The connections between B2B marketing processes and IT solutions: two case studies on the application of CRM in industrial companies

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Abstract

This paper discusses the connections between B2B marketing processes, on the one hand, and IT solutions such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM), on the other hand. The paper addresses two main research questions: (1) how are *CRM's IT solutions* connected to the *B2B marketing processes* they are expected to support? and (2) which *possibilities* and *barriers* emerge while IT solutions are connected to B2B marketing processes within a specific organizational context? In order to address this dual purpose we conducted two in-depth longitudinal case studies over two small-medium sized Italian companies operating in industrial markets, the Loccioni Group and Elitron, who introduced in the last decade new or upgraded CRM systems. Our analytical framework, specifying a set of B2B marketing processes (and sub-processes), is applied systematically to the two cases in search of which sub-processes are indeed supported and which are not. While the opportunities and use patterns of CRM systems clearly differ in the two companies, we identify barriers, some of which are common in the two cases, and relate to IT (data quality and analytical power of the software), individual user (perception of being monitored and preference for human interaction with customers), organizational (information flows between different departments), and inter-organizational issues (customer relationship types and dependence on external partners for key customer information).

Keywords: *CRM, B2B, marketing processes, IT systems, intra-organizational, inter-organizational connections, barriers.*

1. Introduction

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) refers to both a managerial philosophy and a set of technical solutions which has gained widespread diffusion in the last 20 years (Perna & Baraldi, 2014). CRM is a broad concept embracing, according to the most used definitions, the three key elements of strategies, processes and IT solutions (cf. Hedman & Kalling, 2002; Zablah et al. 2004; Payne & Frow, 2005). This paper focuses specifically on the *connections* between these *IT* systems (i.e., databases and software solutions) and the marketing and sales *processes* of the organization introducing CRM. While CRM systems are expected to support and improve key organizational processes in such areas as lead/prospect generation, sales management, customer relationship development, after sales and complaint management, there are also a series of challenges to implementing CRM ranging from organizational and cultural inertia to employees' motivation and monitoring (Zuboff, 1988; Dewett & Jones, 2001; Perna & Baraldi, 2014). Therefore, the many potential benefits of CRM constantly face a range of challenges and obstacles to implementing such technical solutions in a given organizational context. As for the empirical context where CRM has been investigated, Gummesson (2004) points that CRM studies have been focusing mostly on B2C contexts.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to identify (1) how *CRM's IT solutions* are connected to the *B2B marketing processes* they are expected to support; and (2) which *possibilities* and *barriers* emerge while IT solutions are connected to B2B marketing processes within a specific organizational context. In order to address this dual purpose we conducted two in-depth longitudinal case studies on two small-medium sized Italian companies operating in industrial markets, the Loccioni Group and Elitron, who introduced in the last decade new or upgraded CRM systems. Our analytical framework is inspired both by the organization and IT literature (e.g., Yates et al., 1999; Dewett & Jones, 2001) and by the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) literature (e.g., Håkansson & Snehota, 1995; Håkansson & Ford, 2002). In connecting IT and marketing processes, our discussion identifies both strictly *intra*-organizational issues such as internal communication processes, data management routines, CRM implementation teams, and employees' motivation, experience and competence, on the one hand, and broader *inter*-organizational issues, such as customer types, sales cycles, interfaces with customers, nature and duration of customer relationships, on the other hand. Each of these connections entails in turn both opportunities and challenges.

The paper is organized as follows: section 2 provides a theoretical background, followed in section 3 by our methodology. Then, section 4 and 5 feature the case studies respectively of the Loccioni group and Elitron. The two cases are analyzed in section 6, preparing for our conclusions in section 7.

2. Theoretical background

This section of the paper is organized into three subsections. The first introduces and presents relevant B2B marketing processes and offers an overview on customer relationships as conceived by the IMP perspective. In the second part we describe CRM systems as IT solutions and focus on their architecture. The final subsection provides a theoretical discussion concerning the *connections* between CRM and B2B marketing processes.

2.1 B2B marketing processes and customer relationships

B2B marketing processes have been identified over the last decades as critical in order to let companies become aware about the opportunities of doing business in complex industrial markets. However, one acknowledged problem relates to the lack of a common conceptualization about what the marketing process is because there is no single, commonly accepted, definition of what marketing is (Mroz, 1998).

At an overall level, B2B marketing processes are aimed at creating and delivering value to organizational customers according to Anderson and Narus (2004). These authors develop a framework defined "market sensing" whose main purpose is to help marketers analyze their markets relying on knowledge of the market context. In this respect, four processes are identified: market definition, competition analysis, assessing customer value (i.e., realizing the value of a customer for the supplier) and gaining customer feedback.

Evans and Laskin (1994) identify a set of marketing processes aimed at engaging with customers within the B2B arena: understanding customers' expectations and needs, building service partnerships, empowering employees and focusing on total quality management. According to Romer and Van Doren (1993) marketing processes might be considered to be a "framework" which should lead the company to implement a successful strategic plan oriented to satisfy the market needs. In a similar vein Sanchez (1999: 92) stress that "*the marketing process is a set of activities through which organizations identify and exploit opportunities to serve consumer needs*". This definition entails a

wide set of activities which connect marketing and product development both in B2C and B2B contexts. Grönroos (2009) developed the concept of customer management processes, which are related to the creation of value as being the focus and the concern for marketers. In this perspective, companies should be prepared and organized in order to make promises as well as keep promises to meet customer expectations.

An attempt of giving to the marketing processes an "identity" of their own is found in Mroz (1998), who develops the Synchronous Marketing Model. This ambitious model divides marketing processes into two main categories: Marketing operations (e.g., understanding market, customers, competition, products) and Marketing Planning (e.g., developing strategy, formulating plans and implementing them at top management level). The idea is to identify and combine sub-areas and activities about marketing to deliver to managers practical tools helping for planning the marketing strategy.

Marketing processes are also linked to sales management activities, such as the customer management process that encompasses a multitude of marketing activities (from the management of the first customer contact up to the customer support, which follows the sales of products). In a recent article Piercy (2010) indicates that sales functions should be intertwined with business marketing processes in order to enhance the capability of managing customer portfolio. One critical task is to manage the identification process of innovation opportunities as well as the task of building partnerships with strategic actors.

One of the seminal works on marketing processes is Srivastava et al. (1999), who develop a framework that focuses on three main processes: supply chain management, product development management and customer relationship management. The latter process entails several sub-processes such as identification of potential new customers, understanding of customer needs, development of advertising, promotion and service programs, collection of information concerning customers' technology, activities for enhancing customer loyalty.

How to manage *customer relationships* has been attracting the interest of researchers since a very long time. Differently from the relationship marketing perspective (Brodie et al., 1997), which highlights the role of the supplier in managing the customer relationship, within the IMP tradition a core aspect emerging from decades of empirical studies is that customer relationships are complex and bilateral because the interdependencies among customers and suppliers generate the need of continuous adaptations between the two parties (Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Accordingly, a customer relationship is always a matter of dealing with mutual interactions. Ford et al. (2011) identify several factors shaping this complexity, such as the level of mutual dependence between customer and supplier, the type of products and services exchanged, the product development process carried out in cooperation, the intensity of contacts and the costs related not only to the exchanges but also to mutual adaptations.

Another relevant aspect of customer relationships concerns its dynamic pattern. IMP researchers, starting from the seminal work of Ford (1980) proposing a "business relationship life cycle", have approached the study of customer relationships considering its beginning, development and termination phases. Over the entire development stage, the level of involvement of the two parties is continuously shaped by a combination of factors at different analytical levels – people, activities and resources – which are not under the full control by one single party (Perna and Baraldi, 2014). Due to their complexity and dynamics, customer relationships always open up intriguing questions such as if and how they can be evaluated and managed by one single party.

There are several intertwined factors which affect the evaluation and management of customer relationships. Ford et al. (1998) point out as main dimensions the relationship history and current status, the relationship atmosphere based on the level of trust and commitment between the parties, the current operations and the network position of the parties. Moreover, Naudé and Buttle (2000) show that the quality of customer relationships depends on several factors such as the level of trust, of profit (including the assessment of the value of a customer), and the mutual integration of needs. Concerning how to manage customer relationships, many issues arise because it is a complex task. Ford et al. (2006) start their analysis by looking at the interaction among customers and suppliers. These authors reach interesting conclusions by considering key tasks that have to be completed by suppliers after completing the assessment of customer relationships: managing distance, interdependencies, power, conflicts and communication.

Based on the above insights from the marketing literature, we now categorize on Table 1 the various B2B marketing processes, including a series of sub-processes clustering around customer relationship management. According to Table 1 a first marketing step concerns understanding markets and customers in general terms (see "Understanding, identifying and defining the market"), moving then to the "Definition and implementation of marketing programs". These first two major marketing processes happen before focusing on a specific customer, which becomes the object of the following processes starting from the "Creation, development and management of customer relationships". Achieving such relationships needs firstly "Developing sales programs" and subsequently "Developing service and post-sales programs".

B2B marketing process	Sub-process
Understanding, identifying and defining the market	Market opportunity recognition
	Identifying new potential customers
	Understanding customers' needs
	Competition analysis
Definition and implementation of marketing programs	Developing marketing plan
	Implementing marketing plan
Creation, development and management of customer relationships	Contact management (beginning)
	Key account management (development)
	Assessing customer value (management)
	Enhancing trust
	Gaining customer feedback
-Developing sales programs	Customer order management process
	Cross-selling and upselling programs
-Developing service and post-sales programs	Building service partnership
	Complaint management
	Organizing service activities
	Organizing post-sales activities

Table 1: Key B2B marketing processes and sub-processes

2.2 CRM systems architecture: a brief review

There is a vast amount of literature concerning CRM. Many works from the Information Technology (IT), sales and marketing perspectives have been published over the last 25 years. One of the most cited articles is Zablah, Bellenger and Johnston (2004). These authors carry out an exhaustive literature review and argue that CRM is an ongoing "process" aimed at creating market intelligence in order to develop and maintain profitable customer relationships. However, researchers are still far

from agreeing on a common definition on CRM, much because it involves several elements such as IT systems, users, and intra- and inter-organizational dynamics, among which the marketing processes reviewed in the previous section.

Within the CRM area, there is a paucity of definitions and studies conducted within B2B contexts. Addressing this gap, Baraldi, La Rocca and Perna (2013) develop a definition of CRM in industrial contexts embracing three major components namely *people*, *technology* and *organization*. Adopting a resource interaction perspective (Håkansson and Waluszewski, 2002; Baraldi, Gressetvold and Harrison, 2012), these authors define CRM systems in B2B contexts as "a device" that by interacting with people, who insert data and receive back processed information, can support the management of customer relationships. This conceptualization allows understanding the complex mechanisms which stem from CRM implementation, a complexity related to the unavoidable, unpredictable and blurred interactions which happen between individual users, the technology and the organization where the system is embedded.

Since the overall purpose of this paper is to shed light on the connections between B2B marketing processes and CRM, the above definition of CRM is suitable in order to show that the CRM architecture affects the management of complex marketing processes.

CRM architecture is usually recognized to be a complex IT system composed by several elements. Focusing on the IT dimension of CRM, Bose (2002) points out that its architecture is based on databases, business intelligence systems (e.g., data warehousing), websites, intranet, extranet and phone support systems. The META GROUP (2001) divides the CRM architecture into "operational", "collaborative" and "analytical" systems. Operational CRM identifies "business processes and technologies" adopted in order to enhance the day-to-day customer-facing operations. Collaborative CRM is based on the technologies, such as e-mail and Web which allow the company to interact with customers. Analytical CRM entails specific technologies like business intelligence software that facilitate the analysis of customer information in order to make decisions concerning their management.

From a technical point of view CRM integrates different data repository spread over the firm. Different databases placed in different company's departments are connected to each other in order to supply users with data and information regarding several perspectives of the customer (e.g., financial, marketing, sales, etc.). Usually, CRM elaborates such information and gives to the user a more organized "customer profile" with the goal of suggesting how to manage it. A key and challenging point is the extent to which the chosen CRM architecture (i.e., the technical side of CRM) *mirrors* the marketing processes that are supposed to be supported by CRM.

2.3 The connections between CRM and B2B marketing process

CRM is expected to facilitate the performance, but also the development of key B2B marketing processes. The extent to which CRM connects and supports such processes depends, even before the CRM will start being used, on the *implementation* process of the system inside the company. CRM implementation is recognized to be a very demanding phase (Bull, 2003; Perna and Baraldi, 2014), mostly because while an explicit plan is usually advocated to create a fit (or alignment) between IT and organization, this coordination of the technology with organizational aspects stumbles into hardly controllable issues such as people's willingness to adopt IT (Boulding et al., 2005).

In this respect, an important research theme is the analysis of the *factors* which influence CRM implementation. A central place among the identified factors is taken by *intra-organizational*

dimensions of CRM. Among these internal factors Alshawi et al. (2011) identify as critical dimensions of CRM implementation strictly organizational factors (e.g., ICT skills, governance, benefits, business objectives), technical factors (e.g., IT infrastructure, integration of different software, complexity), and data quality factors (e.g., quality of customer data, customer data sources, customer data overall infrastructure). Kotorov (2003) points out the *integration* between different business processes, often performed by different organizational units, as one of the most sensitive issues to deal with during CRM implementation. In this regard, the different interpretation of customer information within the company's departments could create severe barriers in order to collect and store such data in the CRM system.

Users' characteristics also have a strong influence on CRM implementation. For instance, the users' age and willingness to adopt IT affect CRM implementation, utilization and following effects (Perna and Baraldi, 2014). Other user-related factors include the varying attitude of users to accept to share and spread customer information. The perceived risk of losing the control of the customer relationship derived from information sharing can create tensions among salesmen, which can create barriers and resistance to adopting the system (Homburg et al., 2000).

Among intra-organizational factors, the interface between marketing and IT departments has also shown to affect the alignment between CRM and sales/marketing processes (Ryals and Knox, 2001). Companies where these departments do not share a common view concerning CRM (e.g., how to manage customer information flows) often suffer big delays in CRM implementation. Also the interface between marketing and sales department can affect the overall result of a CRM project. Ahearne et al. (2012) claim that sales departments, represented by sales people, should be involved over the entire process of CRM implementation since they carry out important business processes such as identification of prospects, up-selling, cross-selling, which all need to be supported by the CRM system.

A last set of internal factors considered as having an impact on CRM implementation are linked to the use of this system for monitoring and controlling the work performance of the system users (Zuboff, 1988). For instance, if CRM is adopted with the main purpose of controlling sales performances, the successful use of CRM strongly depends on the broader organizational and social context (Li and Mao, 2012) where CRM is embedded. For instance, Li and Mao (2012) have been following the implementation of CRM in a high tech start-up company where the need for using IT systems in order to organize relevant business processes was urgent. The authors clearly show how the users became ready to use CRM as "suggested" by the management only after having understood the real benefits of the system. The negative perception of being controlled by CRM over time was reduced by the increasing awareness that CRM might play the role of a "fellow" along the adoption process. On the contrary, when CRM is implemented with the purpose of controlling results within large and established organizations the resistance level by sales personnel can be very high.

The other group of factors which affect the connection between CRM and marketing processes belong to the *inter-organizational dimensions of CRM*. According to our definition of CRM, it is expected to allow a better management of customer relationships by providing users structured and effective customer information. However, achieving these inter-organizational effects of CRM, visible in terms of customer satisfaction, increased volumes and general relationship development, the history and complexity of a business relationship play an important role (Baraldi et al., 2013; Perna and Baraldi, 2014). For instance, old and complex customer relationships with a large amount of legacy data or tacit knowledge held by key account managers are more difficult to manage via a brand new CRM system (Ibid). Moreover, to produce inter-organizational effects and influence or improve customer

relationships CRM need first to be well embedded within the organization applying it by means of user commitment and acceptance of the new routines entailed by the CRM system. Much of the level of commitment and acceptance towards the system derives from the CRM implementation process, which in turns will influence how marketing processes can be integrated with each other and within the system.

3. A note on methodology

This paper is based on two explorative and longitudinal case studies. The two main reasons for choosing case studies as research strategy are: (1) in the B2B marketing context, a case study can provide effective insights into the nature and especially the context of the phenomena observed (Easton, 2010); (2) case research enables to generate and test theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

The two case studies – Loccioni and Elitron – have been selected due to the high learning potential they offer in relation to our research purpose (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). The two companies have been selected because they both operate in the B2B context as SMEs and have recently installed CRM systems, which make them comparable, but their marketing processes and structures substantial differ (e.g., direct sales Vs indirect sales). Therefore, comparing these two cases can offer interesting insights on the investigated phenomenon – CRM and its connections to B2B marketing processes.

Another reason for selecting these two case studies is the richness of data, especially about the context, that could be obtained: in fact the authors have been working at Loccioni and Elitron during the entire CRM implementation process. This situation has given a considerable advantage in order to carry out the data collection at intra- and inter- organizational levels. The active participation of the researchers in the organizations being observed corresponds to an action research strategy (Coughlan & Coghlan, 2002), which has been complemented by the use of multiple data sources: face-to-face interviews, participant observations and secondary data. Most of the interviews were recorded, transcribed and jointly analyzed by the researchers, using a protocol of content analysis preliminarily shared among the authors, in order to deduct a "meaning of the meanings". Table 2 provides details of our sources of data.

	Loccioni	Elitron
Data collection time-frame	2006-ongoing	2008-ongoing
Number of interviews (face-to-face, phone)	35	12
Participant observation	About 30	10 months (about 40 hours)
Seconday data	Written documents (internal reports, charts and informant notes); visual data (computer snapshots and photos); websites	Written documents (internal reports and informant notes); websites

Table 2: Data sources for the Loccioni and Elitron cases

Several versions of the featured case studies have been written before the current ones and applying different theoretical frames. In this way we adopted a "systematic combining" approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) leading to developing the theoretical framework together with the final version of the

cases. Moreover, in order to address our overall purpose, the cases have been compared in search of commonality and differences in terms of (1) key marketing processes, (2) support by CRM or lack thereof, (3) opportunities and barriers in using CRM. The analysis of the empirical data has been performed by applying systematically our framework which deals with how CRM can be connected to relevant marketing B2B processes (see Table 1 as applied in Table 4): here, for scoring the level of importance for each company of the selected marketing processes, we employed a joint grading system based on the three levels of "important", "very important" and "pivotal".

4. CRM at Loccioni

Loccioni Group (Loccioni) is an Italian company with about 400 employees, headquartered in Angeli Di Rosora (Italy), and with subsidiary in Moie (Italy), Washington, DC (USA), Stuttgart (Germany), and Shanghai (China). Loccioni's 2014 turnover was about Euro 70M; the company spends more than 5% of its turnover for "research for innovation" activities and for its five R&D laboratories.

Loccioni's main business idea is research, design and development of innovative measurement and industrial control solutions to improve the quality, efficiency, and sustainability of products, processes and buildings. The company integrates several technologies and components, both internally developed and coming from external suppliers, with the goal of delivering to customers "tailored" solutions within eight business units: five are established businesses – industry, mobility, environment, energy and healthcare, and three are under development – train & transport, electronics & electric motors and food. Loccioni's customer portfolio includes mostly large companies such as Whirlpool, Haier, FCA (FIAT-Chrysler Corporation), Samsung, Continental, Bosch, BMW, etc.

4.1 Sales and marketing organization at Loccioni

Loccioni has always been selling its solutions directly to customers, without involving agents or distributors over the sales process due to the complexity of delivered solutions. In the beginning of 90s the sales function was re-organized, from a structure managed centrally by a sales director to empowering more as set of key account managers (KAMs). According to the company President every key customer relationship had to be managed by a KAM with specific technical as well as business capabilities: according to Loccioni's HR managers, the ideal KAM must have technical background and experience in project management since she has to sell complex products and solutions. There is usually a strategic sales manager (SSM) for a business unit (BU) who coordinates KAMs; they all have to reach the budget that is assigned to the BU. Therefore, the sales structure at Loccioni is "integrated" within each business unit. Moreover, there are many interactions between KAMs, project managers (PM), R&D people and the marketing office.

For instance, KAMs have to collaborate intensively with PMs which are responsible for the economic and technical proposals. In turn, PMs collaborate with engineers and software developers to fulfill the proposals. There is also a service manager which is responsible for post-sales service activities. KAMs' interfaces are also strong with R&D personnel whose main goals are testing new ideas or competencies related to the business unit. Today, there are about ten KAMs who supervise about 20 sales people.

The marketing division at Loccioni has been established in 1996 and only two people (the Director and her assistant) were responsible for such activities as market research, industrial exhibitions and communication. At that time marketing was not recognized as an autonomous unit; it was more like a

support to the sales department providing it with structured information concerning markets and customers. There was not a clear long-term marketing strategy, but most activities were suggested ad hoc by the top management. Things changed in 2005 when the company decided to upgrade its marketing operations by starting up a formal division called "Marketing Lab". This division was setup in close cooperation with nearby Polytechnic University of Marche, Division of Management, which was involved by the company's CEO Mr. Libenzi. This cooperation entailed a three-year project with the specific goal of "supporting Loccioni in the creation and management of strategic marketing initiatives and specific tools. The new division was composed by fresh graduate students managed by the two historical marketing managers of the company.

The Marketing Lab is divided into two groups: the first carries out strategic initiatives (e.g., how to develop new businesses, monitoring customer needs) by interacting with the top management; while the second group is responsible for the implementation of the "marketing and business development" strategy, that is, activities at tactical level such as market research and marketing campaigns. To sum up, the activities carried out by the marketing unit at Loccioni are (1) corporate communication initiatives for the launch of new products; (2) market screening to identify new sales opportunities; (3) prospect analysis; (4) first customer contact management.

As stated above, the marketing unit operates in close connection to top management, the sales department and R&D division. Therefore, marketers have to interact closely with several internal stakeholders in order to share ideas, collect information and then implement the marketing strategy with the rest of the company. One critical issue that the marketing unit had to solve was to "connect" its several activities and processes to the rest of the organization as well as to customers.

4.2 The urgency of a CRM strategy

When the Marketing Lab was set in 2005 Loccioni had a clear idea to further develop its old "marketing database" in an attempt to go toward the implementation and launch of CRM software. This was considered as one of the most important and challenging projects for three reasons: it was inspired by Loccioni's President after he realized that its competitors had in the pipeline CRM projects; the company, lacking any previous CRM experience, had only very positive expectations about the usefulness of CRM; no one, except for the "external" universities researchers engaged in the Marketing Lab, was aware about how to build the system.

Thus, the CRM project was something new for the company. The main CRM goals were: (1) combining all the customer information coming from different sources into one single database; (2) supporting the sales function activities by providing "suitable and updated" customer information; (3) speeding up processes such as reporting and sharing relevant customer information within the organization. Once the CRM goals had been discussed, a CRM project team was created, including eight people: two researchers from the University, Loccioni's CEO and five employees from the IT, marketing, and accounting departments. Strangely enough, no person from the sales department was involved, but the CEO motivated this choice by assuming that all the important inputs for creating and implementing the system would be available from the aforementioned CRM team.

The choice between buying off-the-shelf CRM software or developing it internally fell on internal development. In fact Loccioni had an internal unit, named TLC (Telecommunication and Control), which developed in-house software for managing production and logistics processes. That unit also sold to customers ERP modules developed by large IT companies such as Cisco. Therefore, the CRM

project team decided to ask the TLC division to develop a fully tailored CRM system; hence another strong organizational interface emerged and the number of people involved increased up to ten people.

4.2.1 CRM implementation

The CRM implementation at Loccioni was a demanding process, taking more than one year until the launch of the software in 2008. This process was divided into three major phases: *configuration*, *testing* and *training*. During the *configuration* phase the most important task was to connect the CRM system to all the other software (e.g. ERP, Intranet) containing relevant pieces of customer information. Moreover, the project team had to develop user-oriented modules which could allow users to interact with the system. Loccioni's CRM included six modules:

- "customer manager": sales processes were connected to this module. The user could retrieve here useful information about the customer (investments made, customer's market share) and register the interaction with customers (phone calls, e-mails, visits to customers' premises, etc.);

- "communication activities": this module allowed users to get an overview concerning marketing and communication activities for developing public relations. For instance, it was possible to create and manage invitation lists in order to get customers involved in ad-hoc initiatives such as seminars and workshops;

- "administrative module": this section was aimed at checking specific customer information concerning invoices, payment processes, financial characteristics of customers;

- "production module": here the CRM let the users know about the working process of each job order of each customer. Also Loccioni's business unit named "service", dealing with post-sales activities, was to use extensively this module to forecast maintenance activities;

- "after sales and service module": the users could gain via this module important information such as all customer feedback. And this information could help marketing and KAMs to adjust their offerings in order to improve the level of service and to anticipate customer needs (e.g., cross-selling);

- "Reports": information enclosed in the various modules could be retrieved in this module and represented in charts or diagrams. Also customized reports could be produced (e.g., calendar and task reports, contacts report, etc.)

Once the configuration terminated, the CRM project team started to test the software in order to identify potential problems. Significant feedback from the users was collected and the most relevant indications concerning how to improve the system were implemented (e.g., modifications to the graphic user interface).

The third step regarded organizing in-depth training sessions. The point was to teach how to use the CRM system and most importantly to show which benefits the users could gain by adopting the system. Between March and May 2008 Loccioni's marketing manager organized and managed about 20 hours of training that involved more than 80 employees from the marketing, sales, administration and R&D departments. One week after the end of these sessions the project team launched the CRM system. A kick-off meeting was organized at Loccioni's headquarter where most users – including the company's management – took part: CRM was officially born at Loccioni.

4.2.2 The different using patterns of CRM at Loccioni

The project team seemed rather satisfied with the very implementation of the CRM system, even if it took about 1,5 years. On the other hand, they were worried about the results in terms of adoption and use of it. The general impression, after a few months, was that users followed different ways of using the system. Of course, this was not an unexpected result but the project team wanted to realize which interaction took place between users and the CRM tool. In other words, the key questions were: "Who currently uses CRM, when, how and for what purpose?" An internal study led to the answers shown on Table 3, displaying the connections between CRM's data and use by different business units.

Business unit, user group	Types of data and information retrieved	Goal in using the data
Top Management	Total sales volume for a certain period, total sales volume by product group, sales volume for business, sales volume by customer	Controlling sales performances and trends. Comparing sales volume against budget
Administration	Sales records, terms of payments	Understanding existing performances of customers in terms of profits
Sales	Customers profiles, list of customer contacts, customer segmentation, financial customer data, press releases	Develop quotations, cross selling analysis
Marketing	Basic customer details, list of customer contacts, volume of orders and quotations, present orders and history of orders, complaints, customer's customers	Building marketing reports, creating new customers profile, building prospect lists
Communication and PR	E-mail addresses, press releases	Building e-mail marketing campaigns, organizing marketing events
R&D	Customer geography, customer expenditures in R&D activities, customer propensity in new product development investments, service orders	Getting feedback concerning products issues in order to make re-engineering processes
After sales	Service contracts and quotations	Assign repair activities, tracking of repair activities, spare parts management
Production	No data retrieved	None
Distribution and Logistics	No data retrieved	None
ICT	No data retrieved	None

Table 3: Patterns of use of Loccioni CRM. Source: Perna & Baraldi, 2014

The most active users were from the marketing and sales units, but within those departments there were quite important differences. In sales for example, KAMs were interested in identifying potential (future) opportunities in each account, while salespeople used CRM to access budgets and documents regarding the history of contacts.

It emerged also a typical pattern of using CRM by the top management: they were interested mostly in controlling that the specific data concerning *sales* was inputted into the system. It was clear that the most important concern of Top Management was to track sales performances. An issue which would emerge later on as a problem was the fact that both KAMs and Top Management delegated personnel of the marketing department to input customer-specific data, which the former were mostly knowledgeable about, because of lack of time to accomplish this task.

Three departments (Production, ICT and Logistics & Distribution) did not use CRM at all. According to people from those divisions, CRM was useless because all the data and information necessary to carry out their activities were already available from other IT systems.

4.3 Epilogue: barriers and opportunities in adopting CRM

The project team was under extreme pressure in order to understand if CRM would really help the company to improve at least part of its marketing processes. In 2008 the picture was not really positive due to several issues. The first was a *low adoption rate of CRM*: 50% of the users did not find CRM useful and therefore they never used the system. Second, CRM was considered to be *complex to use* because it was not user friendly and technically unstable. Third, the users found *problems in the data quality*. The origins of these problems were: (a) lacking synchronization between CRM and the old marketing database, making users unable to retrieve information they input in the previous system because something went wrong during the "migration" step; (b) frequent mistakes by users when inserting new data jeopardized data quality. In turn those mistakes affected data which were shared among the whole organization. In fact, the KAMs were the CRM users with greatest knowledge about specific customers, but were unwilling or lacked time to input such data into the system. Last but not least, most users perceived CRM as "big brother": they felt constantly *monitored and controlled by CRM* since the system made possible to check exactly which actions were performed by the users.

Due to a generalized negative feeling about CRM, the project team realized it was time to recover the system. With the approval of the top management, this team started a complex work focused on tackling both technical and organizational problems. The technical improvements included improving data quality, adding alert signals, and better integration with other software. More training sessions were also organized in order to increase the users' awareness about CRM.

In the beginning of 2009, the initial skepticism started to decline and users felt more confident in using the system. Several advantages of using the system then showed up: for instance, KAMs started to retrieve data such data as customers' financial performances, sales orders or complaints, and use it for managing their accounts. Salespeople could get information concerning customer relationships' beginning and development, and marketers could plan better the contact management activities. To sum up, the number of users of Loccioni's CRM increased to 70% of all employees. However, there were clear differences in the extent of use of the CRM's full functions for managing specific customer relationships by the KAMs. While KAMs in charge of relationships started after the implementation of CRM made an advanced use of the system, those in charge of established and highly complex customer relationships used CRM simply as a static database (e.g., telephone numbers and historical data). These KAMs in charge of old relationships neither had the time nor the willingness to input in the system all the complex knowledge they had about their customers. Therefore, the type of inter-organizational relationship influenced the pattern of use of CRM by KAMs.

5. CRM at Elitron

Elitron is an Italian company that develops software for project design (CAD) and manufactures industrial cutting machineries (CAM). Giuseppe Gallucci funded Elitron in 1984. At that time, he was already an experienced sales director who had started his career in the leather production industry and then had moved to a start-up involved in producing CAD-CAM systems for footwear production. Today Elitron employs 48 people: 30 working in production and 18 as white collars. The average age of employees is 35 and the total turnover in 2014 was Euro 7.5 million.

The only production plant is located in Monte Urano, central Italy, where Elitron's engineers and technicians conduct internally the entire production process, from the initial design to the final crafting and delivering of products.

Elitron's entire business is built on the idea of digitalizing any "design-to-cut" production process. Several customer industries, such as graphics, packaging, footwear, leather goods and furniture, are interested in using ICT for linking their design department to their production units. In such industries, the production process is divided into three main steps. Once the overall design for a new product is ready (first step), the modeler uses a CAD software to explode the original project into individual components (second step). This set of components becomes the bill of materials and input for the production phase (third step). In this phase, skilled professionals use CAM machineries for nesting and cutting all the components on a material's surface as leather or cardboard, in order to make them ready for assembly.

Over the last 30 years Elitron was successful in surfing the wave of CAD-CAM production for companies using thin materials (up to 120mm) that chose the oscillating blade as cutting technology. Elitron earned the position of key-player involved in the production of hi-tech cutting systems and software design packages for customers interested in high quality solutions for aeronautical, maritime, automotive, gaskets and composites sectors, as well as many new technical materials. Due to this aptitude for finding new applications of its technology, Elitron has been developing several patents that are recognized by the market as cutting-edge solutions. Given this background, today Elitron provides a plethora of solutions which are briefly detailed below.

5.1 Elitron products

CAD Systems

The story of Elitron begins with the development of "ElitronCAD 2D Footwear", an innovative CAD software for footwear design. This was the first software in the industry specifically conceived for being installed and used with the Microsoft Windows operating system. Due to this fact, for several years it was recognized by the market as one of the most usable and complete software, characterized by simple and extremely intuitive interface. The "secret sauce" behind Elitron success is its direct knowledge of the footwear industry, due to the professional experience of Giuseppe Gallucci in the leather industry and the proximity to the Marche's footwear production district. Thus, Elitron was able to successfully deploy a competitive software and to deliver it to a solid customer base just in a decade. Thanks to this experience, the technology behind "ElitronCAD 2D Footwear" was then extended to other production environments, such as leather goods (late 90s), industrial materials (2005), packaging and large format digital printing (2009).

Since the very beginning, and due to the need of linking "ElitronCAD 2D Footwear" to other companies' CAM systems, Elitron CAD software was conceived as an "open system", namely as interfaced with any other CAM system.

Today, Elitron has four different 2D CAD software, one 3D CAD software and one software used for interfacing CAD and CAM systems. After continuous new product developments, now Elitron is focusing on improving performances, usability and portability of its CAD systems: Elitron has heavily invested in this business unit during the startup phase of the company, while today the prevailing attitude is to realize marginal improvements.

CAM Systems

Although the first products delivered by Elitron were CAD, CAM products are actually the main Business Unit in terms of turnover (70% of the total). The CAM system provided by Elitron is basically a big plotter: a plain table, equipped with a "cutting head" that moves on x and y axes in order to cut plain materials along a pre-designed path (the path is designed using CAD). The cutting head is a set of various tools used for several finishes and processes, such as cutting, milling, drawing, engraving and drilling various materials. The working area has a powerful vacuum system that allows keeping the material stuck on the surface while the cutting head is working. A projection system completes the machinery, and lets users nest different shapes on the material that is lying on the plotter surface that must be cut.

The first CAM system delivered by Elitron was used to customers in the footwear industry, especially for leather cutting. Later on, Elitron sold its cutting technology to suppliers to footwear companies, such as manufacturers of leather soles. Therefore, Elitron had to adapt its product to new contexts: first they had to create several versions of the plotter in terms of cutting area, kind of tools available for cutting (laser, mill, knife, etc.) and type of technology used to moving and positioning materials on the table (conveyor, manual, mixed). Since the launch of the first CAD system in 1996, Elitron has introduced a wide range of technologies, addressed to several new markets.

At the same time, Elitron sold a number of different versions of its CAM systems, with the result that nowadays the company is facing big challenges to standardize post-sales operations such as spare parts refilling or remote support. This situation has a major impact on the future development of this company, since it affects the scalability of its marketing process, from opportunity recognition to post-sales activities. In order to address these issues, and before describing the CRM implementation process, we briefly describe the marketing processes at Elitron.

5.2 Inside marketing processes at Elitron

In 2015, Elitron reached a total number of 2.000 CAD and CAM installations in more then 100 countries, with 7 CAM systems produced and sold per month on average, and each sale averaging at Euro 70.000. This result was possible thanks to a complex commercial structure involving several types of business partners, classified with three main variables: 1) Country, 2) Industry and 3) Partner's know-how. This classification and the partners' role in Elitron's marketing process are related to the whole sales approach and clients support service applied by the company on the market.

Even if Elitron sells its products worldwide, it choose not to operate directly abroad, but to create strategic relationships with local partners who, according to an internal classification, act on behalf of Elitron by managing activities on three different levels of complexity: a) leads generation, b) customer acquisition, c) post-sales support. Regardless of the number and type of processes managed by each local partner, its identity is clearly distinct from the Elitron's, in terms of end-customer perception.

Elitron classifies it partners with different "degrees of independence" based on their capability of managing all the activities and steps comprised in a complete sales funnel, that is, a), b), and c) as mentioned above. The greater the number of activities a partner is able to manage without contacting Elitron's sales and technical offices, the greater will be the degree of independence: for instance, a partner who has the expertise to provide technical support to customers, is more autonomous than one who can only generate leads but is not able to complete the sale process. Assessing partners' independence is crucial in Elitron's marketing process for two reasons Firstly it affects the organizational effort required from technical and non-technical departments within Elitron (an

autonomous partner is less demanding on Elitron's support). Secondly, sales commissions depend on the degree of independence of each partner: the greater the independence, the greater the commissions on sales.

Since partnerships are the main way to develop its international business, Elitron is always looking for new opportunities and relationships with potential partners. The new collaboration development is usually supervised directly by the CEO and several types of agreements are possible. Usually, a commercial partner represents Elitron in a specific country and for one or more industries. Elitron has about 30 partners operating in 40 countries. Considering all partners' people working as sales agents or support operators for Elitron, the total number of collaborators reaches 150. Each of the Elitron's key account managers (KAMs) is also responsible for the development of relationships with partners, while the support team is the counterpart for partners' technical staff. The reason why there are so many actors involved in the Elitron's marketing process is because of the evolution and characteristics of the markets in which they operate. Some of them are experienced autonomous sales agents with their own customer portfolio, free to decide to include Elitron's products within their offers. But Elitron also partners with local machine distributors covering many of Elitron's customers in a specific local market. Usually these partners have a small workshop to repair faults, although only minor ones.

Since the independence and competence of a partner are linked to a learning curve that depends on the longevity of business relations with Elitron, the top management is strongly committed in reducing the risk of failure and tends to strictly control the evolution of every new partnership, by asking for frequent updates from all the people involved in the relationship. When a new collaboration is started, people from Elitron's sales and support departments develop mentoring programs to help a partner's managers. The partner usually needs very specific suggestions about how to handle technical and financial requests made by end-customers: since Elitron's machinery is critical in the whole production process, customers are very concerned with how it can potentially affect productivity once installed at their company. Given this awareness, before making a buying decision, many customers ask for cutting tests or customization of the machine, and even the payment terms are negotiated for several weeks (sometimes months) before closing a deal.

All these aspects are handled by partners, but every decision involves Elitron, who has to know, analyze and approve (or negotiate) several requests coming from partners. In particular, depending on the partner's degree of independence, many requests are co-managed by the partner with the help of Elitron's sales manager or one of his staff members, in order to guarantee both technical and financial feasibility of any option granted to the end-customer. In this process, Elitron acts like a director "behind the scene", addressing several actors (the business partners) playing at the same time on several stages (countries) and for different audiences (industrial sectors).

Most partner relationships start with a joint roadshow made by one of Elitron's KAMs and the local partner: the roadshow touches the leads generated by the partner itself or by Elitron. The aim of each roadshow is to train partners, while assessing on the field their own capability of discovering good market opportunities, identifying new potential customers, assessing correctly their needs and finding the proper solution to their problems. During these sessions, Elitron is committed to transfer to partners its way of doing business: the final goal is to make them as independent as possible in the creation, development and management of customer relationships and in the development of sales and post-sales programs.

With those partners who have enough technical competences, Elitron pushes for a further "relationship enrichment", namely oriented at making the partner an alter ego fully autonomous while installing, starting-up and providing support to the end customer both for CAD and CAM systems.

Especially regarding help-desk service and customer support, Elitron aspires to make its partners completely independent as soon as possible. In fact, Elitron aims to provide a personal, high-standard support service to its own customers, by providing target assistance, both on-site and remotely. The quality of relationship with end-customers which Elitron directly manages is pivotal in Elitron's business model, requiring that the same quality levels are reached by partners too. When a new partnership begins, the partner tends to rely strongly on Elitron's post-sales team. Many of the end-customers' requests are not manageable by the partners, who forward them back to Elitron. On the other hand, Elitron is committed to supporting its partners, since they are the primary source of business development. Elitron really wants each partnership to be successful, and considers as a "needed investment" the efforts made in building the relationship. The initial phase of the relationship is critical, because it can cause an overload on Elitron's post-sales team, who is busy also managing requests from Elitron's direct customers. Moreover, given the complexity of its products and the high level of customization often granted to end-customers during the negotiation phase, it is really hard for Elitron to make partners aware of how to manage the various requests submitted by customers, and the complete independence of a partner (from lead generation to post-sales activities) is really hard reached.

Elitron's marketing unit performs such tasks as online and offline communication activities, exhibition management, PR and media relation management. As this unit is tightly linked with Elitron's commercial department, these tasks and competence are not transferred to partners. The latter are involved only in operative communication tasks, such as translating leaflets or supporting during local exhibitions. In other terms, while partners are considered by Elitron as key actors in performing sales activities, they are not involved in the definition and implementation of the marketing programs.

5.3 CRM implementation

CRM is part of Elitron's culture since its foundation. Elitron's CEO was formerly sales team manager in a company operating in the same industry of Elitron. During his work as a sales agent, he recognized the importance of tracking the large set of activities and communications characterizing time-consuming industrial negotiations. Once Elitron was established, the CEO immediately introduced a simple software, called PROSPECT, which was aimed just to "contact management". PROSPECT was internally developed by the same people who were developing the first Elitron CAD and was used as a CRM system for almost 15 years.

PROSPECT was developed in visual-basic programming language; it was accessible just from internal computers at Elitron, and had two main functionalities. Firstly, it was used to track all contacts details within a centralized database. With this software, each contact was registered in a separate "contact card". Each card had a pre-set available input field group that identified the company within the system. It was not possible to register individuals, but only companies. However, there was no way to correlate different cards one to each other. Any additional information other than address, phone numbers and email was stored in the generic field called "notes". Secondly, PROSPECT was used to trace chronologically a sequence of activities carried out by Elitron's salesmen and external business partners on current customers and prospective ones.

PROSPECT was conceived as a digital agenda rather then as a tool for business intelligence, or for managing all other phases in the sales and marketing process. It was used for analytical purposes just to track ex post all the steps of a long-term relationship with leads, customers and local partners. Therefore, it was perceived among the sales agents as a way to measure their solicitude to maintain adequate frequency in relations with customers.

During its 15 years of use at Elitron, PROSPECT's inventory grew constantly. It was considered as extremely useful for tracking a long series of events that occurred with a contact. However, due to the low number of input fields available for each card, a lot of relevant information was stored into the generic "notes" text area. In addition to detailed contact information (such as the name of the contact person within the company), notes were used to input critical information such as latent opportunities, tasks to be performed with the customer, activities developed by competitors, etc. Moreover, many contacts were duplicated as two or more "cards" within the system. Due to this duplication, the whole range of tasks performed with a contact was split through several cards, making it difficult to have complete information about the contact itself.

Moreover, given the high volume of unstructured data stored into PROSPECT, the information available was not suitable for analytical purposes. The situation was seen internally as a technical issue to be addressed according to best practices in software development: a software solution had to be found so to reduce the cost for data entry and reach the full potential benefits of powerful statistics about sales activities and performances.

Starting from this perspective, in the beginning of 2011, Elitron formed a task force aimed at introducing a new CRM software: this team was composed by the CEO, the sales manager, the marketing director and one representative from the IT department. Breaking with the past, Elitron decided to purchase a CRM solution instead of developing it internally. The shift towards a commercial CRM system was motivated by the negative experience with internal development, viewed as more expensive both financially and in terms of organizational effort.

Within the team, the IT department representative was in charge of searching a solution fitting the needs of sales people. These needs were explained in terms of "functionalities that would be nice to have in a usable software", instead of as the "process to be managed within the new CRM system". In particular, the entire task force was mainly committed into defining the number and type of input fields that would be available for each contact card. In other terms, they wanted an updated and evolved version of PROSPECT, a tool through which finally they expected to track all the activities occurred with a contact.

After a few discussions within the task force, the IT representative scouted and selected a set of solutions that could be suitable to be used within the company. The final choice was the Zoho application suite (https://www.zoho.com). Zoho is a web-based software suite developed by Zoho Corporation, a US company. It was first released in 2005 and today it has more then 13 million active users all over the world. Zoho is a modular office suite, since it comprises a wide set of tools for collaboration and project management, customer support, sales & marketing, finance, HR management. It is distributed as software as a service (SaaS), which means that the software is hosted on servers that are outside the using company's control. By paying a yearly fee, companies activate one Zoho account and let their employees use the software in a shared working space.

The total fee amount for each account depends on how many modules are activated. Due to budget constraints, and starting from the list of needs created by the task force, Elitron bought only the CRM module, which comprises contact management and a current, comprehensive view of all company's

sales activities. In particular, this module allows companies to know where every customer is in the sales cycle, the total deal size and the contact history. Moreover, the CRM module provides also a mass-mailing function that can be used to engage a relationship with end-customers.

Around 70% of existing data from PROSPECT were migrated into the new CRM system and, by the end of 2011, Zoho was officially introduced within the sales and marketing departments of Elitron. Nowadays, the Zoho CRM is used by 8 internal users from marketing and sales teams. They are rather happy with the new system since they consider it *"easy to use and accessible anywhere and both from computer and from smartphone or tablet"*. They are all Elitron's employees and have collected about 11.500 contact cards. For the first time Elitron is able to register all contacts relevant to its business operations and marketing, both companies and individuals. In addition, a sales team can match several individuals' cards with the card of the company they belong to. Any operator can see any content, but some critical functions, such as deleting a contact card, can be done just by the administrator of the system (one employee from the IT department).

Within the new system, the sales team tracks several master data about contacts, such as industrial sector, addresses, emails, phone numbers and websites, as well as critical information such as number of employees or total turnover. Moreover, they are able to track any activity made by salespeople on a single contact (e.g., meetings, calls, presentations, etc.) and can attach any kind of commercial or technical document (e.g., cutting tests or commercial offers) that is considered relevant for that contact.

From a strategic point of view, the sales team decided to turn the adoption of Zoho into an opportunity for introducing a new approach to sales management. In Zoho, when a new contact is registered within the system, it acquires the status of "lead". Once the salesman starts to develop a relationship with this contact, a new "campaign" is attached to that contact and several steps can eventually occur. With Zoho, Elitron's management team is finally able to analyze the whole on-going negotiations, by highlighting how many negotiations are currently running on each stage of the sales funnel.

The new system is not currently used to manage orders, upselling programs or post-sales activities, even if there are several modules that may be used for these purposes. Sales and marketing are the only two departments that currently use the software. Instead, business partners have no access to the system. They do not record new leads within the system, and they usually communicate to Elitron's KAM the existence of a new opportunity only when the relationship has come to a stage of high interest. Given this situation, Elitron lacks a proper picture of what is going on in terms of lead generation and management within its wide business network and obtains a blurred image of how new business opportunities are discovered, nurtured and developed at the "periphery" of its sales force.

Today Elitron is expanding the range of functions available in the system by adding a module for quotes generation and transmission of sales quotes. This module is already available within the Zoho suite, but Elitron decided to build itself an independent module that will be integrated with the core of the software (Zoho let developers build their own modules). This choice was made in consideration of the complexity of commercial offers Elitron has to present in order to satisfy customers' requests.

6. Analysis and discussion

We analyze now the two cases by following three steps: (1) identifying which B2B marketing processes appear as central in the two cases, referring to the terminology of Table 1 in our theoretical

section; (2) assessing how the CRM systems at Loccioni and Elitron support or not these processes (thereby addressing our first research question); (3) discussing which types of opportunities and barriers the installed CRM systems create for the relevant marketing processes (thereby addressing our second research question).

Table 4 indicates in the third and fifth columns the importance of the various B2B marketing sub-processes for Loccioni and Elitron, respectively. While all these processes are certainly relevant for the two companies, there are some that stand out for their importance. Some processes are even "pivotal", such as identifying new customers, contact management, key account management, trust building and customer order management for Loccioni. The same marketing sub-processes are equally pivotal also for Elitron, expect for identifying new customers and customer order management, which are left mostly or partly to external partners, as Elitron chose to focus on other processes. Loccioni has further several other processes which can be viewed as "very important": market opportunity recognition, developing and implementing marketing plans, assessing customer value, post-sales activities and understanding customer needs, the latter two being the only "very important" processes together with complaint management for Elitron. All other marketing sub-processes can be viewed as simply "important" for the two companies.

Looking at columns four and six on Table 4, we can see to which extent the CRM systems employed respectively by Loccioni and Elitron support each specific B2B marketing sub-process. For Loccioni's CRM we refer here to the support before, but especially after the "re-launch" of the system in 2009; while for Elitron's CRM we refer to the internally developed PROSPECT, but especially to the new Zoho suite installed in 2011. Table 4 indicates in bold the unsupported processes which are either pivotal or very important, thereby indicating relevant problems with the current CRM tools used by the two companies.

Loccioni's CRM system, which interestingly still lacks a name (differently from Elitron's PROSPECT and Zoho), supports to some extent almost all B2B marketing sub-processes, with the exception of "assessing customer value", a very important process, and "building a service partnership", which is however a not so important process for Loccioni (see column 4 in Table 4). Assessing customer value is not supported at all by Loccioni's CRM because of several barriers: complexity in defining the value of the customer for Loccioni (profitability, timeliness in payments, reputation, long-term effects) and lack of necessary underlying information to assign value markers. Further, Loccioni's CRM is not supporting directly a pivotal process such as enhancing customer trust and a very important one, namely understanding customer needs. As for the former, a possible explanation is that enhancing trust requires more personal interactions than a software, which may instead be more functional to improving the cognate, although different concept of customer "reliance" (Mouzas, Henneberg & Naudé, 2007; Jiang, Shiu, Henneberg & Naudé, 2013). As for the latter, understanding customer needs is only indirectly supported by Loccioni CRM's probably due to its lack of complex analytical functions and pattern recognition required to abstract to the level of customer needs, a task for which the cognitive abilities of KAMs are more appropriate.

Looking at Elitron's CRM (column 6 in Table 4), the situation is quite different compared to Loccioni as this tool supports much fewer, indeed a minority of Elitron's marketing processes. This has primarily to do with the different focus of the two companies' CRM tools, with Loccioni's being a broader scope tool than Elitron's. Moreover, several of the unsupported sub-processes (e.g., building service partnership, gaining customer feedback, cross/upselling) are not pivotal or very important for Elitron, who indeed even chose not to activate the related function. In fact, Zoho as employed by Elitron (but also the previous system PROSPECT) focuses only on leads and sales process

information, while not intervening in the subsequent management of the customer relationship (such as the KAM-related processes), not even the order management process, customer feedback, complaint management and post-sales services. Nonetheless, the lack of support by Zoho for such pivotal sub-processes as identifying new customers, key account management, enhancing trust and customer order management process is a serious problem. A barrier here may be the fact that a lot of the relevant information for these four tasks is handled by external business partners who are not connected to Elitron's CRM system. The same goes for the three very important sub-processes of understanding customer needs, complaint management and post-sales activities, which also lack full support by Zoho. Even if for understanding customer needs and enhancing trust one can also think of the same explanations provided above for Loccioni's CRM, namely need respectively for complex analytical algorithms for patter recognition and for personal interactions.

B2B marketing process	Sub-process	Loccioni's processes	Loccioni's CRM support	Elitron's processes	Elitron's CRM support
Understanding, identify and defining the market	Market opportunity recognition	Very important	Yes	Important	Very limited
	Identifying new potential customers	Pivotal	Yes	Pivotal but mostly left to partners in foreign markets	**Only for internal leads**
	Understanding customers' needs	Very important	**Only indirectly**	Very important	**No**
	Competition analysis	Important	Partly	Not central	No
Definition and implementation of marketing programs	Developing marketing plan	Very important	Yes	Important	No
	Implementing marketing plan	Very important	Yes	Important	Partly, mass emailing
Creation, development and management of customer relationships	Contact management	Pivotal	Yes	Pivotal	Yes
	Key account management	Pivotal	Yes	Pivotal	**Only partly**
	Assessing customer value	Very important	**No**	Important	No
	Enhancing trust	Pivotal	**Only indirectly**	Pivotal	**Only indirectly**
	Gaining customer feedback	Important	Yes	Important	Only partly (e.g., tests)
Developing sales programs	Customer order management process	Pivotal	Yes	Pivotal, but partly left to partners in foreign markets	**Function not used**
	Cross-selling and upselling programs	Important	Partly	Not important	No
Developing service and post-service programs	Building service partnership	Not important	No	Not important	No
	Complaint management	Important	Yes	Very Important	**No**
	Organizing post-sales activities	Very important	Yes	Very Important	**Function not used**

Table 4: Key B2B marketing processes at Loccioni and Elitron as supported by CRM

Our second research question concerns the possibilities and the barriers emerging from connecting B2B processes to CRM in the two companies. Starting from Loccioni, the wide range of supported sub-processes we reviewed above indicate the large amount of possibilities of their CRM system, a very comprehensive tool, with several functions, connected closely to all other IT systems and fully

tailored to the needs of this company. In many respect, Loccioni's CRM system had on paper all the requisites to become a perfect tool in the hands of marketing, sales, KAMs and top executives, while connecting all company functions involved in handling customers via highly consistent and updated customer information. However, things did not eventually turn out in this way as several barriers appeared along the road and still impede making a full use of the system. In terms of *IT barriers*, it proved difficult to connect old and new databases and some analytical functions are beyond the possibilities of Loccioni's CRM system (cf. Alshawi et al., 2011). In terms of *individual users*, many people perceived the system as a form of panoptical control (Zuboff, 1998: 322-3) from top managed and therefore avoided using it (cf. Li & Mao, 2012). At the *organizational level*, the CRM system was dependent on all users inputting the relevant information in the correct way so that other users could get relevant and updated information (cf. Kotorov, 2003), which turned however out to be a difficult goal to reach as the KAMs, the people knowing the most about customers were often unwilling to fill in this information (cf. Homburg et al. 2000). Finally, at the inter-organizational level, handling customer relationships is often more a matter of personal interactions and old and complex relationships have so much tacit and hidden information that makes them very hard to codify and manage via a CRM system, or at least induces KAMs to use it less than in newer relationships, which were created after the installation of the CRM system (Baraldi & Perna, 2014).

Compared to Loccioni, the Elitron case indicates that the range of possibilities of the two CRM tools appeared more restricted by their very technical set up: PROSPECT was a CRM system focusing on lead and sales management. Even if Zoho broadened the possibilities to key account management, including order and post-sales activities management, Elitron chose not to activate the two latter functions. Moreover, Elitron also chose not to connect its external partners to either of the CRM tools, even if these actors hold certainly a large amount of relevant information for identifying new customers (lead generation), key account management, enhancing trust, complaint management and post-sales activities, because they are the direct interface with the most customers. Thus, both *IT* and *inter-organizational barriers* in the form of IT connections and external information bearer come at play in this case, next to the same IT limitations concerning analytical functions for customer need identification and for handling personal interactions discussed for the Loccioni case. While we have evidence of *individual users* perceiving CRM as a control tool, á la "big brother" also in the Elitron case, there are no clear evidence of *organizational barriers* to using the CRM system(s) at Elitron. A possible explanation for the apparent absence of organizational barrier may be a smaller organization compared to Loccioni and a more restricted use of CRM within just one function, rather than as a system connecting several functions and a multitude of marketing sub-processes.

7. Conclusions

This paper discussed the connections between IT systems and B2B marketing processes by analyzing two cases of companies that have implemented CRM tools. A first conclusion from the case studies is that CRM can possibly support all marketing sub-processes, from market opportunity recognition and new customer identification to contact management, key account management and all the way to complaint management and after-sales activity management. In particular, in the two cases CRM seems particularly well suited to support contact management. There are however at least a couple of processes which CRM has troubles in fully supporting, namely "understanding customer needs" and "enhancing trust": we suggest the hypothesis that for these two tasks IT may lack both the advanced cognitive human abilities of pattern recognition necessary to identify needs and the personal touch necessary to build trust.

Next to these technical barriers, we identify also individual user (perception of being monitored by CRM), organizational (low input information quality), as well as inter-organizational (different typologies of customer relationships and dependence on external partners) barriers to the full exploitation of the possibilities of the featured CRM tools. The results of this study are preliminary and need to be validated, both by collecting further data about the featured cases (especially longitudinal data allowing for the eventual barriers to be tackled) and data about other cases characterized by different types of CRM tools, and organizational and inter-organizational contexts.

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