

Chapter 3

Managing Customer– Centric Information: The Challenges of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Deployment in Service Environments

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ABSTRACT

Despite a long history of business-orientated information and communication technology (ICT) deployment, contemporary organizations continue to struggle with customer-centric implementation of new technologies that are profitable and contribute to sustainable service business success. This chapter reviews the difficulties inherent in using ICTs to manage customer-related information, and identifies the particular challenges for customer-centric deployment of ICTs. It provides a model of different levels of customer centric information use in organizations which helps understand how companies can become more customer centric in their information use. It reviews implications for future research in this emerging area and concludes that the challenges of ICT deployment and use must be addressed with an uncompromising focus on customer value as the central principle of both ICT design and deployment, and of information management in service organizations.

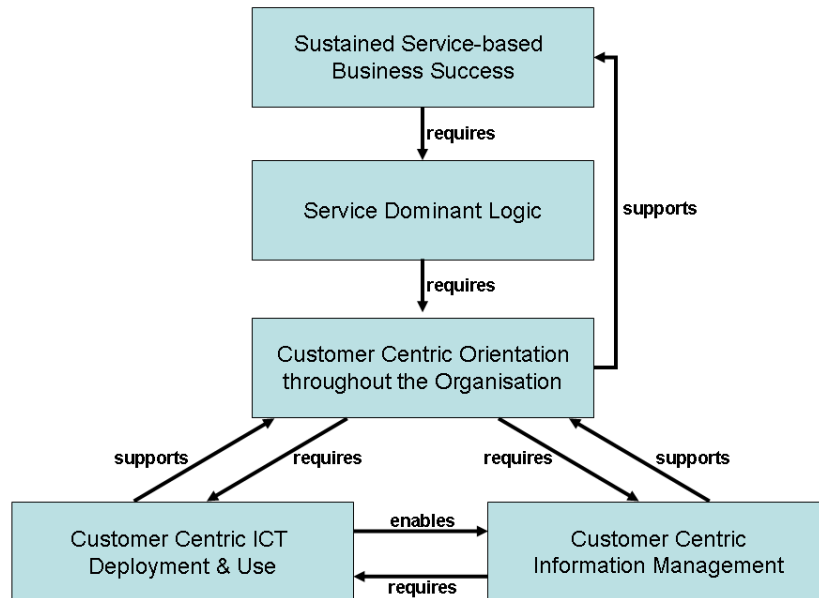
INTRODUCTION

In the current strategic environment, business success depends on a company's ability to understand service-based value creation for customers. One core requirement is the ability to transform customer-related data into information and ultimately into

usable knowledge. Winning companies will be those that not only successfully install information and communication technology (ICT), but that also focus on the management of information rather than the management of technology, recognizing information as the strategic asset that can help them gain competitive advantage (Davenport, 2006; Fisher, Raman & McClelland, 2000; Glazer, 1991; Greenyer, 2006; Myburg, 2000).

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Figure 1. The role of customer centric ICT deployment, use and information management for sustained service-based business success



In this chapter we discuss the challenges for companies of adopting customer-centric information management involving ICT. The core premise of this chapter is that to achieve sustainable service-based business success, all firms need to adopt a service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008) as the basis for organizing and managing their internal and market oriented activities. This in turn necessitates a customer centric orientation throughout the organization, which demands significant changes to the predominant functional organizing principles as well as to predominantly functionally oriented mindsets still found in most service organizations. Such a customer centric orientation in formal (e.g., structural) and informal (e.g., cultural, behavioral) aspects of service organizations requires and – in turn – is supported by customer-centric ICT deployment and use, as well as customer centric information management (see Figure 1).

The reciprocal relationship between such ICT deployment and use on the one hand, and customer centric information management on the other, is the central focus of this chapter. More specifically, we identify and consider challenges involved in deploying and using ICT in service environments to enable customer centric information management.

The chapter is structured as follows: We briefly consider the dynamics of sustained service-based business success by discussing the service dominant logic and customer centricity. In the light of this discussion we then consider in more detail the requirements for ICT deployment and use, and in particular the role of customer centric information management, in service organizations. We present a model of different levels of customer centric information use that highlights the differences between product and customer centric approaches. We then present suggestions for further research to advance understanding of these crucial issues.

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