

THE LEVEL OF SELECTED CRM AREAS IN SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES IN CZECH REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

Abstract. This article aims to present selected CRM areas focused on people, their knowledge of CRM, communication with customers and activities in process of CRM in the Czech SMEs. Customer relationship management is not possible without these elements. 736 respondents were addressed. Awareness of CRM increases, the level of contact is changing in favour of a complete evaluation and creation of databases, which favors communication. Differentiated is carrying out tasks to ensure the CRM process. Some activities are carried out regularly, some occasionally. But there are many activities that SMEs do not carry out at all. SMEs prefer personal contact with customers over electronic. The latest research results are, if possible, compared with results from 2005, 2010, or 2012. Hypotheses testing confirmed the relationship between the SME size and CRM awareness in companies, customer contact levels and methods of customer contact. Growing CRM awareness and introducing CRM processes into the business system can make a significant contribution to improving the SME market position.

KEY WORDS

CRM knowledge, level of contact, CRM processes, communication with customer.

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Introduction

SMEs have a specific market position. They represent a competitive element. SMEs create jobs and absorb employees who were dismissed from large companies (Wágnerová et al. 2003: 9). They provide a social stability and freedom of entrepreneurship. They help to reduce the negative consequences of structural changes. Small and medium-sized enterprises

quickly adapt to the market demands and changes. Customer relationship management is developing. The level of contacts is constantly improving.

These enterprises do not have easy position on the market, because the current market trends are characterized by continued concentration and the market dominance of large companies and the globalization

on the sides of supply and demand. Can SMEs deal with this situation? Can they still succeed on the market and satisfy their customers to keep them? Strong competition is another feature of globalization. SMEs must respond to this situation, better understand their strategy and their customer relations. The potential of SMEs, not only in retails or services, can be in close relationships that need to be constantly built (Stoklasa et al. 2013). And CRM can contribute to this.

However, proper implementation and operation of CRM is not simple. An important role plays the specific CRM processes, people and communication with customers, and used technology. In the CRM process, the regularity of major marketing activities is important. The level of communication with the customers is related to the overall level of company marketing communication.

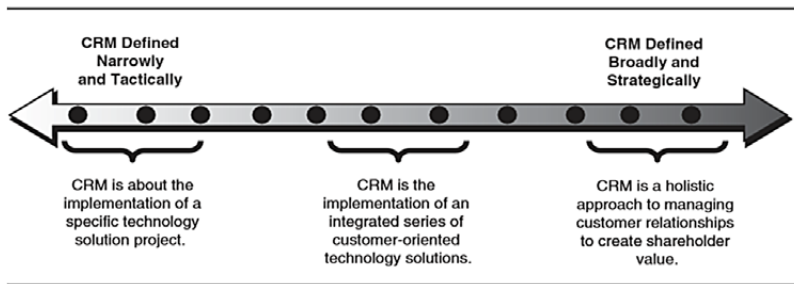
The aim of this article is to present selected problems of CRM focused on people, their knowledge about CRM, communication with customers and activities in the process of CRM in Czech SMEs. The starting point is a brief theoretical review. The latest research results from 2015 have been compared with results from 2005, 2010 or 2012. In conclusion, 3 hypotheses have been tested to evaluate the relationship between the SME size and responses.

organizational and technical factors and data quality. His study confirmed some similarity in problems faced by SMEs. With the gradual development of trade, the development of relationships with existing and potential customers became more important. This development of customer relationships needs to be managed in order to get progressively relevant information about consumers, and that information also needs to be continuously recorded. One of the pioneers of various CRM ideas is Levitt, who emphasizes company focus on fulfilling customer needs and not only on selling their products or services (Levitt 1960). Day and Wensley (1983) expanded on this idea and defined customer relationship management as a system allowing for more detailed information about customers and then the use of this information to customize offers that are better linked to customer needs than the nearby competition. Payne and Frow (2005) summarized the definition of CRM into three aspects (Figure 1): closely and tactically as a concrete implementation of technological solutions; CRM as the introduction of an integrated range of customers; and CRM systems strategically and broadly defined as a comprehensive approach to customer relationship management to create value for shareholders.

1. Literature review

It is generally known that this kind of CRM is mainly used in large companies. These companies possess sufficient resources and expertise to effectively work with the CRM system. However, it is also necessary not to forget SMEs, which are an important part of business. According to Alshawi et al. (2015) there are different results of success of SMEs introducing CRM solutions. The main problem are the

Figure 1. The CRM Continuum



Source: Payne, Frow 2005.

Other marketing experts focused their attention on the fundamental ability of firms that are required to develop and maintain good customer relations (Kohli, Jaworski 1990; Day 1994; Vorhies, Morgan 2005). Therefore, CRM is associated with differentiation of business strategy that allows individual firms to achieve better results (Day, Wensley 1983). In the beginning, CRM was understood only as a software. In one of the first definitions by Kotler and Armstrong related to customer relationship management, it is listed as a special software program and a sophisticated analytical technique used to integrate and use vast amounts of data about individual customers listed in a database (Kotler, Armstrong 2004).

Boulding et al. (2005) stated that CRM is a focus on the customer rather than just building relationships with customers using systems for data collection and analysis, but also includes the integration of all these activities across the company; linking these activities, expansion of integration along the value chain, development and integration of these activities in the entire network of companies that work together to create value for customers and stock values – i.e. bearers of corporate values.

2. CRM processes, people and communication

The literature most often lists 3 to 4 CRM parts. Usually, the parts are strategic, analytical, operational, and collaborative. All of CRM parts are ensured by people that have the necessary technological means, according to the possibilities of a specific company. Among the most needed qualities of people in management process in general, as well as in the CRM, include: rigorous concentration on customer needs, competition, motivation and will, decisiveness, ability to improvise, teamwork and the ability to lead teams (Dohnal 2002). All processes aim at understanding customers and their goal is a satisfied customer. Workers evaluate successful and unsuccessful sales and key customer groups. The basis of good sophisticated CRM system is the correct choice of workers who act on behalf of the company with the customer (Kozák 2011). Kotler and Keller (2013) believe that providing high customer value affects their satisfaction and loyalty. Important is the idea regarding the status of CRM workers in SMEs. SMEs mostly prefer personal contact with customers instead of other communication channels (Čemerková 2016).

The strategic part of CRM is aimed to evaluate the profitability of the customer and define short, medium, and long-term customer goals. If this part is being used well by the company, it can divide its customers into different segments; calculate the income, profits and overall profitability of segments and individual customers, and simulate the future behaviour of customers (Curry, Curry 2000).

Analytical CRM corresponds to the integration and processing of the obtained data and processing them into useful information, important for building relationships with customers and their possible improvements. Analytical part contains the accumulated data on consumers, obtained from processes at the level of operational CRM and other applications. Objectives of the analytical CRM are focused on customer segmentation, their preferences and analysis of their behaviour to support purchasing decisions, preparation and execution of marketing campaigns, recording and evaluation of new relations established with customers and profitability analysis, customer, and financial forecasts (Dohnal 2002; Reicher, Szeghegyi 2015).

Operative part supports the operation of all communication channels within the company that are used for customer contact. In this part, the customer is in direct contact with the CRM system and the people who provide it. Operational CRM mainly supports actual customer contact with employees, led by first-line (front office), and general automation of business processes, including sales of products, services, and marketing. All communication with the customer is tracked and stored in a database, and if necessary, is effectively provided to users, or employees (Dohnal 2002). People build relationships with customers and make contacts with them (Lehtinen 2007). These relationships are part of marketing

communications. The level of communication with the customer is affected by the behaviour of employees who directly represent the company brand. Relationships between staff and customers have a significant impact on positive word of mouth communication. One of the key indicators of employee-customer relationship is trust. Three aspects of human relations gain confidence: a close relationship of employees and customers, personalized employee approach to customer, and care manifested by the employees. Motivated employees, who are constantly trained and motivated for personal development, have significant positive impact on the overall functioning of the CRM system.

Another part of CRM is known as collaborative CRM and is very closely linked to the operational part. Collaborative part uses the services and infrastructure and creates relationships between businesses, employees, and customers (Payne 2007). This collaboration improves cooperation with suppliers, partners, and customers, with the aim to improve processes and meet customer needs. Collaborative CRM extends the communication with clients via all marketing channels (Heteyi 2004).

3. Research methods

The research was conducted mostly on the Moravian-Silesian Region in 2015 via questionnaire. Students of OPF Karvina collaborated on the primary research stage of collecting information. The choice of a sample used was a random choice. We have gathered answers from 736 respondents. However, for some questions, the sample was lower, because not everyone answered all the questions. Most were micro-enterprises with 301 (40.9%), small businesses with 230 (31.3%), medium with 201 (27.9%). Service enterprises dominated in our sample (51.0%), second were

trade companies (28.8%), and the smallest share was represented by manufacturing companies.

The structure of the questionnaire had a wider scope than the thematic orientation of this article. According to the content focus of the article, we have selected essential respondents' answers concerning the people's awareness in companies on CRM, customer contact, activity in the process to ensure CRM, the most important component of collaborative CRM in customer communication.

To evaluate research results, we have applied descriptive and causal research. Individual issues were assessed using both absolute and relative frequencies, hypotheses were formulated, and dependencies and connections between phenomena were sought. For statistical calculations, we have used MS Excel and IBM SPSS. Where possible, our latest research results were compared with our previous research from 2005, 2010, and 2012. The three research hypotheses were formulated about the size category of companies. These hypotheses are related to the latest research.

Null hypotheses:

H_{01} – There is no dependency between the size of enterprises and awareness of people in companies on CRM.

H_{02} – There is no dependency between the size of enterprise and the level of contact with customers.

H_{03} – There is no dependency between the size of enterprise and the used ways of contact with customers in collaborative part of CRM.

This hypothesis H_{01} has been tested by logistic regression method. The aim of the analysis that uses the regression method is to find the best and the most economical and the meaningful model, which describes the relationship among

the dependent variable and the group of independent (explanatory) variables. If the dependent variable is continuous, the regression is linear, if it is not continuous, then the logistic regression is used. The method of logistic regression has been used regarding to character of the variables. The logistic regression can be used to describe the relationship among several independent variables and a dichotomous dependent variable (Kleinbaum, Klein, 2010). Independent variables will be the size categories of SMEs and dependent dichotomous variables will be a categorical response yes/no for CRM knowledge.

To evaluate hypotheses (H_{02} , H_{03}) and to assess dependency of one of the characteristics on the second one, chi-square test was applied, which is based on the difference between the empirical (observed) and theoretical (expected) frequencies (Wonnacot, Wonnacot, 1998).

In the following chapter, research results and verification of hypotheses will be presented.

4. Research results and discussion

4.1. Awareness of people in companies on CRM

The questionnaire survey was addressed primarily to owners of SMEs and competent executives. Awareness (resp. knowledge of CRM) was in 2015 in SMEs relatively high (73.0%), although the proportion of those who did not know the term was not negligible (26.5%). Some of the respondents have not understood the CRM abbreviation. The questioners had to explain the essence of it. Then the respondents found out that they perform many CRM activities. In Table 1, one can see the overall results for the whole sample of SMEs.

Table 1. Knowledge of CRM (2015)

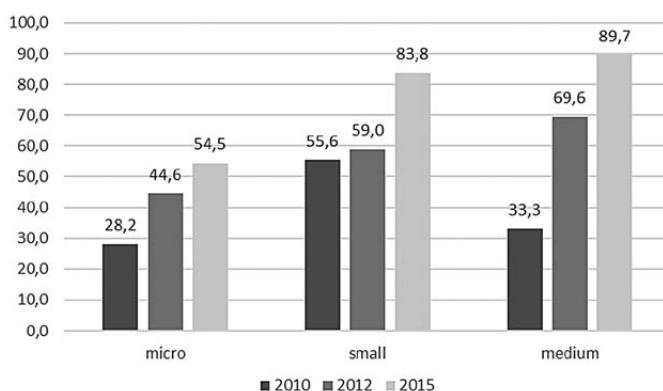
Character of answer	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency (in %)
Yes	537	73.0
No	195	26.5
Without answer	4	0.5
Σ	736	100

Source: Own elaboration.

In 2010 and 2012, there was a similar research conducted at our department (Stoklasa et al. 2013). When asked what respondent's knowledge of CRM is, only 39% responded positively in 2010. In 2012, it was 52.4%. We consider it a very positive trend that over the past 5 years this number has grown significantly, which may be indicative of understanding of small and

medium-sized companies, how important is the relationship with the customer for their competitiveness and stability in the market. This growing trend is evident for all size categories of SMEs. With the exception of 2010, the following phenomenon emerged – the larger the enterprise, the higher the share of knowledge (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Comparison of the level of CRM knowledge in 2010, 2012 and 2015, according to size category



Source: Own elaboration.

4.2. The level of contact in CRM

The level of contact with customers contributes to the overall marketing communication with them. Contact method, its human and technological ensuring suggests how relationships with customers are built, and whether is contacting done systematically or randomly (Table 2). The largest proportion of responses was recorded for a complete evaluation and creation of a database (D), which represents almost 30% of respondents. The second was recording contacting each customer (B, 26.1%), third

was centralized monitoring of customer (C) feedback within one department (24.3%). If we were interested in the answers according to the type of SME, one would expect that a complete assessment will usually involve medium-sized enterprises, it was true for 50.2% of respondents. What is surprising is the recording of customer feedback because the largest proportion reported are microenterprises (31.9%), although we can observe most irregularities and randomness in their activities.

Table 2. Contacting customers (2015)

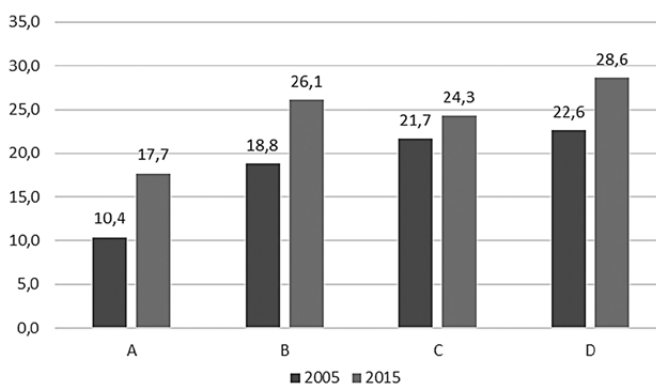
Character of contact	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency (in %)
A: Contact with customer is random, previous contacts are not recorded	130	17.7
B: Contacts are recorded by everyone for themselves	192	26.1
C: Contacts are recorded through centralized feedback within one department	179	24.3
D: Contacts are recorded through complete evaluation and creation of database	211	28.6
Through surveys	17	2.3
Other	7	1.0
Σ	736	100

Source: Own elaboration.

The results of the current research can be compared with the research that has been conducted by our department 10 years ago (2005). As a positive development, we perceive the increasing trend in the contact records (B, +7.2 pp), identifying customer response (C, +2.6 pp) and a complete evaluation and creation of a database (D, +6.0 pp). However, increased

randomness in the records of customers (A, + 7.3 pp), which is not a positive phenomenon. In 2005, however, it has not been determined which types of SMEs are most concerned (Starzychná et al. 2007). On the chart in Figure 2, we can see the comparison between 2005 and 2015. Comparison by SME size category is not available.

Figure 2. Comparison of the level of customer contacts in 2005 and 2015



Source: Own elaboration.

4.3. The activities of people in the process to ensure CRM

People provide in the CRM process many operational activities, which are the basis for the level of customer relationship management, as well as for successful and well-targeted marketing communications. Generally, it can be said that many

activities are in small and medium-sized companies performed irregularly and occasionally (see Table 3). Most regularly carried out by SMEs is searching for potential customers (49.3%). The second position belongs to creation of single central cus-

tomers database (44.6%). Third place is the research of customer satisfaction (42.0%), mostly reported by medium-sized businesses.

Many activities SMEs perform occasionally. This most concerns the customer loyalty, the segmentation and differentiation of customers according to their value for the company. Approaches to the customer differentiation can be different on the B2B and B2C markets, as suggests the study by Lošťáková et al. (2009: 33). On B2B markets the primary criterion is the customer value. On B2C markets the companies do not perform the customer value surveys. They assess the customers according to other criteria (e.g. prices, discounts, or different payment terms).

SMEs usually don't have established contact centres, so the fact that 59.5% do not provide information to these centres is not surprising. Unprocessed access to CRM for SMEs confirms the absence of activities related to e.g. the management of customer database (31.2%) or registering of new opportunities and assigning to activities (27.1%). The lowest proportions of absence have occurred in the search of potential customers (10.5%), and satisfaction research (16.2%). Unsophisticated approach to CRM for SMEs is confirmed by other irregularities. The complete absence of some activities leads to reflection on the causes of the departure of some companies out of the market and their instability.

Table 3. The activities of process ensuring CRM (relative frequency in %)

Selected partial activities	regularly	occasionally	never
Customer segmentation	30.2	48.2	21.6
Research of customer satisfaction	42.0	44.1	13.8
Analysis of customer profitability	40.3	33.6	26.1
Evaluation of customer loyalty	25.5	49.1	25.4
Search for potential customers	49.3	40.2	10.5
Management of sales staff expertise	37.4	41.8	20.8
Keeping a single central customer database	44.6	24.2	31.2
Providing information to contact centres	14.7	25.8	59.5
Registration of new opportunities and prioritizing	26.5	46.4	27.1
Differentiation of approach to customers according to their value for the company	26.7	47.4	25.9

Source: Own elaboration.

In similar research carried out in 2005, we have asked almost the same questions. At that time, most SMEs regularly kept single central database (63.9%), were searching for potential customers (54.1%), carried out customer segmentation (49.2%), and researched customer satisfaction (41.0%). Respondents in 2005 showed greater regularity in these selected activities than in 2015, which could be due to a higher proportion of manufacturing firms (B2B market). In 2015, companies from services and

trade were more prevalent. Relationship of CRM and industry would probably deserve more attention in the selection of research activities.

4.4. Collaborative CRM component in communication

This question has not been answered by all respondents. Shares are calculated from the total number of answered questions. As the most important characteristic of a contact, companies consider the per-

sonal contact with the customer, which is certainly interesting in the context of the previous surveyed area, which showed that the employee expertise should from this point of view be given greater regularity. As already mentioned, also the study by Čemerková (2016) confirms that SMEs prefer personal contact with their customers. The preference of personal contact can be influenced by the structure of respondents from the sector's point of view. As has been said, the services prevailed,

with trade second. Both sectors are relatively closely linked with the human factor. Especially services depend on personal contact in their realization.

The preference of personal contact is mainly shown by the micro enterprises (42.2%), followed by small enterprises (33.3%), and finally medium enterprises (24.4%). On the second position placed electronic contact (33.0%). Other methods of contact have received a negligible share of votes (Table 4).

Table 4. Parts of collaborative CRM

Character of contact	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency (in %)
Electronic contact (internet, email)	225	33.0
Contact centres	15	2.3
Telecommunications contact (telephone, fax)	47	6.9
Personal contact	393	57.7
Contact through classic mail	1	0.1
Σ	681	100

Source: Own elaboration.

4.5. Verification of hypotheses

Three statistical hypotheses were formulated:

H_{01} – There is no dependency between the size of enterprises and awareness of people in companies on CRM.

H_{11} – There is dependency between the size of enterprises and awareness of people in companies on CRM.

Table 5 shows an estimation of logistic

regression method for the size category of SMEs. Maximum assurance method estimates the coefficients. It can be seen in the table that knowledge of CRM is dependent on the size category of SMEs. The coefficients are statistically significant because the significance is less than 0.05. We reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

Table 5. Estimation of logistic regression for the size category of SMEs and CRM knowledge

	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold Knowledge of CRM	-0.858	0.215	15.901	1	0.000	-1.280	-0.436
Location The size of SMEs	-1.104	0.128	74.387	1	0.000	-1.355	-0.853

Source: Own elaboration.

H_{02} – There is no dependency between the size of enterprise and the level of contact with customers.

H_{12} – There is dependency between the size of enterprise and the level of contact with customers.

The second hypothesis considers the relationship between the size of SMEs and the level of customer contacts. When applying the test (chi-square), the criterion was calculated (75,365), and the critical value (15,507). It can be stated that at the significance level of 5% H_{02} null hypothesis of independence of the individual characters can be disapproved and we accept the alternative hypothesis H_{12} , which says that there is some relation between the size of SMEs and the level of contact with customers.

H_{03} – There is no dependency between the size of enterprise and the used ways of contact with customers in collaborative part of CRM.

H_{33} – There is dependency between the size of enterprise and the used ways of contact with customers in collaborative part of CRM.

The third hypothesis evaluates the relationship between the size of SMEs and applied methods of customer contact within the collaborative component of CRM. When applying the test (chi-square), the criterion was calculated (19,723), and the critical value (15,507). It can be stated that at the significance level of 5% H_{03} null hypothesis of independence of the individual characters can be disapproved and we accept the alternative hypothesis H_{13} , which says that there is some relation between the size of SMEs and the applied methods of customer contact within the collaborative component of CRM.

Conclusions

Evaluation of selected CRM areas in SMEs in Moravian-Silesian Region has been the aim of primary research. It was about the CRM awareness, communication with customers and selected CRM activities. The results of the latest research in 2015 confirm that the people's awareness of CRM in small and medium enterprises is increasing if we compare it with our previous research. In comparison with the previous research in 2010, only 39% of respondents answered positively, in 2012 it was 52, 4%. This positive trend may carry over into improving customer contacts and consequently the level of communication with them. The largest share of respondents (28, 6%) confirmed the complete customer evaluation and database creation. However, there were respondents who admitted the randomness in customer evidence (+7, 3 pp in 2015).

People play an important role in ensuring the CRM process. The most regular activity was the search for new potential customers (49,3%). Equipped with the necessary technology, they also carry out a series of operational analytical activities. Here, the results in terms of trend did not evolve clearly positively, but it must be said that the samples were different, which could have an effect on the differences in the regularity of selected CRM activities. Important position of people in SMEs in the CRM process is confirmed by the popularity of personal contact with customers (57,7 %), which even today with globally interconnected computer networks surpassed electronic contact.

Thoughtful communication and personal contact with customers can be a competitive advantage for small and medium-sized enterprises. If SMEs want to use the CRM as a competitive advantage, they have to build the long-term relationship with customers. Verification of statistical hypothe-

ses has shown us that there is some relation between the size of SMEs and knowledge of CRM, the level of contact and applied methods of customer contact, which was also indicated by the relative frequencies of respondents' answers.

In communication, important role is played by person. Employees make a significant contribution to customer satisfaction and loyalty as confirm the studies by Long et al. (2013). SMEs can have closer relationship with their customers. It is their competitive advantage which they should use for developing and improving their market position. Growing awareness of CRM and implementation of CRM process into the company system can make a significant contribution.

We have been researching CRM for a long time. The selected questions dealt with in this article are just a part of the whole customer relationship management. Not all CRM areas are covered. Over the past few years since the first research, there has been a significant positive shift. Still, there are areas unchecked. e. g. barriers to the CRM development in term of technology. The Alshawi's study has confirmed some similarities to the problems faced by SMEs. The study's author points out, among other things, technical factors. In the future, we intend to explore this area. Technology is the driving force behind business development in general. It is important to assess how it is in managing customer relationships in SMEs. The respondents in our sample presented personal contacts with customers. However, technology can be used in other CRM activities.

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