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CURRENT OPERATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN IT COMPANY: SYNCHRONIZING PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND SALES

Case company: Finnish Net Solutions Oy

Author/s: Sami Juntunen

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THESIS
Abstract

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to study the cooperation between the product development and the sales team in the client company Finnish Net Solutions Oy. The objective was to identify and gather solutions for more valuable customer engagement and improvements for its product "Diarium" which is a specialised software for therapists.

The literature consists of theories of both sales principles as well as the impact of research and development, which was crucial to give insights to understand better how to create research that would benefit both departments' needs. The two activities had not been combined before, so the aim was to create new information by uniting and targeting them in the case company to generate new market value for its product and customers.

Methodology chosen for this research is quantitative research methods. The research consisted of two separate surveys for two target groups, new and current customers. The first survey aimed to research the customer journey as well as new customers' first impressions of the product and the customer engagement. The second survey aimed to gain more detailed feedback on the product use and the company's support of current customers. By combining this information, the company achieved better understanding of the direct customer interface in order to create more customer-centric and valuable services.

The outcome of the research combined with the theory generated a considerable amount of new ideas and suggestions for the company about its upcoming activities. Due to the lack of answers in the survey for new customers, the research did not achieve to assemble a broader picture of its study area. However, the survey for current customers managed to fill the information gap. Finnish Net Solutions can utilise these ideas and the analysis in their future projects. The research could be widened to a more extensive time period, which could lead to more responses from the target groups as well as concrete proof of benefits that this study generated.

Keywords
IT, sales, sales management, product development, innovation management

CONTENTS

Abbreviations and definitions

B2B = Business-to-Business

CRM = Customer relationship management

FNS = Finnish Net Solutions Oy

IT = Information technology

RDI = Research, Development and Innovation

R&D = Research and development

TPG = Three Plus Group Oy

1 INTRODUCTION

There have been many studies related to sales theories, innovation management and product development, but so far, studies are made separately. This thesis focuses on uniting these areas and creating new information for the case company to create more market value for its operations and customers. Connecting different departments and increasing potential communication should never be underestimated. The more open discussion, the more transparent the company is when striving towards success. Specifically, researcher interest was to create the study for an IT company, which pursues to create actual value for the customer.

The thesis progresses initially through the introduction of what the thesis is about, its client company and the case study. After this, the theory part consists of two main areas as the thesis is about combining two areas; Firstly, sales principles and then the impact of research & development. For the reader, it is easier to understand the used case study, methodology and its analysis when the chosen theory is explained.

1.1 Case company background

Finnish Net Solutions Oy (FNS) is a company providing highly usable web applications by using open source tools. The company was founded in 2001 and employs currently over 80 people in different departments. FNS is part of Three Plus Group Oy (TPG), which acquires and supervises a selection of fast-growing healthcare SaaS companies such as Finnish net Solutions Oy, Estonian Net Solutions OÜ and Navicre Oy. (FNS 2020; TPG 2020)

Main products of FNS are Provet and Diarium practice management solutions and customised web services. The product group that this thesis is assigned to is Diarium, which is specialised software for therapeutics. "Physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and other therapeutic professionals need an efficient and easy-to-use patient records and billing system at their profession. Diarium is a software that is offered as a web service. As an easy-to-use software, it saves the therapist time for actual work." (FNS 2020)

Thesis activities focus on the improvements in the sales and product development team. These departments inside Diarium product employes currently in sales team six people in roles of two sales representatives, a marketing coordinator, a sales manager and a sales team leader. In the product development team, about fifteen people are working, in roles of developers, tech support, a tester and a product owner. Occasionally, company's other development teams cooperate with Diarium's development team with joint projects. Thesis project progresses throughout dialogue and collaboration between thesis author and three key persons of FNS, a sales manager, a sales team leader and a product owner.

1.2 Purpose of the study and research questions

The purpose is to create a study for Finnish Net Solutions Oy between the product development team and the sales team of the company's product sector "Diarium" and to find relevant information within the cooperation of both teams to generate more information on improvements of their business.

This thesis explores the current ways of managing an IT company "Finnish Net Solutions Oy" and how it operates within these two departments inside "Diarium" product team. The goal is to create more strategically realistic opportunities for the company to meet the goals of both parties, and through collaboration to create more efficient operations that facilitate sales in their work and product development to design products in a more sales-oriented direction. Within the joint cooperative research, the company receives new opportunities from a straight customer interface to create more customer value and upper hand for their market share. Salespeople have a direct dialogue with customers, whereas the product development team to customer feedback. This information is of great importance and should be utilised as a way of sharing ideas, for example, through joint meetings, studies or middlemen.

2 THEORY OF SALES PRINCIPLES

Creating value for customers is the sole purpose of companies, selling has a significant role in the matter as in identifying and finding opportunities throughout different series of exchanges and interactions. Value can be seen as in economic, material, organisational, and relational terms (Cuevas, J. M.; Donaldson, B.; Lemmens R. 2016 2016, 3). Companies are required to adapt as the customers constantly expect more for their needs as the technology evolves within the economies.

Today's world, modern sales techniques have increased from the personal sales meetings to more targeted contacting via telephone, internet sales and different automated customer service. Within the adapted change, the company reaches a maximum value for the customer while achieving sustainable advantage for the supplier. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 3) Overall demand for more automated tools is required as people use more software-based solutions in their everyday activities. This situation creates pressure to obtain the most efficient but affordable tools, for example, sales activities.

Numerous sales organisations are focusing on diverse types of technology to increase their sales output. Technology has a vital part in this either in existing or in development of new technologies and the possibility of combining different technologies to provide new automated ways of handling different tasks by salespeople and sales managers. Sales productivity is improved by different salesforce automation (SFA), customer relationship management (CRM) and data analytics tools. Fast-growing artificial intelligence (AI) and more advanced use of social media will potentially have a major impact on sales productivity development. (Ingram, Thomas N.; LaForge, Raymond W.; Avila Ramon A.; Schwepker, Charles H., Jr.; Williams, Michael R. 2020, 5-6) With the use of advanced technology, companies can more efficiently gather data from their actions in order to develop their processes evermore.

Regardless of the business sector, companies need to keep up with the different platforms and channels to reach more potential customers and business interactions. The companies need to find the best middle ground between its various departments as sales, development, manufacturing and distribution to achieve maximum potential. Leading IT companies that want to maximise their share of markets, continually pursue new ways to find solutions for their sales and marketing as they are also creating more competence of the sales force through their managing and training. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 3) This thesis focuses more on the cooperation between sales and product development and their united reach to customers.

In the first theory part, sales principles and sales management are more thoroughly introduced and reflect the information; how the client company Finnish Net Solutions Oy operates within its market to reach the maximum potential of its clients and prospects. As explained in the first paragraph, the role of selling is creating value for customers. In contrast, the sales management’s role is to control the bigger picture around selling, “the process of planning, organising, controlling and developing the sales force, and implementing sales operations to achieve the firm’s objectives and business growth” (Cuevas et al. 2016, 3).

2.1 Professional selling

Professional salespeople are a vital part for many companies, especially when operating in ever-growing and changing business-to-business markets. As economies evolve and develop, customers become more self-conscious of their needs and possibilities/alternatives among markets. This situation creates the need for companies to be more customer-centric and market-oriented, furthermore developing active relations with customers; companies understand more the candid needs for their operations (Cuevas et al. 2016, 91-92). Companies strive to make more value-added transactions and cooperations with other companies for both companies' success.

In 1998, Rackham and Devincentis argued that there are three types of selling: transaction, consultative and enterprise selling (as cited in Cuevas et al. 2016, 92).

- Transactional selling is a sales process more about accomplishing than investing in human encounters, unlike the latter sales methods. The process matches the needs of intrinsic value buyers, meaning that the focus is mainly in the actual values as in price and convenience. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 92)

- Consultative selling is a sales process that matches the needs of extrinsic value buyers, meaning that the customer is willing to pay for a selling effort that adds value providing additional benefits to their product or service. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 92)

- Enterprise selling is a sales process that is the most efficient for a strategically important customer that requires an exceptional level of value creation from a singular supplier. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 92)

For an IT company that seeks to provide software solutions like FNS; using previously mentioned consultative and enterprise selling methods, proves to be the best alternatives for customer-centric orientation. Since the purpose of the software is to ease the work of a therapist by creating the possibility of executing its duties easier and more efficiently via working customer relationship management for the benefit of its own business and their clientele. Adding value for the customer by providing additional features, creates the possibility of added value to the original transaction. The company offers constant improvements to its product, especially if their clientele is meeting the specific needs.

2.2 Sales process

There are many theories and versions of the sales process from both the buyers' and the seller's perspective. In this chapter, study deepens on both sides, since the case study is also created monitoring both sides. As it is crucial to understand in life, it is, even in business, the ability to be able to step in other people’s shoes. The seller needs to discover what the buyer might need, but to do that, one must think and discuss further to analyse the client to achieve maximum value for both parties.

One must take into consideration that these sales processes are one of the models that are being used, including different activities and steps that might be carried out differently. Altogether it may vary by the sales position that one possesses. Sales activities differentiate in companies also depending on their overall selling and customer relationship strategy. (Johnston, Mark W.; Marshall, Greg W. 2016, 45)

As these are proven models that comply in modern sales situations, one must remember that if salesperson skips some of the stages, it may cause problems for the persuasiveness of the sales situation. One should never make assumptions of potential customers’ needs but to carefully investigate all customer needs and potential concerns. A patient conversation with genuine interest inspires trust in the client.

2.2.1 The ladder approach

Following these two upcoming theories of sales process, one can truly achieve genuine value-added transactions for the benefit of both parties. Firstly, from the customer perspective, as it is the foundation of everything, to find and accomplish customers’ needs. Timo T. Äijö argues that “The Ladder Approach” is a checklist of questions that need to be taken under consideration when approaching a potential prospect or lead (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 33-40). Timo T. Äijö states that the checklist consists of 12 separate steps that every sales cycle follows (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 33).

1. Do you have a suitable product to fulfil a need that the customer has?
2. Are you able to identify what exactly the customer needs?
3. Can you demonstrate your capability to fulfil the potential order?
4. Does the customer seem like they have a positive or at least neutral opinion of your company?
5. Can you produce a bid on time?
6. Can you meet the customer’s price?
7. Can you answer the customer’s questions in a timely manner?
8. Can you find out and eliminate the customer’s obstacles for ordering?
9. Can you negotiate and execute a contract?
10. Can you get internal support for your bid within the customer's organisation?
11. Can you close the sale?
12. Can you deliver as promised? (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 33.)

Next, the thesis author will go through all the Äijö's questions with his own insights regarding each issue at hand.

1. Do you have a suitable product to fulfil a need that the customer has?

   Firstly, you need to think if your products solve customer's potential problems. To be successful, the right kind of targeting must be imminent. You may have something that the customer has not even considered before.

2. Are you able to identify what exactly the customer needs?

   You need to understand the clienteles' business to understand what kind of solution they may need and want. With the right type of preparation before the meeting and within specific leading questions, one can push the sale towards mutual understanding of both interests.

3. Can you demonstrate your capability to fulfil the potential order?

   Can you provide history or recommendations within the product or your capabilities so that the customers understand and believe what you are recommending them? Providing customer stories are an effective way of showing proven satisfaction towards your suggested solution.

4. Does the customer seem like they have a positive or at least neutral opinion of your company?

   Is this the first time you contact a customer's business? What kind of impression did the previous dealings leave the customer? What kind of image does your company have among the market? This opinion can be either strength or potential slow down for your new proposition. Address the situation and become the turncoat for doubts and show the reasons why the customer needs your product now more than ever.

5. Can you produce a bid on time?

   Äijö argues that customers should ask for a quotation in writing. Regardless, there are cases when a verbal quote and commitment is enough, but if there is an OTC (over the counter) deal, he recommends that one must not do verbal agreements, but make sure everything is in writing. There is a potential risk of many things going wrong otherwise for the deal. There may become a misunderstanding towards agreed details, and it is hard to clear the situation at this point. (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 34)

6. Can you meet the customer’s price?

   The company needs to address its product worthy of asking the price that they see fit. The sales representative has to give the customer the perspective to see why they value their product with the price that they ask. If the sales rep fails to deliver the sales pitch and negotiation as the client requires, they might go somewhere else if the price/value does not meet each other.

7. Can you answer the customer’s questions in a timely manner?

   As previously mentioned, consultative selling takes place here. As the seller takes care of the customer's worries promptly, the client feels its relationship valued. It is vital to keep the customer informed from everything that one might raise to the table.

8. Can you find out and eliminate the customer’s obstacles for ordering?

   There can always be obstacles that come out surprisingly, and it is essential to be able to react instantly to those situations appropriately. The problems may be that the customer needs acceptance for the contract higher above their organisation, they may have some uncertainty towards the service, and does it meet their needs or the lack of funds. Creating customer-centric relationships, the customer might ease their hesitation to the seller easier, which is always better than declining the offer without a specific reason.

9. Can you negotiate and execute a contract?

   As said for the fifth question, it is crucial to have discussions in writing, at least after meetings, writing the key points on what matters were agreed verbally. People might change their opinions drastically, so written summaries prevent the potential mishaps on agreed terms. Therefore, a seller should always create a written contract about discussions to safeguard both parties, interests and benefits. (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 36-37)

10. Can you get internal support for your bid within the customer's organisation?

    It is essential to understand the decisionmakers on the buyer's side. One must impress all of the meeting's part takers, as the sports team is strongest as their weakest link. Meaning with this saying is that one might turn the heads of others, so it is vital to get everyone on board of the decision.

11. Can you close the sale?

    Äijö states (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 38) that there are four different buyers.

    a. First is a customer who has already made the decision on what and where they want to buy. This group is easiest, but it is essential not to make any mistakes since they can go elsewhere since they know what they need.
    b. The customer has two to three viable options for the product/service they need. The customer is eager for the offer, but they need still more persuasions to make the ultimate decision. This situation needs a good closer for the deal from the seller's side.
    c. Customers leaning towards another company can still be persuaded to change their mind for your product. Success level is low, but a good negotiator and closer can reach success.
    d. The customer has already decided to do business with another company. A seller needs to evaluate the situation and understand when the time is to focus on other prospects. However, even though this deal is lost, he/she can still leave a good impression of the company for future situations to come. (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 38)

12. Can you deliver as promised?

    Äijö claims that delivery is not always considered a part of the sales cycle, but in his opinion, it completes the sales cycle (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 39). This concept is also claimed in various sales theories as to the importance of after-sales service. It is vital to deliver the whole process smoothly, especially at the end, so that future collaboration and the potential use of reference is guaranteed. In the sales process, the careless sales representative might cut corners in the process.

    Self-evaluative mindset creates the possibility to understand which steps did not go as planned, and how the person can improve his/her sales process to reach the goal next time. However, one must keep in mind that every sales situation is somewhat different as there are other people and companies to contact. Most successful sales professionals learn from accomplishments and mistakes then take the best methods for future endeavours.

2.2.2 Traditional sales process

These Äijö’s suggested 12 steps (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 33-39) were the excellent head start for the theory of the sales process. In Sales Management: Strategy, Process and Practice, the more known sales process is explained with seven steps referring to Moncrief & Marshall study created in 2005. It has been emphasised as one of the foundations for professional selling. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 100-106)

Prospecting: Is the phase of finding new potential customers. Prospecting involves the possibility of getting rejected, and immediate payoffs are often minimal, it requires patience and vast sources to be successful. (Johnston, Mark W.; Marshall, Greg W. 2016, 45) External and internal sources are founding new prospects. Nowadays, the value of networking is cherished within salespeople; it is the ability to connect with new people from different channels such as social media, seminars, webinars, referrals or community contacts. One can also use a referral by asking a prospect or current customer for the name of another opportunity. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 100)

In Sales Management (Cuevas et al. 2016, 100-101) theory shows that internal sources can also be used as company records, directories, memberships and other documents to obtain names of prospects. Prospects can be obtained via responses to customer inquiries from company advertisement and promotional campaigns. Sometimes leads can obtain responses from customer inquiries from phone, mail and email. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 100-101)

Even these days, however, companies have obtained many technological advances for getting and contacting new prospects, telesales, or in other words, cold calling is one of the most used ways of acquiring new leads for sales. To be successful in telephone selling, it requires good communications skills, professionalism as in understanding both parties' business, empathy, patience and the ability to have an eye for specific situations. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 98)

Nowadays, companies use efficient prospecting tools, and some of them are connected to social media platforms such as LinkedIn. These innovative technologic tools effectively ease the time and effort for searching correct companies through various filters and ultimately right decisionmakers in companies. The prospecting tools gather their data, for example, through national business databases.

Pre-approach (planning and preparation): Once the potential lead or prospect has been found, the next phase is contacting the customer via a various selection of ways, telephone, email, mail or different social media platforms to set-up a meeting for a sales interview. One must make proper preparations regarding information gathering of the customer's business before contacting one. By acquiring enough information regarding the customer, it creates trust and convincing for the acquaintance. Undeniably when enough information is gathered, it is easier to plan questions and timetable for the meeting as it is essential to lead the structure and time during the meeting so that its benefits are maximised.

Evaluation is vital at this point, what value can you propose for the potential customer and how can you both benefit from each other. Can you establish a long-term relationship with the company? Does your product or service support the strategic goals of the customer? (Cuevas et al. 2016, 101) This is why planning also the questions for the information that you need for the proposal is vital beforehand. Once the appropriate sales objectives have been figured out, the next phase can begin.

Approaching the customer and exploring needs: Like the previously addressed pre-approach and some of the "The ladder approach" (Äijö, Timo T. 2015, 33-40) steps have been figured out, the seller may meet the buyer. Within good manners and respecting counterpart's culture and background, an acquaintance has been established.

During the meeting, the sales representative makes a needs assessment by asking and requesting information with open-ended questions regarding customer's business current situation, pinpointing potential issues that the company might have, and how their problems/needs can be handled. It is vital that questions are open-ended in order to receive more information and the dialogue to be interactive. This creates deeper understanding for customers' needs for right solutions. Examples of open-ended questions:

- How do you believe this situation…?
- What is your current situation regarding...?
- Tell me about your situation regarding...?

Example of closed-ended questions making the answers either as "yes" or "no":

- Do you like your current situation regarding…?
- Is this suitable solution for your solution?
- Are you satisfied with your current solution?

Questions that are not open-ended give you less diverse answers/thoughts and making the customer less involved in the conversation. This creates a problem in the upcoming recommendation, making the suggestions less personal as salesperson is lacking important points for value-creation.

Competent salespeople take a listener's mindset throughout the conversation with the customer (Ehrlichman, Matt 2014). By acknowledging and reacting to customer's answer, meeting creates more conviction for the business relationship. It is important to remember that there is no one-size-fits-all way of acquiring trust among new customers; each customer can be different and require different grip during the meeting.

Customer's decisionmakers need to be identified at this point to reach out correctly to the right people during the meeting and in future, as it is essential to be in favour of the whole decision party. During this meeting, it is necessary to establish credibility by showing an overview of the company, products, experience and references from previous customers (Cuevas et al. 2016, 102).

Presentation: It is said that this phase is the core of the selling process (Johnston, Mark W.; Marshall, Greg W. 2016, 48). At this point, the company representative has assessed the most suitable solution for the target company and presents the product or service respecting the knowledge that one has obtained from the need assessment. For the sales presentation to be successful, one must focus on the bigger picture, what benefits does the solution provide, and not only the distinct advantages or features. Based on ideas from Rackham 1995: (Cuevas et al. 2016, 103)

- Features provide characteristics and qualities for product or service. In help to describe a product or service, features provide additional information, facts and data. Rackham states (as cited in Cuevas et al. 2016, 103) that using only features can be unpersuasive. However, in smaller sales, it might be advantageous. On the other hand, in larger sales calls, using features early in the sales process can be counterproductive. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 103)
- Advantages can be described as statements that tell how a buyer can use a product or a solution. Its purpose is to explain how certain features can benefit the client but yet, may trigger objections when not linked correctly to explicit needs. Using advantages can have a positive influence on smaller sales, but in broader terms, it is said to be less effective. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 103)
- Benefits indicate how a product or service fulfils the explicit needs expressed by the customer. Benefits are classified as powerful statements that can lead to success in both smaller and larger sales. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 103)

Rackham states (1995 as cited in Cuevas et al. 2016, 103), when benefits, advantages and features are divided, benefits provide the most added value for the customer. Rehearsing the ability to present product solutions is vital for avoiding any inconvenient mistakes with technical details. Presentations need to be personalised for the specific customers to provide a uniquely planned solution that carries out the best value. Using information or references based on similar customers can be used at this point to provide more credibility. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 103; Johnston, Mark W.; Marshall, Greg W. 2016, 49)

In order to presentation to be successful, it needs to be concise and well structured. Recapping customer's needs, addressing clear areas for suggestions throughout his/her recommendation and linked the value to the customer. The customer is easier to follow the presentation and it becomes convincing.

Overcoming objections: Regardless of one's sales pitch being flawless, the customer may have some concerns and reservations about the product or service. This hesitation is called objections, usually seen as negative uncertainties towards the product or service. Professional sellers may use this situation to their advantage to obtain more understanding of customers' real needs. Regardless of the possibility of the sale being jeopardised, the seller can articulate the customer's concerns to positive assurance, leaving the client more certain to seize the opportunity. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 104)

The success for overcoming objections depends on salesperson's sales skills, preparations for the meeting, listening abilities, empathy towards customer's needs and competitive knowledge among markets. Ingram et al. states that it is vital for salespeople to understand competitive offerings in terms of strengths and weaknesses to plan sales strategy and sales presentation efficiently and to be able to respond effectively to customer questions and objections (Ingram et al. 2020, 173).

Closing: Closing the sale indicates obtaining a final agreement to purchase (Johnston, Mark W.; Marshall, Greg W. 2016, 49-50). The invested effort in this stage should not be wasted by underestimating the importance of this stage. There has been much literature on the most effective ways for closing as the techniques differ significantly for small and larger sales. Sales management theory by Cuevas et al. suggests a non-manipulative closing approach as seen in figure 1 for more customer-centred strategies (Cuevas et al. 2016, 104). Therefore, as Johnston et al. state that companies nowadays focus extensive training for buyers and decisionmakers about selling and buying techniques so that they can identify manipulative closing techniques (Johnston, Mark W.; Marshall, Greg W. 2016, 50).

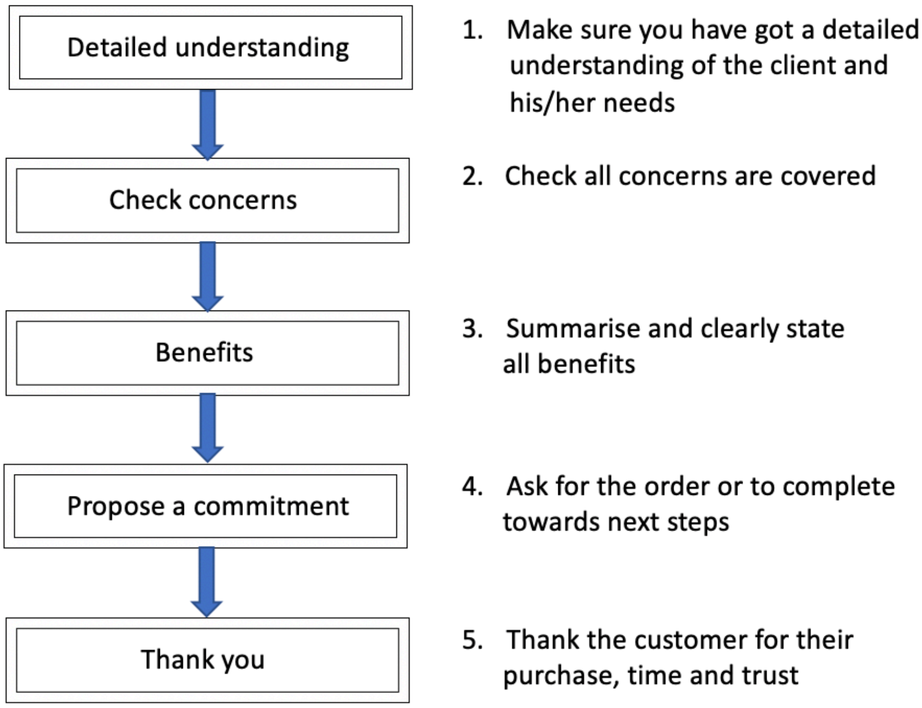

FIGURE 1. "A non-manipulative closing approach" (Cuevas et al. 2016, 104)

Follow-up: This part is referred to as the after-sales service that the seller company provides for the buyer company to maintain a relationship with them. The relationship is maintained via consultancy within the product or service that they provided them by advising for maintaining proper customer satisfaction. At this stage, companies also seek for customer referrals for obtaining new sales leads. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 105) Customer referrals can be said to be connected to client loyalty as the clienteles are linked inseparably to sales value. Stevens states that as we live in a service-based economy, loyalty nurtures among your client base so does the number of referrals. (Stevens, Drew 2016, 79) Upcoming surveys will also study how well does FNS manage their clientele's customer journey regarding finding the company, is it found by their client colleagues, for example, throughout a referral, social media or internet. This is an intriguing matter to be found as it partly shows how proactive are the customers of FNS.

2.3 Sales methods

Customer-centred, solutions selling, is a term founded in the mid-1990s by Bosworth, as the B2B relationships become more demanding than before, solution selling has seen as a promising approach to match ever-growing requirements of demanding buyers. These methods lead to a different kind of account and relationship strategies that need to be defined for specific accounts to propose and achieve the required value for both parties. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 29) For the same purpose, there have been other studies that say "value-based selling" also defines the meaning for focus not only the transactional purpose but creating long-lasting relationships with the customers (Stevens, Drew 2016, 34).

Ingram et al. identified personal selling as a similar method, as previously mentioned. It is detailed as an essential part of marketing, engages for more interpersonal communications between the customer and the seller, and harness the customer relationships. (Ingram et al. 2020, 18) As these aspects are written by multiple authors, it is noted that the way of selling as creating real value and being a trustworthy/knowledgeable partner is becoming more important nowadays.

Lanning and Michaels stated (1988 as cited in Cuevas et al. 2016, 117-118) that the segmentation of customers in business markets should lead to the development of the customer value proposition. Sales management theory presents the idea of Anderson, Narus and Rossum about a three-phased structure for the value proposition. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 117-118)

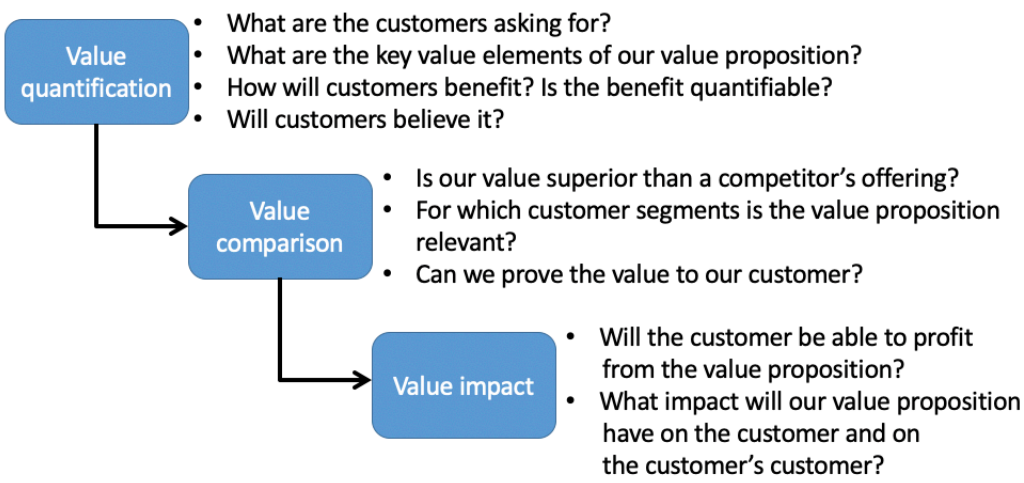

FIGURE 2. Way to structure a value proposition (Cuevas et al. 2016, 118)

As the figure 2 shows, the phases are divided into value quantification, value comparison and value impact (Cuevas et al. 2016, 118). When the company plans its actions based on these questions of this method, it is genuinely on the right path towards success. The technique allows the company to critically analyse its client and its requirements, seller's own product/service and ultimately; how could both benefit the most.

Within this process in mind, turning your customer into an active partner, it creates a two-way dialogue. This consultative and solution-based selling method creates the sales approach to be more persuasive and customer-centric of the real issues and needs (Cuevas et al. 2016, 120). This method is part of the topics that will be discussed in the upcoming theory part of the impact of research and development. In this theory, the main idea is to create a collaboration between the seller and the customer to produce better results with its product/service.

When the standards of sales process and methods are understood, one can start progressing towards more in-depth ways of selling. In figure 3, Ingram et al. defines a model for trust-based relationship selling process (Ingram et al. 2020, 22). The model clearly justifies the previously stated and discovered aspects in relation of value-based selling. Throughout the process of trust-based relationship selling, salesperson focus on questioning and listening in order to create a two-way dialogue for better understanding. This selling process summarises previous sales process & method concepts to one clear practical structure.

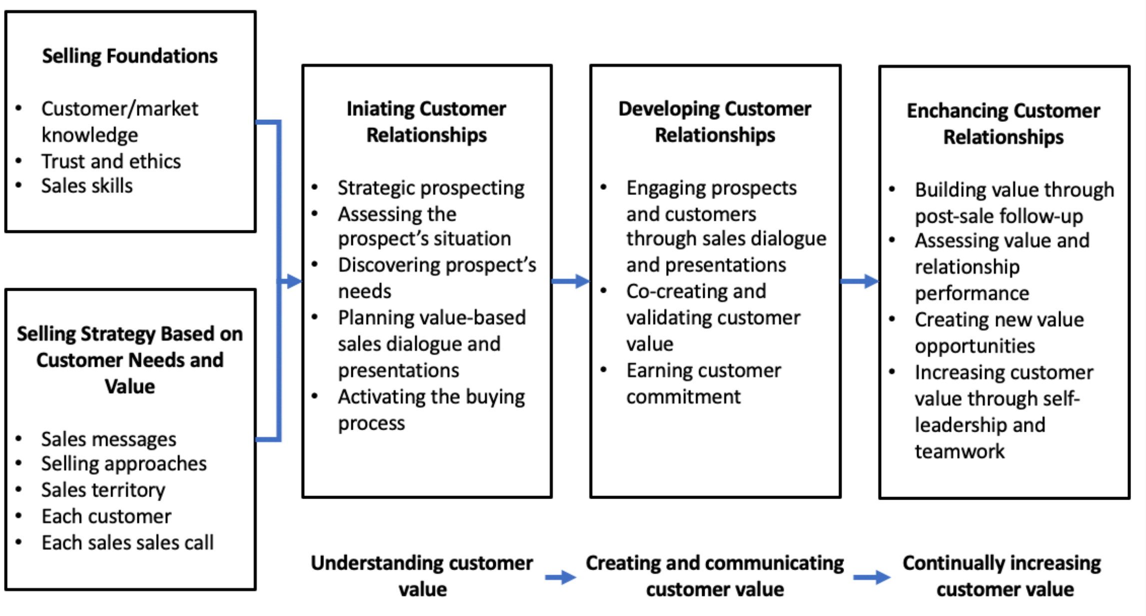

FIGURE 3. Model of trust-based relationship selling process. (Ingram et al. 2020, 22)

2.4 Sales management and leadership

Sales management and leadership are one of the key elements to define how successful the outcomes of sales are. Management theories discuss both terms' management and leadership as separate meaning, management focusing more on managing things, and leadership as in managing people. Sales manager's role is to obtain a skill set of balancing both areas.

One of the responsibilities of a sales manager is to guide salespeople with their tasks, objectives, motivation and performance. Additionally, one's charge of planning and organising areas related to the sales department as in forecasts and allocating needed resources for its purposes and targets. While being a mentor whilst pursuing constant change for the sales team, the sales manager needs to be additionally a role model for his/her salespeople (Ingram et al. 2020, 9). These actions are one of the critical aspects that provide the needed motivation for an efficient team since the actions of the supervisor are highly crucial for an employee.

Forecasting is essential as it requires multiple aspects to be taken into consideration. Ingram et al. state six different parts that provide a forecast basis for sales management decisions:

1) Determining salesforce size
2) Designing sales territories
3) Forming sales quotas and setting budgets
4) Defining sales compensation levels
5) Assessing salesperson performance
6) Estimating prospective accounts (Ingram et al. 2020, 115)

With these forecasting areas, sales management can make more reasonable decisions when they have valued and analysed actions by different criteria. It is vital to predict and calculate how much potential market there is to acquire in order to maintain its salesforce effectiveness.

The sales manager needs to assess the sales process and its compatibility for the pursued targets during each business quarter. To investigate the process more thoroughly; the case study has included a phase for it in the first survey for the new customers. Its purpose is to analyse the customer journey from the customer's first touch on the client company FNS to giving a demo presentation of their product/service to finally signing the contract as it is both the sales representatives and managers continuous duty to find any part of the process that could be improved to maintain its competitive edge.

As accomplishing the goal for the surveys states as manager works more as a leader united with its sales representatives, it lowers hierarchy and creates more possibilities. Johnston et al. state that in today's world, the successful sales manager needs to understand the importance of distinction of leading versus managing (Johnston, Mark W.; Marshall, Greg W. 2016, 4). Moreover, as sales managers adopt more leadership roles, to accomplish required results, they must focus more on collaboration rather than relying strictly on controlled methods. This matter cannot merely mean collaboration between salespeople and customers but united cooperation between different departments within the organisation such as product development, production, customer service and marketing. (Ingram et al. 2020, 7)

Ingram et al. state (2015 as cited in Cuevas et al. 2016, 79) that these days "providing leadership to sales professionals has been recognised as one of the most crucial issues for future sales for organisational success." It is said that nowadays, sales professionals are facing more competition than before and forcing them to become more adaptive for technological changes and globalisation. One can read between the lines that this truly creates more importance for sales leadership. (Cuevas et al. 2016, 79)

2.5 The importance of sales training

As mentioned previously, there are a variety of ways to approach sales, but also how to share the information within the organisation and sales team. Every company has their own way to train their personnel as the company differ from each other in so many ways depending on for example by its size, geographical location, its market area, product/service and its target groups and segments. Sales training are an essential investment for the success of its salespeople. Companies need to have effective onboarding plans on how to prep new salespeople to the company values, product lines and ways to sell in order to adapt to a successful path to creating more value for the company. Different companies provide sales mentors and buddies via team or organisation in order to orientate the person to adopt company policies and effective ways of selling more effectively.

As the company decides to pursue a new selling method or approach as an example previously mentioned customer-centric approach or consultative selling method; the whole organisation needs to be on board with the change. Training and way of learning need to be easily accessible as the teams might differ by their locations where they work. Technology allows companies to use the electrical way of learning, which is a much easier and convenient way to arrange personnel training. Ingram et al. state that personnel that have been properly recruited and trained tend to be more confident on the job and have fewer problems with job conflicts, leading to higher job satisfaction, involvement, commitment and performance (Ingram et al. 2020, 166).

Sales training should provide good exemplary situations for it to be more illustrative for practical work. Proper training can prepare sales personnel to potential situations and challenges. Therefore, the training has to be diverse with its activities and situations so that practical knowledge is more understandable instead of only reading theoretical insights. Technology allows training platforms to offer diverse training with combined both practical examples via exercises and theoretical background.

Ingram et al. suggest a structured process for sales training, as seen in figure 4. The process visualises a clear plan for salesperson's training as first to evaluate the needs and aims/goals for the training. Then needs to be planned best alternatives for the training, who will conduct the training, is it led by the internal or outsourced trainer? Is it best to perform virtually or live, and what would be the best location for it? What is the method, is it via books, virtual videos, interactive training applications? After the plans are made, they need to be approved by its budget by the upper management. The training program itself needs to be finalised to that it accomplishes its purpose. As the sales training are progressed and completed, they need to be evaluated during and after the training to conduct the potential needs for follow-up training. (Ingram et al. 2020, 168-187)

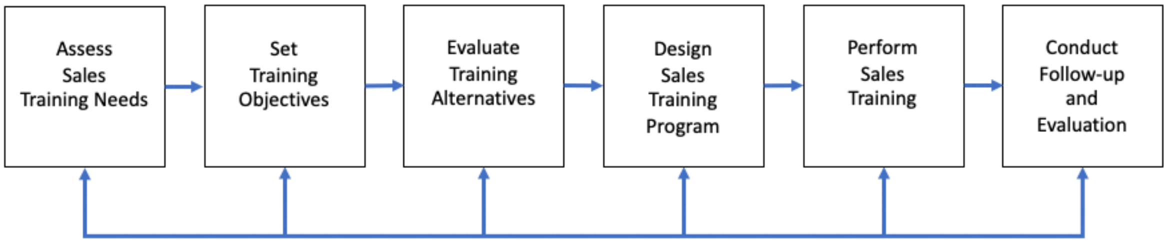

FIGURE 4. Sales training process. (Ingram et al. 2020, 168)

As the ways of selling change, the silent knowledge inside the sales team is vital to be shared, and activities to be as transparent to others as possible. United team, shared techniques, and ways can push the team together onward without diminishing team spirit with unreasonable behaviour of competition between teammates as it is a sales professional's duty but also the manager's duty to observe and estimate his/hers own and others' actions.

3 THEORY OF THE IMPACT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

For an IT company, to stay competitive and separate itself from the competition, the company must have the ability to seek technological opportunities that pursue the needs of the customer (Trott, Paul 2017, 226). The company needs to create unique but profitable innovations that give the company an upper hand in its market sector. Technological cash cows are constantly pursued within the development team. The cash cow is a term used in BCG-Matrix (Boston Consulting Group), which means a product that is extremely profitable, and where no extra effort or investment is needed to maintain the status quo. When the growth of a product's market decreases but the company's market share remains high and steady, it becomes a cash cow. (Van den Berg, Gerben; Pietersma, Paul 2015)

For a company like Finnish Net Solutions Oy, product development has a significant role in guiding the company into success. This theory part goes more in-depth into research and development, innovation management and product development; as it is an important aspect when leading an information technology company.

3.1 Definitions

Innovations are the striving force of companies to adapt and evolve in the ever-changing economy. Innovation is a key element to stand out from the crowd and show its uniqueness in its industry; on the other hand; they are inventions. Innovations can be seen in different forms in different companies, for some, it is concrete inventions for a new information technology solution, for some, it may be a new way of selling or pushing its company to a new market. Some companies may be more innovative than others, and this is affected by company management.

Innovation management is what companies use to manage their new ideas for their products and services, meanwhile balancing its resources for its efficient day-to-day operations. Innovation management is to control their use of research & development of their company. The balance is essential so that the brainstorming does not affect the productivity of the company too much. As Paul Trott stands out the dilemma of innovation management: "The farter that any company seeks to innovate, as measured by the degrees of change from its base markets and technologies, the greater the likelihood that its innovation efforts will fail. And yet, the less than a firm seeks to innovate, across the board, the greater the likelihood that the corporation itself will fail." (Trott, Paul 2017, 119) How can one's company balance the everyday activities between new improvements for their competitiveness? To be successful, the company needs to have constant pressure to maximise its potential by limiting costs and creating more improvements for its operations.

Research and development (R&D), as a concept, one can point out to separate words, research and development as they have their separate meanings. Research in the academic world implicates a systematic approach to find new knowledge. To come for a resolution for innovation, the researcher can use old and newly discovered science to come up with new ideas. (Trott, Paul 2017, 306) Development is when researched knowledge is put in use and being tested for new solutions. As an end product, researchers can achieve new technology, which can be new products, services and processes.

3.2 Research and Development

As inspecting more thoroughly on the latter subject in the introduction's definition part; as said, research and development have a significant role in the technological company. It is noted that industrial R&D is more accurate to be seen as a continuum, as seen in figure 5 where knowledge and concepts are the other side and physical products on the latter side. Throughout this continuum, one may go through various activities to achieve the end goal. (Trott, Paul 2017, 306-307) Within this process model, its purpose is to create value for the company, using its scientific, technological and organisational capabilities that the R&D unit has to offer (Tschirky, .; Herstatt, C.; Probert, D.; Gemuenden, H-G.; Colombo, M. G.; Durand, T.; De Weerd-Nederhof, P. C.; Schweisfurth, T. 2011, 74).

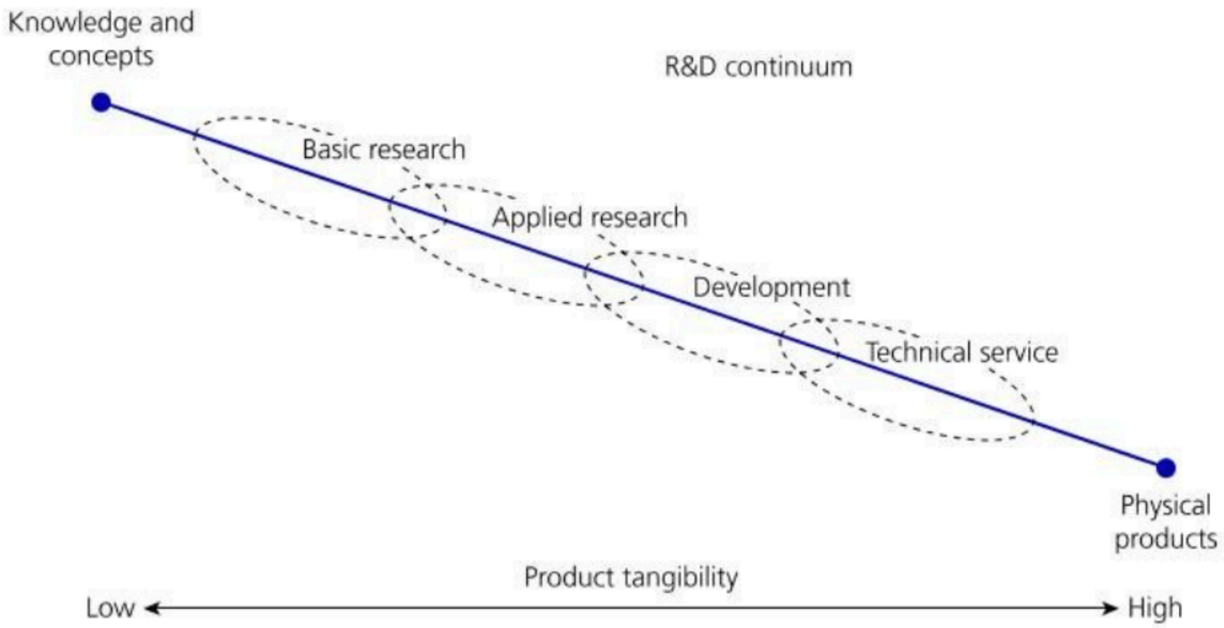

FIGURE 5. The R&D continuum (Trott, Paul 2017, 306)

3.2.1 History of the research and development

R&D revolutionary age came after the Second World War when economies started to recreate itself and its industries. Companies pursued competitive advantage from one another, and it started the need for research and development. New technical developments in different sectors (electronics, automotive, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals) created the possibility of many industries to strive like never before, at least for a while companies thought that technology could achieve anything. (Trott, Paul, 307)

This situation started the pursuit of reaching the moon by late US President Kennedy. Economy at the time made it possible to use immense amounts of money to R&D, which gave the possibility to reach its goals. This linear process, going from research to engineering, and finally to manufacture, caused the whole industry to follow its lead. Research and innovation faced a mishap of needless amounts of money wasted in potential technological projects that seemed interesting without ultimately discerning what is and what is not creating the upper hand in the competitive market. After a while, R&D value was being questioned, whether it is truly profitable or not. (Trott, Paul 2017, 307)

3.2.2 The use of R&D in modern industry

Learned by history, managing R&D is not an easy task. To achieve its full potential, one cannot use any specific rule or model. Each company and every competitive environment are unique and different how it changes and evolves. Management needs to use various sources of knowledge and science to find the right kind of solutions for its needs. The expenses and the potential increase in sales also need to be taken into consideration. (Trott, Paul 2017, 307-308) Standard calculation formula, known as Return of Investment (ROI) is used in this situation (IONOS 2019).

ROI = Investment as % of sales = (Investment expenditures ÷ total sales income = 100%)
(IONOS 2019)

With this calculation, the company can calculate the outcome of planned investment, whether it is profitable or not. For financial stability, it is highly essential to predict the potential outcomes and then re-evaluate after the investment has been made. Everything cannot be predicted, since the competitive environment is ever-changing, but it is vital to keep up with advantages when comparing to competitors. This point can be highlighted in every industry, but especially in IT-sector, it is underlined.

The Finnish economy has been said in European Innovation Scoreboard 2020 that it is one of the innovation leaders among its European Union countries. Finland invests in high education for its citizens, and the local companies strive for new knowledge for their companies. (EIS 2020) For a company like Finnish Net Solutions Oy, it is essential to separate themselves from competitors and gather enough knowledge of their market and what is needed to succeed evermore.

3.3 Planning and estimating R&D projects

Company managers need to estimate the value, risk and expenses of each development project that they set up. Some of the projects are never-ending as there are improvements as long as the economies and world change by other innovations and technologic improvements. This situation is where the companies differentiate from each other, who keeps up with changes and yet still manages to innovate more. Nevertheless, projects cannot be endless by schedule but need to have some goals and a timeline to stay cost-efficient.

Typically, one cannot accomplish all the ideas that come to mind but need to prune the best ones that will go through the process of R&D. Some projects need to be left behind if they turn out to be either too expensive to complete or will not exceed all of the expectations. Trial and mistakes are typically part of R&D projects.

Paul Trott states that R&D portfolio managers evaluate projects based on a hierarchy of criteria and factors that ultimately creates improvements of four categories. These four categories are: (Trott, Paul 2017, 367-368)

- New product
- A derivative of an existing product
- A new market segment product
- Existing product improvement (Trott, Paul 2017, 367-368)

These are just a few examples of results after multiple evaluative criteria have been brainstormed for different projects.

3.4 Innovation management

The ways of managing innovations and new product development have evolved tremendously in the past decades. As it has understood of being quite complex and ambiguous and involves various activities to be effective and inducing for its purposes. (Trott, Paul 2017, 30)

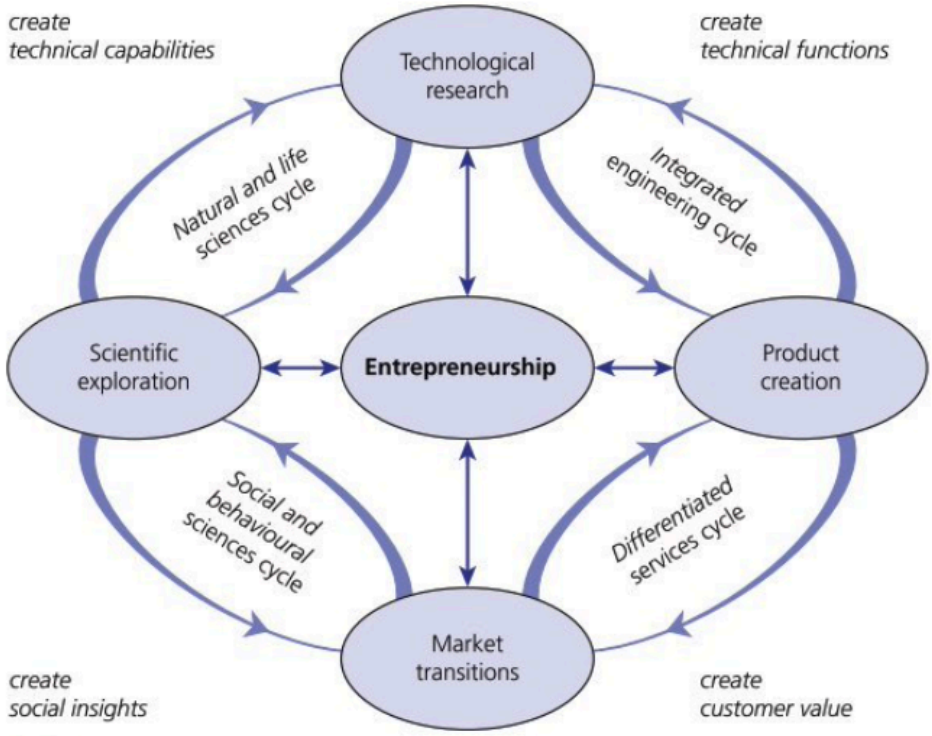

FIGURE 6. "The cyclic model of innovation with interconnected cycles" (Trott, Paul 2017, 32)

Paul Trott introduced "the cyclic model of innovation with interconnected cycles to visualise the process more clearly" (Trott, Paul 2017, 32). This model was created based on years of experience within industries by scientists that developed valuable new products and services, combining both analyses of theories and empirical evidence. As the model is seen in figure 6, it is circular with interconnected cycles, as its point is to be an endless cycle of events. The concept explains how the company gathers information over time, how it uses technical and societal knowledge and ultimately creates new appealing ideas. In the centre, is entrepreneurship as it is described to be the decisionmaker for thriving the possibilities of these opportunities. As Paul Trott states, without innovation, there is no new business. (Trott, Paul 2017, 30-33)

As Paul Trott argues (Trott, Paul 2017, 33-34) that innovations build on innovations. As the researchers learn new ideas, it creates new concepts, and accomplishments create new challenges, mistakes create new insights (Trott, Paul 2017, 33-34). It depends on the management that handles projects, how does the innovation process overcome limitations and information sharing. While working in a modern innovative company, processes are different nowadays since the locations may differ between co-workers, causing the potential problems between cooperation. It is vital to invest in social capital as well within the company, so ideas and plans are shared more openly and more straightforward.

This ideology can also be seen in existing companies as a principle for wanting to adapt in an ever-changing economy. Every company needs to use all of their assets as maximising the benefits and for example, utilising the sales and customer service department to obtain useful customer insights and preferences to create better products or services via product development team. It is up to the company how it wants to maximise all of the potentials of its every action.

Since the processes are nowadays more dynamic, leadership needs to adapt and acquire new ways of managing operations such as sharing responsibility and lowering the authority. Managers might have to work with people that are not directly their subordinates, but from another department, meaning also that the manager does not have formal authority over them. This situation causes the effect of leadership is being shared across the team members. As the departments can be widely geographically divided, it causes companies being more complex and virtual in their actions. Having wide-ranging networks all-around is highly essential for receiving information and support from different individuals. Figure 6 explains and visualises the whole process thoroughly. (Trott, Paul 2017, 32-34)

4 CASE STUDY AND ITS METHODOLOGY

Companies need to reach the full potential of all of its departments that are in contact with customer interface. This ideology gave the researcher motivation to research the cooperation between client company's sales and product development team. The study question is, what kind of benefits can be created further when these two departments work together to create more customer satisfaction and innovations for both, their operations and product within the help of their clients. The case study researches the potential vital indicators that could be needed for the development of the product Diarium of Finnish Net Solutions Oy. As for the study methodology, using the background information and theory, cooperated with the client company, two different surveys were created to find more information from clients regarding the product Diarium. The purpose of creating two separate quantitative study surveys was to see how opinions also differ between the new customers by first impressions of the product's demo presentation and the current customers that have used the service a while. The surveys are expected to gather many different open-word answers from each other to give more thorough insights regarding the topics.

The chosen research method is quantitative research for it to be more convenient when targeting a larger group of people, especially when it needs to be done online. A quantitative research method is used with quantitative variables that are effective when an individual wants to study opinions in certain matters and transform them into usable statistics. (Donnerly, Robert A, Jr; Fatma, Abdel-Raouf 2016, 17-19) It aims to create a structured survey with specific leading questions that gather both numeral and data to be transferred to a table to be analysed. Calculating the average between all industries as well as between different industries among different sub-sectors allows seeing the difference between participants' opinions.

Target groups for both surveys as stated in the company introductory part are company's current or future customers who are physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and other therapeutic professionals either working as an entrepreneur or working in a larger therapeutic company. By inspecting the industry and company size, it gives the information to know how the opinions differ between the specific criteria giving the potential of receiving more information for better services for all of the client company's customers. These target areas are vital information to separate answers from each other and find specific differences among customer segments by different industries and company sizes.

The reason why it is highly important to review the opinions of customers in businesses is that people do not give opinions proactively otherwise, especially in Finnish culture, where people tend to keep their opinions to themselves. When provided an anonymous way to give opinions and ideas, people tend to be more honest when they know that it will not harm themselves or their company's reputation. John A. Goodman raised an idea that the customers do not complain for four main reasons (Goodman, John A.; Broetzmann, Scott M. 2019, 5-6).

- Customers believe it will not do any good. Caused by a bad experience in the past without results or they believe that the problem is unchangeable.
- Fear of harming a long-term business relationship. Customers might have a fear of the outcome for the service if given opinion to a specific person they are complaining about.
- The problem is exasperating but not acute. Hence the customer might be bothered that it is not worth the hassle of complaining.
- Customers do not know where they should complain. Usually, customers do not know how to raise a complaint to other people of the company than the person they are dealing with. It is said that requests might take forever or the person they are telling the problem, does not have the authority to fix it. (Goodman, John A.; Broetzmann, Scott M. 2019, 5-6)

Therefore, actively researched surveys are an effective way to obtain answers and opinions from the customers that might not be uncovered otherwise. The possibility of keeping the answers anonymously it may lower the response threshold compared to open interviews.

4.1 Research ethics

In researches many matters need to be taken under consideration and one of them are the ethical side of the research. Research and study area need to be thoroughly planned, how to conduct it in appropriate manner, plan data acquisition and how to address the research results in respect of ethically sustainable methods. In the latter aspect, it is important to pay attention to addressing the research results that researcher handles, saves and evaluates the results in an ethical manner. One cannot distort results by changing its parts or leaving some parts unpublished. Nowadays it is important to take data protection law seriously when planning a research as in avoiding the collection of unnecessary personal data which will be addressed further in the next paragraph. Ethics includes respecting the materials and literature that author uses for its own study by referring to original publications and authors properly. (University of Helsinki, 2020)

Due to the instructions and further researched information of GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) by Savonia University of Applied Sciences, the surveys did not collect any personal information that can be linked to the answers to respect complete anonymity of the participants of the surveys. (Savonia UAS 2019) This way, it also allowed both the researcher and the client company to save themselves from extra paperwork during the process. The personal information of customers was irrelevant for the study purpose and answers, so it clear that they were left out from the surveys. However, surveys did offer participants a separate opportunity to join two separate draws for both surveys of winning a gift certificate for a specific amount of money to a local sport & outdoor retailer. The client company wanted to invest in the draws to create extra motivation for more potential participants and answerers.

4.2 The study progressions

The research started by acquiring multiple sources for literature as in physical books via local library and gaining access to several e-books from Savonia UAS’s provided partner websites. In order to respect further sustainable methods for data acquisition, researcher also used in addition to e-books different reliable websites as sources for information. After gaining the stack of books, structuring plans began to feel easier as the author got ideas for goals clearer.

The researcher had no previous relation to the company, so processes for the case study started by several interviews between the researcher and both sales team management and product development management personnel. Both parties first shared ideas, and the meeting's purpose was to gather more information relating to the client company's product, activities and processes, personnel details, and goals.

The personnel gave information to the researcher openly, which eased the pressure and uncertainty of the new unknown specific expertise market area for the researcher. For the study, the reality of the researcher being completely outsider created the success of no potential bias suggestions for the research and conclusions. This situation also created the possibility to develop his mindset and opinions for the analysis and overall summary part in respect of both client company and customers.

For both surveys, the researcher and client company's contact personnel had both in-person and virtual meetings. For the reasons of time management and more importantly, for the social distance reasons for COVID-19 which is a global pandemic crisis that has affected economies enormously during the year 2020 (WHO 2020). Meetings mainly were set up via telephone or video conferences online. The client company showed compassion for the study by participating in the planning and executing part of the surveys. Since the researcher is not an employee of the client company, the personnel of FNS shared the surveys for the clientele within their customer relationship management platform and emails. The survey distribution was not only effective but sustainable method due to their newsletter for the customers.

4.3 The first survey: New customers

The first survey was targeted for prospects that are not yet customers of the client company but have seen the "first bite" as in the form of a demo presentation by a sales representative of the product that they have shown interest towards. The survey's purpose is to develop both the sales and marketing team and product development by asking specific questions regarding the customer journey from finding the client company to seeing the product first-hand.

Appendix 1 shows the survey and its research questions. The questions were correlated to the customer journey related theory of Äijö's twelve steps of the sales process and the traditional sales process method. Based on these theory methods, survey challenges the company to reflect on their capability of fulfilling the customers' needs, expectations, pricing and quality. The results can guide the sales team to improve its operations depending on the answers.

The survey is expected to gather potential information regarding the company's sales actions among the close customer interface and hopefully generate useful opinions and open answers to use in improvements for their actions and sales process. Depending on the scale of scores among different questions can direct the way for potential areas of corrections in the future.

An important matter to keep in mind, as the theory states the purpose and example of conducting sales training, nevertheless answers being positive or negative about the customers' opinions about the sales presentation, salespeople should focus on pursuing more knowledge for their continues endeavours. However, it is good to know what level the team stands at the moment.

4.4 The second survey: Current customers

The second survey deepens the customer journey experience to current clients, and its purpose is to research their opinions of the client company's service, product and how it fulfils their expectations. The survey was done deliberately longer with more detailed questions regarding their customer experience. This way, the survey created the possibility of receiving a more open written answer in different sections to gather more specific needs of the customers and making more valuable analysis for the client company.

Appendix 2 shows the survey and its research questions. The questions were assembled based on both theories of the sales and research and development. For the success of finding prosperous projects analysing risks and what will be truly profitable and beneficial for both customer and the company. The theory of research and development provided insights to use questions regarding different features of the client company's software to analyse what needs to be improved and ideas for potential new projects. Keeping in mind the customer-centric approach that both theories showed; also, the questions challenged the company regarding aspects as the new customer survey did in the areas of the capability of fulfilling the customer needs, expectations, pricing and quality.

5 RESULTS

As the surveys came to an end, the researcher had to export its answers to an excel and form a logical breakdown for the upcoming analysis. Both surveys took place almost the same time, giving the researcher the possibility to save time by starting the analysis for both surveys at the same time.

5.1 The first survey: New customers

The new customer survey took place from May to the end of June and from August to September. The survey had the potential of reaching around forty clients but carried out only two answers for the survey, making the survey’s outcome smaller than hoped. The result was somewhat predicted based on the overall amount what the company receives within its customer feedback surveys, which is generally less than five per cent (Kiiski 2020).

5.2 The second survey: Current customers

The survey was gathering answers for over a month, starting from the end of May to the end of June. The survey managed to collect 187 responses in total out of the target group of over 5000 clienteles, making the answer less than five per cent of the total amount. Client company’s product owner comments that this percentual amount of responses is a typical result for the client company's customer feedback surveys. (Kiiski 2020) Regardless of the percentual amount of being small, the answer amount is reasonable and rewarding for this research and has loads of different open answers for the various questions; making the survey successful for its purpose.

6 ANALYSIS

The analysis will be carried out, pointing out some of the factual numeral values from multiple-choice questions and summary of the information gathered from the open answer questions. The questionnaire was created to collect information in a relation of customer satisfaction towards the product Diarium, its delivery and the whole process of the service, including main areas as the product features.

Both of the surveys had two main questions, in the beginning, to differentiate the answers from each other, the size of the company and the industry they are representing. With these two main questions at the beginning, it is easier to understand the scope and the background of the survey's targets. It is also interesting to see; how do the opinions differ between different sized companies and various industries. This way, it creates the possibility to continue the research and development towards more customer-centric solutions if the option of multiple diverse answers appears.

After the analysis was complete, thesis author organised a meeting with previously mentioned client company's contacts to present the results and analysis via Excel, PowerPoint and Word file. Altogether surveys' open-word answers were condensed into ten pages for the presentation. The following paragraphs address these results and analysis further.

6.1 The first survey: New customers

The first questionnaire was focused more on the customer journey to enhance the sales process within customer finding the company, first impressions of the company, product and the whole service. These customers have only received the first impression via a demo of the Diarium product. It is interesting to analyse the difference between people who have not used the product and who have with the next survey "Current customers". Opinions always differ by the amount of time that has been used with a specific service or product since the customer has only heard what it can be, and not yet tested itself how it resonates with one's duties and needs. Adding a few leading questions at the beginning, which can also be found in Appendix 1:

1. "How did you first hear about the service?"
2. "How would you prefer to contact us?"
3. "What is the most meaningful way to get to know the service?"

These questions help to understand the customer journey more thoroughly regarding the way customer's first impact of the client company, and it also gives the possibility to analyse what method should be focused more and what should not. Finding the most effective marketing reach is vital for sales to know how to acquire more leads for the future.

After these first questions, the survey focuses more on the impression of the demo presentation, the product and how it could benefit the customer. One cannot hear enough feedback about its actions; it is crucial to be aware of one's presentation skills. Did one truly give the clearest sales pitch to his/her customer or not? Reflecting your performance is the only indication to learn from mistakes; why one lead may not have reached the goal.

Regardless of the plan being genuinely good and value-creative, it gathered only two participants. However, the target group was limited due to changes in the market caused by COVID-19 (WHO 2020). There can be many reasons for the failure of the survey, either in motivation or time-related reasons, since the target group are not yet customers. These issues always create a problem with the motivation of the answerer since they do not possess an active relationship yet with the company. The potential issue, which the researcher does not believe is the fault, is the problem with the client company's employees sharing the survey. Still, it raises questions of the customers, that were they so unsatisfied that they did not want to participate in any extra activities with the client company? Though this probably is not the case, the problem for both consumers and company employees is that if something is not necessary, usually people tend not to bother to react to it even if there is a prize involved.

Since the survey gathered two answers, it cannot be modelled as a vast credible source of information. This a reason why this part of analysis cannot compare answers between the different industries nor the company sizes, in the second survey analysis these aspects are more inspected. However, despite answer percent being low, it is always intriguing to know what these people thought; the results were optimistic. These two persons saw the company in a positive light, as answering an average of 4.5 to all the questions, except the last one related to the need for some other extra feature. The average for those questions was 2.5, meaning that they did not wish anything else to be added for the program, making the software impressive and answer for their needs.

The areas that the author wanted to see answers to were in the relation of first questions about the customer journey, how the customers found the company, how they would want to reach the company most pleasantly and what is the most favourable way of getting to know the service. These two participants answered that they found the company by either search engine or by a colleague. This information is useful for the company as it is being found first in line by search engines for their industry and that people talk about the company and its products. These are highly important these days since customers tend to share experiences online and among colleagues/friends. The answer amount does not state a strong case for the fact that the customers are proactive. However, it gives a promising impression for it as it was previously mentioned in the sales theory to be an intriguing matter to be discovered.

The question in the relation of the most favourable way of reaching the company shared opinions to all of the options within the questions making it somewhat expected results. The most favourable way of getting to know the product was a demo presentation as it was hoped to be. Next to follow was a divided opinion between their company website and the free trial version of the software. These answers were somewhat expected, but it is good to be sure of the customers' opinions.

6.2 The second survey: Current customers

The questionnaire was more focused on the customer journey that current customers receive being a customer and user of the Diarium. As mentioned before, the purpose was to research customers opinions of the client company's service, product and how it fulfils their expectations. The focus was to divide the survey between the main feature areas of the Diarium product; this way, it is easier to find more thoroughly main targets for the improvement of the whole service around Diarium. The questions for the survey can be seen in Appendix 2.

The used topics for study areas:

- Customers
- Treatments / Kanta
- Billing
- Appointments
- Additional services

For each section, the survey's purpose was first to discover the general numeral opinion for the feature, then ask open-word feedback on how to improve the specific feature. This way, one can also equate the value from numeral opinion to the open-word answers and see the correlation between them.

The survey's multiple-choice questions regarding the numeral value of certain areas gathered an overall good score for each section. When we look more specifically on the detailed sections starting from question 8 in chart 1, one can notice the difference between the scores as in lower than in the general questions.

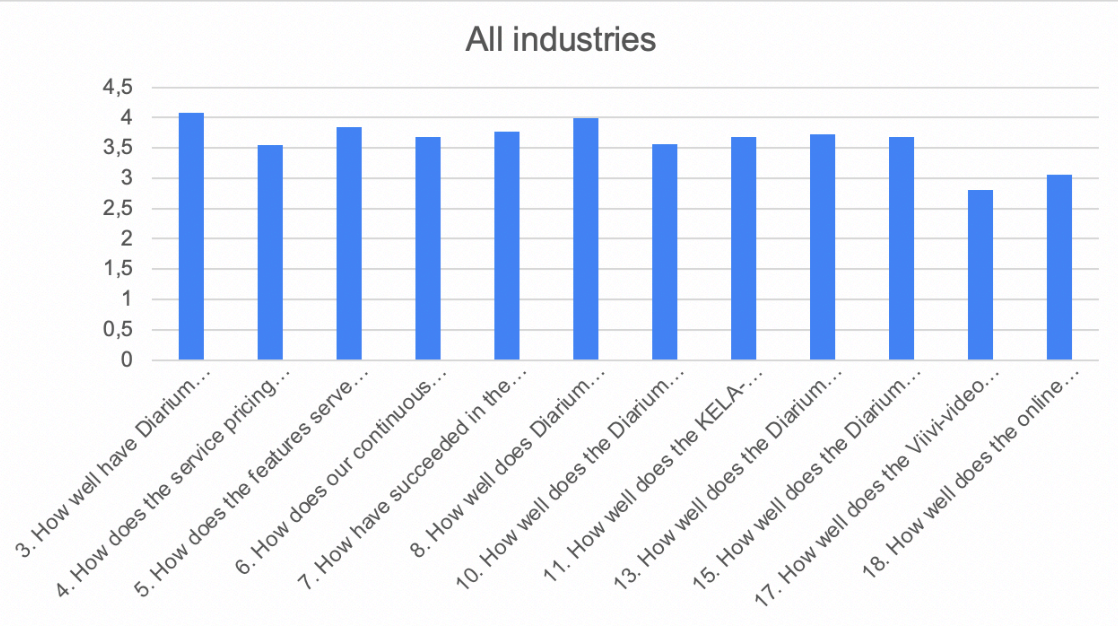

CHART 1. Multiple-choice scoreboard between all industries.

For the client company, as for any other company, the basic questions regarding its overall value for the customer, price correlation with the product quality, continuous improvement and ease of use must be relatively high if the primary activities of the company are stable and well organised. As referring to the product development theory (Trott, Paul 2017), to establish a proper product development department, the company must have a solid foundation for its activities first. To successfully determine how to allocate its resources for improving its service, one must know what the customers desire further from their product. It is the reason why it is vital to divide the survey's sections regarding different areas to find answers more specifically.

When looking at the scoreboard of chart 1, the reader can see that "Viivi-application" and "online appointment" features had the lowest score, as they also raised many open-word opinions. Mostly the thoughts were in the relation of the software being unable to let the person use sharing its screen for the patient and having the possibility of adding a third person to the session, which could ease the activities during an online session. In addition, opinions were in the relation of the program should be more convenient to use as this can be a continuous improvement for every software there is in the market. Answers gathered opinions that overall program interface needs stylisation to be easier to use, and potential changes to the third-party partners form layouts. These improvements are often never-ending areas for software companies since optimisation is the key of the essence.

Altogether, these eight open-word questions gathered a prosperous amount of different ideas for the product to improve itself for better customer-friendly directions. Although, since the surveys collected open-word answers worth of multiple pages, for the length of this thesis, there is no need to list all feedback, but to summarise it in a few points. Thesis author presented all of the ideas, opinions and charts of results to the client company's key personnel during a meeting and shared the results/analysis in a compatible format. These contacts from the client company commented the results to be truly useful for their future use and intend to delve into the material in more detail.

The thesis author and the client company were interested to see the results by different perspectives as how did the opinions differ between different industries and company sizes. The sizes were given from one as an entrepreneur to over 20. One must keep in mind that the value that is seen in chart 2. "Over 20->" can mean any size over the given value. The given options for company sizes allowed the results to be free of vague values that could affect the reliability of the results. Results showed that people from smaller companies as in entrepreneurs with 45.5% of participants were most eager to answer the survey. The largest clients were the second highest answerers with 29.4% of participants. These two target groups show that people are interested in change and giving opinions nevertheless of their company size. Rest of the answerer size groups were divided in similar percentual differences. Opinions did not differ much by number criteria in multiple-choice questions between these target groups, but entrepreneurs had more open-word answers than other target groups.

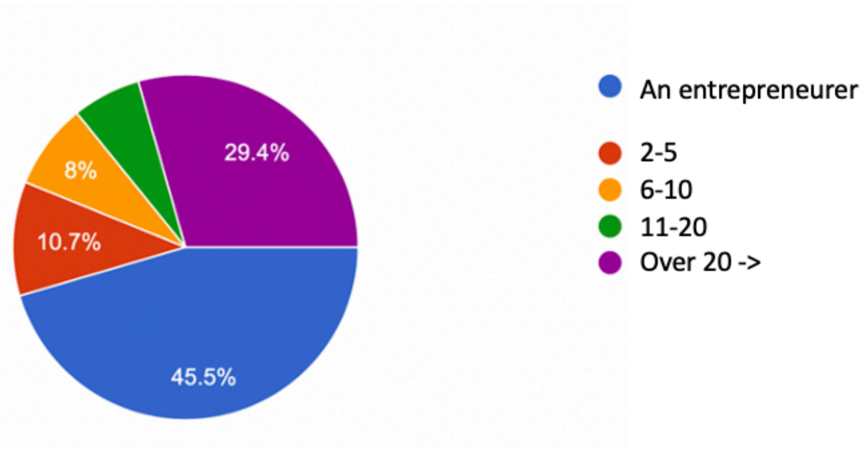

CHART 2. The size of the companies.

The next factor to inspect is the differences between industries that can be seen from chart 3. Among answers were slight differences visible between satisfactory among multiple-choice questions. The company received slightly lower score from segments "other health sector", "school department". These industries might be quite different as for example in school facility, the needs can be a bit different compared to private therapeutic companies. Both of these segments had less than ten people answering so the average is more susceptible to change. In addition, these answerers did not input any differentiative open-word answers so critical factors to change was unable to identify. FNS can potentially identify more opinions if they want to interview or create a specific survey for their school industry customers. However, the average between all industries were good in all of the questions as shown in chart 1. This score shows that FNS is serving its target segments evenly well, but still improvements are in place.

CHART 3. The industries of the companies.

For the research, it was nice to see that most of the 187 people that answered the survey, also took part in open-word feedback. Without open-word feedback, only numeral feedback does not show what the person truly thinks about the question or specific section. Also needs to be taken under consideration of people who randomly pick values for multiple-choice questions to be done with the survey faster. However, when the person has also written something to justify its opinion for the numeral value, it creates the answer and opinion more meaningful. These answers and especially differentiated answers, were the goal for the case study.

7 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Combining these two separate theories, one can form a sound basis for customer-centric thinking and align that to their corporate values and actions. When management works together with the same purpose and desire to create more value and benefits for their future and current customers; one can honestly say to be proud of the company that they represent. These two theories share the same passion and purpose of meeting customer needs.

The sales team works in the close customer interface and represents the brand and product up front, and the product development team works as their foundation. It is vital to unite these two departments to let the previously mentioned:" The cyclic model of innovation with interconnected cycles" generate more ideas (Trott, Paul 2017, 32). Using the sales team's potential fully, it can create more feedback already during the sales process that can be shared with the development. They have the closest network and social knowledge with the company's customers, so it is easier to gather information within their regular activities. Both departments might also share ideas for the benefit of making either department duties more effective, for example.

As mentioned before, during these days, as technology changes, it requires the company to be prepared to change its processes and methods to maintain its competitiveness. As the companies need to provide more customer value continually, it has to maintain its continuous dialogue to its target groups. The consultative sales approach gives the upper hand of the industry as a proper understanding of customers' expectations and hopes.

As the research and development theory dealt with its history, one must keep in mind that these globally changing times prove that the most adaptive companies will strive from the hard times. FNS also needs to keep up with their concentration on what they should focus on and use its utmost hardworking developers to learn from its mistakes of what is a profitable improvement and what is not. These decisions require critical and analytical thinking of the correlation between costs, usage of time and the results either in profitable or unprofitable.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The thesis aimed to find relevant information within the cooperation of both the product development and sales teams to sort out areas of improvement of their business through customer surveys. Despite the fact that the first survey was unsuccessful, the second survey validated the study with its data. The study managed to gather successfully enriching information for the company for its future endeavours. The thesis author was highly motivated during the thesis process since the study area was interesting, challenging and was close to an area/expertise he has worked on in the past as well.

For the sales department, the author recommends taking the steps of the customer-centric, consultative and value-based approach, more into their everyday basis when planning future customers and contacting current customers. When planning sales training and onboarding phases, these approaches should be included. These approaches will genuinely serve the company well when the ideology is taken by heart; creating more committed and satisfied employees as well as customer relationships. In time, more proactive customers will spread the word of the company's service and product, giving more potential customers as they hear it from their colleagues and peers, creating majority eventually in the market-share of its expertise product-line.

For the product development team, the author recommends using the method of the cyclic model of innovation with interconnected cycles as it combines both technical and societal knowledge and ultimately creates new fascinating ideas. This thesis project being as living proof that the team can utilise for future projects. All the plans and ideas cannot be put into use, but critical thinking and learning from mistakes and used ideas will guide the way to eliminate the unprofitable ideas from the beneficial ones. As mentioned before, it is up to the company how it wants to maximise all of the potentials of its every action and possessed resources.

For the future, it would be interesting to complete this kind of project with more time for its process; with the possibility of generating more answers and witnessing the impact that the research discoveries might accomplish. Will the overall customer satisfaction improve over time if the ideas are put in use, and how do the client company's customers see the annual changes that occur when they see that their ideas are being heard? On the other hand, this thesis subject has the potential of expanding its theory as well to a master thesis size by adding more literature of sales and brand management with the perspective of sales and product development.

As Paul Trott states: "One factor differentiates great companies from the others, and that is the products they sell" (Trott, Paul 2017, 460). When the company pursues towards success united with its personnel, it can be possible. The client company describes itself "Interaction between people is more important than processes and tools" (FNS 2020). This thesis project proves the line to be accurate; the interaction between the company's departments was admirable and essential for the success of the thesis process. Hopefully, the material, surveys, and the whole of what the process achieved will help the client company continue its operations even better and further than before.

Given the information that surveys generated and potentially generate in the future, the company can use it as a foundation for profitability calculation for upcoming improvements and projects. Previously mentioned ROI calculation can be used in this situation, for example. Since the information is from a direct customer interface, it can be seen as a reliable and valid source of information. If enough similarities appear among opinions/answers, it can give guidance to clear desired areas for improvements.

Uniting and creating annual cooperated surveys can genuinely create more enriching information that can be used for future endeavours. The author recommends that FNS continues these surveys annually to gather feedback from a different perspective compared to their annual customer service survey. Taking into account that combining the departments of sales and product development in the future as well throughout united workshops. United, as stated in theory, these departments can cooperate with efficient results. However, the information cannot be put in use altogether at once, since it needs to be processed and evaluated for future projects. After a time, something new always arises either as in product improvement or improvement in the processes and activities. As mentioned before, one can never hear enough feedback about its actions. Like a company, also a person is always growing with its knowledge and innovation and is never truly complete. As long as there is a thirst to be better, there is a direction onward.

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APPENDIX 1: CUSTOMER SURVEY PART 1: THE NEW CUSTOMERS

Welcome to the Diarium service feedback survey.

With the help of the survey, we want to find out our customers' thoughts about the Diarium service. In the survey, you will be able to influence Diarium's future development projects and give feedback on our success. Continuous development and customer experience are essential to us, so we hope that as many people as possible will participate in the survey.

The survey will be conducted anonymously, and your personal information will not be stored or used for any other purpose.

It takes about 5 minutes to answer.

Among all the respondents, we value one (1) 50 € gift card for the XXL sports store. Fill in your contact information at the end of the survey if you want to participate in the draw.

Thanking you for your cooperation,
Diarium team

Finnish Net Solutions Oy

Background

1. What is the size of your company?
    a. I am an entrepreneur / self-employed
    b. 2-5
    c. 6-10
    d. 11-20
    e. Over 20->
2. What is your industry?
    a. Physiotherapy
    b. Psychotherapy
    c. Speech therapy
    d. Occupational therapy
    e. Nutritional therapy
    f. Music therapy
    g. Podiatry
    h. Multimodal therapy
    i. Massage

j. Osteopathy
k. Naprapathy
l. Chiropractic
m. School department
n. Another health sector

3. How did you first hear about the service?
    a. Social media (for example Facebook. Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram)
    b. By Diarium Sales Representative
    c. Colleague
    d. Search engine (For example Google)
    e. Expos / Events / Seminars
    f. Webinar
    g. Online advertisement
    h. Magazine advertisement
    i. Direct marketing (For example Diarium Newsletter)
    j. Other

4. How would you prefer to contact us? Select options in order of 1. Most meaningful - 5. Least meaningful.

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

    a. By phone
    b. By Email
    c. Homepage chat-service
    d. Contact form
    e. Chatbot*

    Chatbot * = A chatbot that interprets text takes advantage of artificial intelligence, added intelligence. The chatbot can answer the most common questions asked by a web visitor on a website, for example, about a company's products, services or people's contact information.

4.1. Other?

5. What is the most meaningful way to get to know the service? Select options in order of 1. Most meaningful - 5. Least meaningful.

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

    a. Homepage
    b. Demo presentation
    c. The trial version
    d. Brochures

e. Webinars

5.1. Other?

6. Assess, how well the information about the service was available before the presentation? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

   1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

7. How well did we manage to introduce the service? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

   1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

8. Did the remote presentation implementation work for the demo? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

   1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

9. How did the connection work in the demo? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

   1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

10. What was your image of the service? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

   1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

11. How well do the features of the service meet your needs? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

   1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

12. How useful do you find the service for yourself / your company? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

   1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

13. How does the pricing of our service correlate with the benefits you get for yourself / your company? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

   1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

14. Did you miss any additional functionality/feature from the service? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

   1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

15. What features would you like to add/develop to the service?
   a. Open answer
16. Feedback
   a. Open answer

APPENDIX 2: CUSTOMER SURVEY PART 2: THE CURRENT CUSTOMERS

Welcome to the Diarium service feedback survey.

With the help of the survey, we want to find out our customers' thoughts about the Diarium service. In the survey, you will be able to influence Diarium's future development projects and give feedback on our success. Continuous development and customer experience are essential to us, so we hope that as many people as possible will participate in the survey. The survey is carried out together with the university of applied sciences thesis.

The survey will be conducted anonymously, and your personal information will not be stored or used for any other purpose.

It takes about 5 – 10 minutes to answer. The questionnaire is open until 30.6.2020

If you want to hear about current issues related to Diarium and new features, you can subscribe to the newsletter from within the Diarium program under your name.

Among all the respondents, we value one (1) 50 € gift card for the XXL sports store. Fill in your contact information at the end of the survey if you want to participate in the draw. The draw will take place at the end of the survey, and the winner will be notified in person during July.

Thanking you for your cooperation,
Diarium team

Finnish Net Solutions Oy

Background

17. What is the size of your company?
    a. I am an entrepreneur / self-employed
    b. 2-5
    c. 6-10
    d. 11-20
    e. Over 20->
18. What is your industry?
    a. Physiotherapy
    b. Psychotherapy
    c. Speech therapy
    d. Occupational therapy
    e. Nutritional therapy

f. Music therapy
g. Podiatry
h. Multimodal therapy
i. Massage
j. Naprapathy
k. Chiropractic
l. School department
m. Other health sector

Diarium service

19. How well has Diarium product served you? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

20. How does the service pricing correlate with benefits for you / your company? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

21. How do the features serve your company's needs? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

6. How does our continuous improvement support your company? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

7. How have you succeeded in the service's ease of use? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Customers

8. How well does the Diarium customer register serve you? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

9. What improvements do you have in mind for the section "Customers"
    a. Open answer

Treatments / Kanta

10. How well does the Diarium patient record (Kanta) - functions serve you? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

11. How well does the KELA-forms serve you? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

12. What improvements do you have in mind for the section “Treatments / Kanta”
    a. Open answer

Billing

13. How well does the Diarium billing service serve you? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

14. What improvements do you have in mind for the section “Billing”
    a. Open answer

Appointments

15. How well do the Diarium appointments serve you? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

16. What improvements do you have in mind for the section “Appointments”
    a. Open answer

Additional services

17. How well does the Viivi-video call application serve you? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

18. How well does the online appointment serve you? Select options in order of 1. Very bad - 5. Very good

    1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

22. In case you are charged with handling billing, does Diarium need to be synchronised and compatible with your accounting software electronically?
    a. We have already
    b. We do not need / This does not concern me
    c. We would have an interest in this

    In case you answered "We would have an interest in this" what accounting program do you have currently?

19. What improvements do you have in mind for the section “Additional services”?
    a. Open answer

Diarium program in general

20. What improvements, in general, do you have in mind for Diarium?
    a. Open answer

21. Free-form feedback/greetings for Diarium-team
    a. Open answer