enable knowledge sharing among individuals and working teams. Difficulties regarding information and knowledge creation, as well as sharing knowledge in both formal and informal ways, are not particularly well addressed in CRM literature. Hence, this study adopts a holistic approach to CRM and aims to “Understand how a B2B-organisation organise for strategic CRM”. The holistic approach implies that organisational aspects (such as co-workers, organisational culture, internal processes and affordance, c.f. Finnegan and Currie 2010) should be captured and seen as integrated parts of strategic CRM together with the more tangible CRM-system. Besides that, this study attempts to answer the question, “How does a B2B-organisation work with CRM to learn about their customer relationships”.

Despite its importance, IT-infrastructure is just one aspect that managers have to consider when making decisions about implementing and organising for CRM. From previous research we can learn that organisational aspects, such as co-workers, internal processes, and organisational culture (e.g. Finnegan and Currie 2010; Jayachandran et al 2005) are important to consider when implementing and using CRM. Thus, discovering how B2B- companies organise for strategic CRM necessitates the use of a holistic approach to CRM, based on the philosophy of relationship marketing (e.g. Grönroos 2008a; Nguyen and Mutum 2012; Storbacka and Lehtinen 2000).

The empirical context in this study is the accounting and auditing industry. During recent years Swedish accounting and auditing firms have faced changes in the macro environment due to changes in legislation, which has transformed the industry to become more customer oriented and CRM has been brought to interest in many firms. The study adopts an explorative research approach connected to the research question and purposes and the empirical inquiry is conducted through an abductive approach and investigates a large auditing and consulting firm, during the time period of 2,5 years. The analysis is built on the theoretical framework and case findings to empirically identify relevant themes connected to the customer relationships, to the development and learning processes in working teams and among individuals, and to intra-organisational prerequisites and structures.

This study shows that managers have to integrate relevant organisational aspects to be able to organise for and implement CRM with a purpose to generate learning about customer relationships in a successful way. While previous research have shown that the organisational aspects may vary depending on company-context, size and type of customers, this study suggests that managers should consider “strategic communities of practice” as an important strategy to enable knowledge sharing, and thus cultivate learning processes among individuals, groups and divisions. However, enabling and cultivating for strategic communities of practice is not suitable for all groups of individuals due to their work tasks, or what goals and objectives managers have with the particular group or team. This finding is important to address since CRM, when narrowly approached as an IT-infrastructure, does not capture all relevant information and results in a lot of important knowledge about customer relationships getting stuck in minds of smaller working groups - instead of being shared with colleagues in networks or communities of practice, and thus contributing to organisational learning about customer relationships.

Keywords
Customer Relationship Management, CRM, B2B-relationships, Relationship Dynamics, Learning about customer relationships

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