

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN IRAN
AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

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TO ALLAH THE ALMIGHTY

WHO GAVE ME THE GUIDANCE AND THE UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT

Customer relationship management (CRM) has become popular among organizations and firms, hence many have implemented it in order to compete with others and promote their businesses. In CRM implementation, there are barriers, critical success factors and the strategic components that should be determined. A CRM model was used to determine the CRM barriers, critical success factors and show the current implementation of CRM in the Iran automobile industry. The proposed CRM model can be used by different organizations to identify the critical success factors, barriers and the position of their CRM project. To do this, nine automobile manufacturers were investigated. The automobile industry is chosen because it is a strategic and crucial industry to Iran. Besides that, the investigated companies also plan to penetrate in the international market. According to previous investigations and databases, currently, this study is the first done in the Iran automobile industry. Data were gathered through several in-depth interviews and observations conducted among the managers and non-managers. Two stages of analysis were performed, they were case analysis and cross case analysis. The findings show that the studied companies have experienced some difficulties in implementing CRM. An example of the difficulties identified is cultural barrier. Besides that, the critical success factors have been recognized. This research also reveals that the most important components of CRM implementation are people, process, and technology. Another contribution of this study is identifying new items in Iranian settings such as the in-house or outside trainers. This study shows that in-house trainers are more efficient and effective in training employees for CRM projects. In addition to that, the level of CRM knowledge of trainers is vital in getting the expected results.

ABSTRAK

Pengurusan perhubungan pelanggan (CRM) telah menjadi semakin popular di kalangan organisasi dan firma perniagaan. Oleh yang sedemikian, terdapat banyak organisasi dan firma perniagaan yang menjalankannya dalam menghadapi persaingan dan mempromosikan perniagaan mereka. Dalam melaksanakan pengurusan perhubungan pelanggan, terdapat faktor halangan, faktor kejayaan yang kritikal dan komponen strategik yang perlu dikenalpasti. Sebuah model pengurusan perhubungan pelanggan telah digunakan untuk mengenalpasti faktor halangan, faktor kejayaan yang kritikal dan perkembangan terkini dalam pengurusan perhubungan pelanggan dalam industri pembuatan kereta di Iran. Model ini boleh digunapakai oleh organisasi yang berbeza untuk menentukan faktor-faktor yang telah disebutkan. Bagi tujuan ini, sembilan buah syarikat pembuatan kereta di Iran telah dipilih untuk dijalankan kajian. Industri pembuatan kereta telah dipilih kerana ianya merupakan sebuah industri yang penting dan strategik kepada Iran. Selain dari itu, syarikat-syarikat ini juga bercadang untuk menembusi pasaran antarabangsa. Berdasarkan kajian dan maklumat literatur yang lepas, kajian ini adalah yang pertama seumpamanya dijalankan dalam industri pembuatan kereta Iran. Data dikumpul melalui beberapa siri temuramah dan pengamatan yang dilakukan ke atas para pengurus dan bukan pengurus. Dua jenis analisa telah dijalankan, iaitu analisa kes dan analisa kes bersilang. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa syarikat-syarikat tersebut mengalami kesulitan dalam menjalankan pengurusan perhubungan pelanggan. Antara kesulitan yang telah dikenalpasti ialah halangan budaya. Selain itu, faktor kejayaan kritikal juga telah berjaya dikenalpasti. Kajian ini juga telah berjaya membuktikan bahawa komponen-komponen penting dalam pengurusan perhubungan pelanggan adalah manusia, proses dan teknologi. Selain itu, kajian ini juga telah mengenalpasti faktor lain yang mempengaruhi pengurusan perhubungan pelanggan seperti jurulatih dalaman atau jurulatih dari luar. Jurulatih dalaman didapati lebih berkesan dan teratur dalam memberikan latihan kepada pekerja yang terlibat dalam projek- projek pengurusan perhubungan pelanggan. Disamping itu, pengetahuan jurulatih dalam pengurusan perhubungan pelanggan juga penting dalam memperoleh hasil yang dikehendaki.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ROI	-	Return On Investment
KM	-	Knowledge Management
CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
CSF	-	Critical Success Factors
IT	-	Information Technology
ERP	-	Enterprise Resource Planning
CRM	-	Customer Relationship Management
E_CRM	-	Electronic Customer Relationship Management
TBCRM	-	Technology Based Customer Relationship Management

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 An overview to Islamic Republic of Iran



Figure 1.1 Map of IRAN

Source: Atiehbahar (2004, P.1)

Iran is between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. The country neighbor's are Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan Afghanistan and Pakistan and Turkey and Iraq. Iran has one of the largest areas in Middle East, which is 1,648,000 square kilometers. North of Iran where the Caspian Sea is located is the largest lake in the world (Atiehbahar, 2008).

Iran's population is almost 67 million in 2009 (The world fact book, 2008). Approximately 1.8 million are living in the country and the rest settled in cities and towns. The density population of Iran is 42 people each square kilometer. According to the last survey taken 52% of the population are less than 25 years old (Atiehbahar, 2008).

Iran has huge resources of oil and gas. The production of oil and gas are 135 billion barrels and natural gas 25 trillion cubic meters. Mineral resources currently exploited include bauxite, chromium, coal, copper, gold, iron ore, red oxide, salt, strontium, sulfur, turquoise, and uranium (Library of Congress, 2008).

Iran's economy is highly impacted by oil resources that are totally under the control of the government. Generally, the economy of Iran is divided into three different sectors that are state, cooperative, and private. The state or governmental sector focuses upon all strategic industries such as international trade, most important minerals, banking, power generation, dams and large-scale irrigation networks, radio and television, post, telegraph and telephone services, aviation, shipping, roads, railroads and the like; all these are controlled by the government. Regarding the cooperative section, we can refer to companies that are responsible for distribution and production in the country.

The last sector is private, which concentrates on activities such as agriculture, animal husbandry, industry, trade, and services that helps the economic activities of the government and other sectors (Atiehbahar, 2008). The goal of economic development plan of Iran has focused on increasing international and global trades and also on underutilized resources and more investment in private sectors. (Amirahmadi, 1996).

To be successful in the above plan the country has to increase its exports and having duty free and international zones can be helpful. Other than these, controlling the domestic market, maintaining a well-functioning supply of basic commodities as well as reasonable prices for necessities and services, and increasing foreign investment are the rest of Iran's economic development plan (Karshenas and Pesaran, 1995).

1.2 Manufacturing Industry

Manufacturing in Iran was cut down during the 1978–79 revolution and the condition of the industry was not satisfactory. However, the imposed war with Iraq

had impacted positively the growth of the industry. In the 1990s, Iran's economy did not improve and the investment in private section was low, but the high world oil prices helped the government in public investment especially in petrochemicals industry. The petrochemicals industry, which has been controlled by the government, has improved remarkably. According to the economic development plan, the government tries to increase petrochemical output and due to this, the above industry has received many attentions for foreign investment.

The steel industry in Iran is improving quickly in three cities namely Ahvaz, Esfahan, and Mobarakeh. According to the plan of the government in 2004, 8.5 million tons must be produced and the goal was attained. Regarding car makers it should be pointed out due to those contracts with foreign car makers they benefited greatly. For example, Iran national car manufacturer could manufacture 260,000 units in 2002. Planting and growing of agricultural products is also a strategic and critical industry in Iran, and controlled by private sector. Two other major industries in Iran are related to grain processing and textile industry. The two said industries have created many job opportunities for Iranians (Library of Congress 2008).

1.3 Background of the Study

Business environment, lifestyle and consumption patterns are changing dramatically and customers expect to be served individually with direct communication and because of these changes, companies are experiencing new situation of business (Buttle, 1996, Filiatrault and Lapierre, 1997, Dyer, 1998, Homburg *et al.*, 2000, Stone *et al.*, 2000, Boudreau *et al.*, 2001, Bateson, 2002, Gefen and Ridings, 2002, Newell, 2003, Gummesson, 2004). Technology revolution, which has improved information technology, has caused fundamental changes in business that can be used as a competitive weapon (Harvey Élisabeth and Lefebvre, 1993, Kraemer *et al.*, 1994, Holland and Naudé, 2004). Due to this, customers are well informed through various media (Bitner *et al.*, 2000). Consequently, they can access to helpful information from different companies (Peppard, 2000, Dussart, 2001). Kotler and Armstrong (2003) exemplify internet as one of the results of technology revolution and explain that internet is the most the dramatic technology

that has caused improvement in marketing since it links individuals and businesses of all types to one another. Firms, companies, and business organizations are using the internet to have closer relationship with customers.

Marketing activities have changed radically (Brown *et al.*, 1995, Brodie *et al.*, 1997) and it no longer involves producing and selling as what it was in the past. New marketing emphasizes on satisfying customer needs and wants (Fournier, 1998, Batra, 1999, Gummesson, 2004). Kotler, (2003) has defined marketing as "*a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and values with others.*" It seems that the most important concept of marketing refers to customer needs.

Relationship marketing is another important concept of today's marketing that is affected positively by improvement of technology such as internet (Anderson, 1995, Aulakh *et al.*, 1996, Blois, 1996, Bruhn, 2003, Egan, 2008). Since 1990s, relationship marketing has been accorded much attention especially in business to business marketing (Sharma, 2003). Nowadays, managers try to understand their customers so that they can best meet their customers' needs, and thus, by doing this, consequently, the customers avoid switching to other companies (Gallagher, 1998, Fickel, 1999, Dibb and Meadows, 2001).

Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) have explained that a successful marketing relationship is the promise and commitment of the company towards the customers' long term satisfaction by offering values. It should also be considered that the meaningful exchange of values depends on boundary functions as well as the organization or the company as a whole. Hence, critical values of cultural orientation are vital to the successful implementation of relationships. Reichheld (1996) has explained that during the past marketing period, companies that have the ability to offer the required products and services and having advantages through productivity gains and lower costs could satisfy their customers. The reason that companies could produce massively since customers were happy with those products, but today the goal of mass marketing that focused upon selling what manufacturing produced had lost its effectiveness since more firms entered and market segmentation had changed.

Firms produce according to the customers' expectations and due to these changes it is preferred that companies concentrate on small customer segments. Hence, close relationship with customers increased (Chatham *et al.*, 2002) since they are not same in their wants and expectations. According to the techniques of customer relationship management, relationship marketing focuses on individual customers.

The firm must also be customer centric rather than product focused. Companies that focus upon customers try to serve them in the best manner to satisfy them. It can be done by integrating marketing activities and the business process of the company. They also adopt themselves with changes; hence, they will be more flexible to respond to changes in customers' needs (Field and Shutler, 1990, Bowen and Hedges, 1993, Conlon, 1999, Prabhaker, 2001, Flint *et al.*, 2002, Bigné *et al.*, 2004).

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Nowadays many firms invest in customer relationship management. However, some of them fail to meet management expectations on return on investment (Corner and Hinton, 2002, Åkerlund, 2005, Caldeira *et al.*, 2008). The reason is that firms apply the technology with the absence of a coherent business strategy focused on the customers. Another problem in customer relationship management is the technology implementation. In some firms, because the focus was given to controlling the customers rather than rendering better services to them, it means trying to retain the customers affects the organization rather than aiming to give better service to the customers (Stone *et al.*, 2000).

Also, Bard (2005) has clarified that only 10% of the business and information technology executives believed that expected business results obtained from CRM implementation and a study by Gartner in 2003 revealed that 70% of CRM projects failed or did not improve due to the reduction in CRM spending between 1999 and 2003 (Ledingham and Rigby, 2004).

However, Hackney(2000) Botwinik(2001) Elmuti(2009)and Goodhue(2002) explained that there were convincing reasons to implement CRM in business organizations and companies even though there was no 100 percent guarantee that it would be successful. On the other hand, CRM software vendors talk about a successful CRM in a way that can solve all the problems in the business. Schweigert(2000) and Boulding(2005) claimed that there were some risks such as failure in the project, inadequate return on investment, unsatisfied employees, and customers that should be considered.

In one example Patton(2001) explained that, *"a large telecommunications company rolled out a major CRM application to more than 1,000 sales representatives in late 1999, at a cost of \$10,000 per user, only to find a year later that fewer than 100 were using the system."* Other surveys have also shown that the average investment in customer relationship management implementation is \$2.2 million dollars and the failure rate is 65 percent (Apicella, 1999).

It is becoming increasingly clear that failing in customer relationship management projects are the results of companies misunderstanding of customer relationship management properly (Chen and Popovich, 2003, Cicmil *et al.*, 2006, Foss *et al.*, 2008, Alamgir *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, they have pointed to other issues. The first issue is that companies try to implement CRM but they do not design and redesign the processes properly. To get better results from CRM, companies have to focus upon the process of sales; they also have to find the ways to convince, serve, and satisfy customers better, and then identify the steps to changes in the plan software or process.

Another issue is that companies are focusing too much on new technologies and processes rather than focusing on people who are responsible to implement CRM. It means that companies need employees who can offer better services to customers, also employees who can be sure that they will have a better situation and environment than what they now have after CRM has been implemented(Alexander and Turner, 2001).

Another CRM implementation issue refers to its sourcing, that means because organizations do not have all the required items for CRM implementation they can

outsource them (MacSweeney, 2000). If customers become satisfied about the value that is offered and meet their expectations the benefit will be generated for the company (Bateson, 2002). Besides all these issues, pitfalls and difficulties regarding CRM implementation, it should be considered that today we have the concept of CRM that leads to improve customer retention and satisfaction, increase competitiveness, higher revenues, lower operational costs and customize products (Jackson Jr, 1994, Reichheld *et al.*, 1996, Bultema, 2000, Bose, 2002, Roh *et al.*, 2005).

Due to the issues and difficulties in CRM implementation, some companies are reluctant to implement it (Bard, 2005). By searching through databases and Iran annual reports, the researcher has realized that customer satisfaction is remarkably low regarding the products and services of car manufacturing companies in Iran. It has also been found that customer relationship management is not implemented properly. It seems that because of the current problems, the customer relationship management technology has been disregarded in Iran automobile industry.

The problem of the research revolves around the implementation of customer relationship management technology in Iran automobile industry. This study is conducted in automobile industry since it is one of the most known and crucial industries in Iran.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

Considering the importance of automobile industry in Iran, this study attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore the current implementation of customer relationship management in the automobile industry.
2. To identify the barriers in customer relationship management in the automobile industry.

3. To identify the success factors of customer relationship management with regard to automobile industry.

4. To analyze critically the implementation of customer relationship management in the automobile industry.

1.6 Scope of the Research

This study designed to provide an overview on customer relationship management implementation in Iran automobile industry within the vicinity of the capital Tehran, and two other cities Ahwaz, and Boroujerd. These cities are selected because Tehran and Ahwaz have large population, are industrialized cities and Boroujerd is selected since one of the investigated car manufacturing companies is located there.

1.7 Significance of the Research

First, based on the previous study this is the first attempt of exploring CRM implementation in Iran automobile industry. Hence it will be helpful for this industry specially car manufacturers.

Second, customer relationship management implementation has been tested, but the majorities were done in the developed countries or they were not about automobile industry(Nguyen *et al.*, 2007).

Third, results are expected to help practitioners and managers understand CRM success factors as well as CRM implementation barriers to influence the factors that determine CRM success implementation.

1.8 Limitations of the Research

The research has some limitations. First, it is done merely in automotive industry therefore results and findings cannot be generalized in other sectors. Second limitation refers to the data collection. As some of the respondents were busy, making appointment with them was difficult. Third limitation refers to number of cities that will be covered, because difficulties in traveling and long distances between the cities only three cities Tehran, Ahwaz, and Boroujerd were covered for this study.

1.9 Guides to the Thesis

This study is organized into five chapters, as follows. The first chapter presents a general introduction and discusses the statement of the problem, objectives of the study as well as significance and limitations of the research.

The second chapter discusses customer relationship management concept through an overview of CRM literature. The theories in second chapter have been used in different context and are proposed here as means for studying and understanding customer relationship management. In addition, this chapter includes description and evaluation of these theories and finally this part ends with a conceptual framework of the study. Chapter 3 begins with the research design, also data collection method and data collection procedures, sample design and data analyses are discussed. Chapter 4 will discuss data analysis and the results. Finally, the fifth chapter provides a discussion of the results and explains the theoretical, methodological, and managerial implications. Lastly, limitations and directions for future research and managerial implications will be discussed in fifth chapter.

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