

Insights into B2B Value Creation

A Case Study of Measuring Customer Journeys

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Abstract

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Title of the thesis Insights into B2B Value Creation A Case Study of Measuring Customer Journeys		
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Abstract <p>This study addressed the gap in methods and practices for examining customer journeys as mechanisms in value creation within the B2B sector. The research aimed to bridge this conceptual gap by developing a journey measuring framework based on theoretical concepts and applying it through a practical case study for WithSecure Corporation, a Finnish B2B cybersecurity company. The case study focused on refining and advancing practices for measuring and evaluating end-to-end customer journeys, with the premise that insights into customer actions, behaviors, and context could enhance overall customer experience and improve value creation.</p> <p>Structured as a qualitative case study, the research employed a dual approach. Firstly, the theoretical background, enriched by five semi-structured expert interviews in B2B customer experience, was integrated into a measuring framework. Secondly, this framework was translated into an artifact tailored for the case company, following design science research principles.</p> <p>The findings indicate that the customer journey acts as an interface for holistic value creation evaluation, quantifiable through three perspectives: value realization, value proposition, and value delivery. The developed framework, transformed into an artifact, offers a practical approach to measuring this value formation, contributing to bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical implementation of the value paradigm.</p> <p>The artifact introduced has positively impacted the case company by fostering communication and initiating new discussions around customer experience topics. Despite initial concerns about the inside-out focus and high-level positioning of some metrics, stakeholders acknowledged the value of the concept of having this end-to-end visibility as a needed basis for further development activities.</p>		
Keywords B2B value creation, B2B customer experience, B2B customer journey, customer journey measurement		

Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Case context.....	2
1.3	Case study objectives	3
1.4	Existing research	3
1.5	Research problem and strategy.....	4
1.6	Scope and limitations.....	4
1.7	Thesis structure	5
2	Service value creation	6
2.1	Evolution of value creation.....	6
2.2	Value co-creation.....	8
2.3	Design of service systems for value (co-)creation	9
3	Customer Experience.....	11
3.1	Definition of customer experience	11
3.2	Attributes of B2B customer experience	12
4	Customer journeys and journey mapping.....	14
4.1	Customer journey	14
4.2	Mapping the journeys – a tool for CX development.....	15
4.3	Value creation through journeys	16
5	Measuring value creation	18
5.1	Current CX metrics in B2B.....	18
5.2	Benefits and limitations of current metrics	19
5.3	Measuring the value	20
6	Research strategy	22
6.1	Qualitative case study.....	22
6.2	Dual approach for research strategy	23
6.3	Expert interviews	24
6.3.1	Sampling and recruitment.....	24
6.3.2	Interview structure.....	24
6.3.3	Analysis.....	25
6.4	Co-creation of the artifact	25
6.4.1	Current state analysis	26
6.4.2	Stakeholder engagement.....	27
7	Expert interviews	29

7.1	Conducting the interviews.....	29
7.2	Analysis and findings	30
8	Framework and artifact development.....	32
8.1	Synthesis of the theoretical framework.....	32
8.2	Case company current state.....	34
8.3	Structuring the initial artifact	36
8.4	Stakeholder engagement for co-development.....	37
8.5	The initial proposal for metrics.....	39
8.5.1	Value realization	40
8.5.2	Value proposition	40
8.5.3	Value delivery	41
8.6	Feedback and evaluation.....	41
9	Conclusions and discussions	43
9.1	Summary of main findings	43
9.2	Practical implications for the case company.....	44
9.3	Reflections on the research process	45
9.4	Reliability and validity	46
9.5	Practical and managerial implications	47
9.6	Theoretical implications	48
9.7	Future considerations	48
	References	51

Appendix 1. Expert interview discussion guide

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The introduction of service-dominant logic by Vargo & Lusch in 2004 marked a significant shift in understanding the structures of value creation. Move from a goods-centric view to a reality where value is co-created through intangible services, knowledge, and skills, emphasizes customer participation and tailoring offerings to their needs.

This evolution in value positioned customer at the center of the value construct also for business-to-business (B2B) organizations. It should be acknowledging that B2B customers are more and more expecting the same kind of experiences and value they encounter as individual consumers. This has heightened the importance of understanding also B2B customer experiences (CX). In today's landscape of intense market competition, the value of the exchange can no longer be quantified by mere input-output measures, but the outcomes and the entirety of the customer experience is to be considered equally vital (Zolkiewski et al. 2017). This shift in focus is challenging the dynamics especially in B2B, where CX has evolved from being predominantly transaction-based to embracing a more relational, partnership-oriented approach (Meyer & Schwager 2007).

In the B2B sector, the dynamics of customer relationships and experiences are substantially different from those in consumer businesses (B2C). While B2C relationships typically involve individual consumers, B2B engagements are inherently more complex. The customer experience in B2B involves a greater number of stakeholders and individuals, and the projects or engagements often span longer durations and are more extensive. Additionally, given the typically longer lifecycle of B2B customers and the higher revenues they generate over time, the risks associated with losing such customers are proportionately greater. (Maechler et al. 2017.) Leveraging and gaining value on this intricate ecosystem of actors, customers, partners require new approaches and abilities from companies in service development, management and strategic planning.

As there is a growing recognition of the need to rigorously examine customer experience as a key indicator of value, many organizations claim to prioritize customer needs. However, quite often customer-centricity may remain as high-level strategic jargon due to its intangible nature and the lack of explicit definitions or classifications. Each organization needs to define for themselves what customer experience means in their context and what good looks like. It's not an easy task and this makes it tempting to focus on more quantifiable areas of development. In these situations, tools like customer journey mapping prove valuable as

they render intangible aspects more actionable. This thesis focuses on exploring the opportunities to create similarly useful tools and frameworks to measure the value creation by utilizing the concept of customer journeys.

1.2 Case context

This thesis is carried out in collaboration with WithSecure, a Finnish B2B cybersecurity company. As a new brand – although stemming from decades of experience as former F-Secure for Business – WithSecure is focusing solely on B2B sector. With the new focus the company can generate new ways to engage with and serve their customers. This strive and dedication is visible also in the company’s vision to create a reality where cyber-attacks no longer result in significant losses, particularly for those who entrust their security to WithSecure. Achieving this goal is a collective effort that can only be accomplished in good partnership. (WithSecure 2023a.). In Figure 1 is presented the December 2023 update to strategic focus.



Image 1: WithSecure strategy focus and areas of excellence (adapted from WithSecure 2023b)

The main offering of the case company is its cloud based cyber security platform called WithSecure Elements Cloud™. It is a modular suite of cyber security capabilities, that is sold to end-customer via utilizing partner channel. The company’s strategy update reflects the direction of a strong partnerships and delivering security outcomes that add value to customer (WithSecure 2023b.) Practically, this use of the channel means that for the offering, the company has two customer segments: channel partners and end customers. In these dynamics, the relationship, brand perception, and customer experience of the case

company are significantly influenced by the customer's interactions with the channel partner. Often, customers may not even be aware that the services they receive from their partner are utilizing the case company's products and services. The focus in this thesis is on the end-customers.

As many other B2B companies, also WithSecure is facing the challenges of competing through technology and product features alone. The cyber security market is global and big companies such as Microsoft are dominating the field (Stacey 2023). In the highly competitive landscape, small players like WithSecure face the situation that challenging the resources and capabilities of larger enterprises is not a viable strategy. Instead, they must carve out their own niche for differentiation. Already today WithSecure is constantly getting appraise from its customers and partners of being easy to reach and to do business with.

1.3 Case study objectives

The objective of the case study is to define and develop practice to measure and evaluate customer experience and in the case company by measuring customer journeys. The premise is that by gaining insights into customer actions, behaviors and context throughout their journey, WithSecure can improve the overall customer experience to gain higher customer life-time value. While the application of customer journeys in business development is fairly well-established in the consumer sector, its potential in the B2B domain remains relatively untapped. Traditionally, B2B customer experience development and measurement have been limited to specific touchpoints or the overall customer relationship. This limited focus overlooks the nuanced value that a comprehensive journey perspective can offer (Zolkiewski et al. 2017).

The assumption is that embracing a journey-centric approach enables WithSecure to understand the diverse constructs that contribute to value creation at different stages of the end-to-end customer journey. As the B2B relationships typically involve a complex setting of stakeholders, multiple channels, and numerous interactions over extended periods. Understanding and managing these dynamics becomes crucial for building lasting and profitable relationships.

1.4 Existing research

From the early stages, service-dominant logic has been one of the fastest growing and cited themes in service research, taking a central position in the academic discussion. However, in comparison, the theme of B2B is seen peripheral to service research and the interest towards it very scarce. (Furrer et al. 2020.) In the field of (service) marketing and marketing

research, the topic of CX has been explored also in the context of B2B, however, the typical focus having been on the marketing activities or the execution of the purchase funnel. More recently, the focus has expanded to include value (co-)creation and customer journeys, marking this as an emerging trend in marketing research. (Chowdhury et al. 2023.) However, when considering a comprehensive perspective on CX, particularly the impact and value of B2B customer journeys, the number of studies remains quite limited (Zolkiewski et al. 2017, 175).

Even though the relevance of CX in B2B is rising, the discussion in both business and academia is still lagging. Now would be a perfect time for B2B companies to comprehend the complex customer journeys that their customers are engaging and leverage that understanding in the value creation. The limited focus on B2B gives the opportunity to develop the domain further, leading into new insights and frameworks benefitting both academic research and business practices in this context.

1.5 Research problem and strategy

This research aims to approach the identified gap of missing methods and practices for holistically examining customer journeys as mechanisms in value creation in the B2B sector. It has been concluded that value creation throughout end-to-end customer journeys yield benefits that go beyond evaluating individual touchpoints or interactions (Maechler et al. 2017). However, this thesis proposes that focusing on quantifying value creation throughout end-to-end journeys is underutilized, especially when taken into practice.

As outlined in chapters 1.4, there is a lack of academic interest towards value creation within the context of B2B. Furthermore, the discussion is often occurring on a very conceptual level and the practical implications are missing. This thesis aims to address this by taking the theoretical concepts and applying them in a case study. This approach enables the potential to improve both the case company performance and enrich also the existing knowledge.

1.6 Scope and limitations

The practical application of the framework in the case study will incorporate general best practices and research-based guidelines and, particular emphasis will be placed on elements that are most relevant to WithSecure. The developed framework is designed to facilitate data-driven decision-making, enhance customer experience management, and provide leadership insights. This foundational work is intended to support the company's ongoing customer-centric initiatives.

However, the scope of this thesis does not extend to prototyping and testing the framework. Including such a pilot phase would significantly broaden the thesis's scope and complexity, making it challenging to execute effectively within the given timeframe. The pilot phase would involve implementing the framework, data collection, and process refinement based on feedback and would require extensive collaboration within WithSecure and other stakeholders. Nevertheless, this thesis will explore future avenues for evolving the framework, emphasizing its dynamic nature and the need for adaptability in response to changing customer behaviors, market conditions, and technological advancements.

1.7 Thesis structure

The first part of the thesis set the theoretical foundation. The first chapters exploring the evolution of value creation, defining key concepts in customer experience, and examining the role of these in the B2B context. Next is outlining the concept of customer journeys and customer journey mapping, exploring the value creation opportunities embedded within these journeys. The theoretical foundation is finished by evaluating the current CX metrics and practices in correlation to value creation. The middle part of the thesis outlines the research strategy. This section describes the dual approach for the case study as well as the chosen methodologies.

The latter part of the thesis focuses on describing the empirical application of the research strategy. Chapter 7 describes the process of conducting the expert interviews, with analyzed main findings. Chapter 8 focuses on the case study and the design science research process of the artifact development, through the synthesis of theoretical frameworks, stakeholder engagement, and proposal for metrics.

The final chapter summarizes the main findings and conclusions. Furthermore, the final chapter reflects on the research process, discusses reliability and validity considerations, and explores future research avenues. The thesis is concluded by offering practical, managerial, and theoretical implications drawn from the research.

2 Service value creation

2.1 Evolution of value creation

Starting from the industrial era, value creation was long perceived as the realization of value through exchange. In that context, products or goods were exchanged for money, and the customer or consumer didn't play a role in the actual value creation (Bharti et al., 2015, 573).

After Vargo & Lusch (2004) published their article "Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing," the value creation of services gained prominence in discussions in both business development and academia. In the article, Vargo & Lusch describe the paradigm shift from the exchange of goods to the exchange of intangible services, knowledge, and skills. This shift also proposes a new definition of value creation mechanisms, shifting from goods with inherent value to services where customers actively participate in co-creating the value, and goods are seen as means to an end. Vargo & Lusch suggest that with this notion, the focus should shift from the producer to the customer, prompting producers to customize their offerings to meet customer needs. In a paper from 2010 Vargo & Lusch evolve their thinking further, stating that all parties involved in economic exchange are bound to resource integration and service provisioning to achieve value (co-)creation. Based on this definition all parties regardless of their positioning on the consumer-business spectrum could be described as B2B.

According to service value creation can be examined from the perspective of three spheres. The first sphere is the provider sphere, where the provider produces resources that may realize value for the customer as value-in-use. The provider has full control over the processes and actions in this sphere, acting as a value facilitator, but the actualization of value happens with the customer. The second sphere is the joint sphere, where the interaction between the customer and the provider takes place. This sphere is where actual customer value starts to form, and although the customer is seen to be in control of this phase, both the customer and the provider have a co-creational role in value creation. The third sphere is the customer sphere, where value is generated outside the interaction with the provider. It is within this sphere that the actual value-in-use takes shape and materializes. The value is influenced by the user's accumulated experiences with various resources, processes, and outcomes, in various social, physical, mental, temporal, and spatial contexts.

Almquist et al. (2018, 75) have approached the value formation specifically in the B2B context from five levels. These levels follow the progression of value creation in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, transitioning from more objective and tangible values to subjective and experiential values (Figure 2).

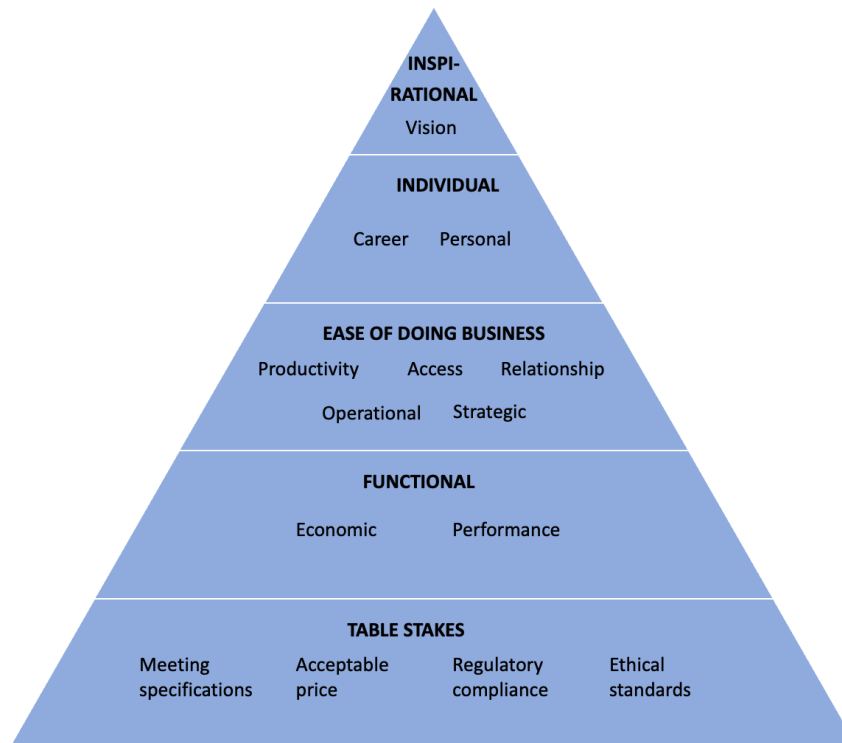


Figure 2. B2B elements of value pyramid (adapted from Almquist et al. 2018, 75)

On the first level, table stakes, the value-creating attributes are fundamental and expected to be in place for any ethical company. The second level, functional values, focus on fulfilling the performance and financial needs of the customer. On the third level, ease of doing business, the values continue to fulfil objective needs but begin to incorporate some subjective elements for the customer and buyer. The fourth level, individual value, the creation elements are explicitly tied to the buyer and the personal or professional gains they receive. Finally on the fifth level, inspirational value, the elements are forward-looking and significantly influencing the way the customer company perceives itself and the environment around them. (Almquist et al. 2018, 75-77.)

As businesses move farther away from the traditional exchange of resources and goods, the customer sphere becomes more relevant in understanding the dynamics of value creation. Providers also need to obtain certain levels of flexibility to react to changes in customers' processes to continue delivering and facilitating value creation (Brozovic et al., 2016).

2.2 Value co-creation

The creation of value in services is seen as a collaborative effort, shaped by contributions from both the customer, the service provider, and potentially other stakeholders (Grönroos & Voima 2013, 135). Unlike businesses focusing on goods, the value of services does not manifest at the point of resource exchange but rather revolves around value-in-use, influenced by the customer's context (Brozovic et al. 2016).

A conceptual model, proposed by Payne et al. (2008, 85-86, 90), underscores the interconnectedness of these processes and the importance of continual learning and adaptation in the pursuit of effective value co-creation (Figure 3).

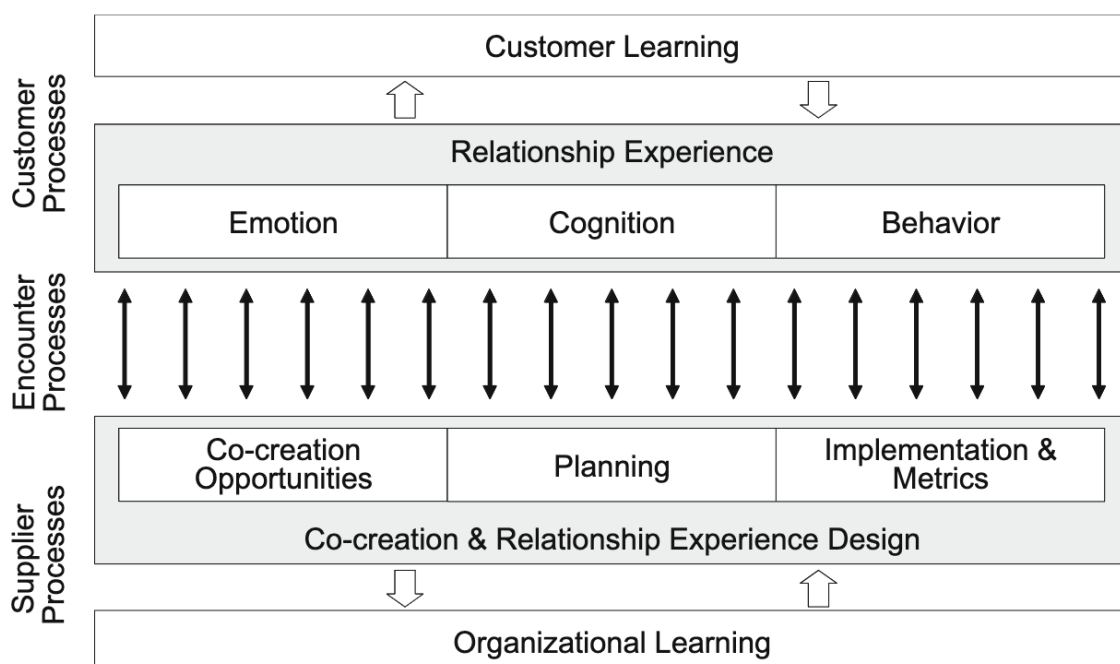


Figure 3. Value co-creation framework according to Payne et al. (2008, 86)

As Payne et al. (2008, 85-86, 90) describe, the first set of processes involves customer value-creating processes, in the B2B context specifically referring to the internal operations within customer organizations. These processes are important in managing their business affairs and navigating complex landscapes such as vendor relationships. The second set of processes include supplier value-creating processes, representing the provider's internal mechanisms for managing their business concerning customers and other stakeholders. This includes also co-creation opportunities and the relationship development. The third set of processes are the encounter processes, which link together the customer-provider relationship and include the interactions and other encounters between the customer and supplier processes. In this framework, customer and organizational learning is also seen as an

integral part. The value creation is strengthened by customer reflection and learning, and efficiently utilizing the knowledge of customer related value creation processes.

There is a growing interest also in B2B regarding value co-creation. However, some challenges that slow down the adoption of this idea. In B2B, where relationships are longer, investments and risks are higher, the value co-creation relies on trust-based and risk-sharing collaboration among autonomous firms. In best scenario this can result in the generation of innovative ideas and the formation of partnerships. However, the relationship must be mutually beneficial, and companies need to carefully evaluate the benefits and costs associated with it. Co-creation activities become interesting only if the benefits outweigh the costs and possible risks (Saha et al. 2022, 623).

2.3 Design of service systems for value (co-)creation

Vargo & Lusch (2010, 182, 185) assert that value creation is fundamentally an actor-to-actor (A2A) operation. Viewing value creation through this A2A lens offers a more dynamic and systemic perspective. Adopting a systems perspective is important as it provides valuable insights to the practical application of value co-creation principles. Taking a systemic approach to value creation is relevant to increase our understanding of how specific entities, such as companies, can engage more effectively. From service science perspective service systems can be described as configurations for value co-creation that involve people, technology, and value propositions. This structure supports connections between internal and external service systems, along with the sharing of information. Furthermore, Vargo & Lusch state that there is a need to shift towards an even broader view of (service) systems and ecosystems that encompasses generic participants in the system in the interconnected and dynamic global landscape.

Edvardsson et al. (2011) propose that the value creation and service exchange are integral part of the social constructs. In the paper Edvardsson et al. combine the S-D theory with social construction theories including social structures and systems, actors' positions and roles, and social interactions. These theories emphasize the continuous reproduction of social structures through a process of dynamic internalization and externalization that occurs during interpersonal interactions. This is seen also impacting value creation. Although the customer is the primary integrator of resources, and the provider's role is to assist in co-creating value within a specific context, these processes involve not only various knowledge and skills but also necessitate understanding the social positions and roles within service systems. Social systems have similarities with service systems.

Service logic offers an approach to enhance our understanding of service systems as it emphasizes the way actors combine resources for value co-creation. Design for service as a practice focuses on the practices on understanding the value generating elements and the different aspects of the experience, such as user experience. It can then deliver a practical methodology and tools for examining service systems within their specific contexts. This approach also enables envisioning future service systems and value conceptions by understanding how innovation might emerge from the reorganization of resources and the processes of resource integration and value co-creation by actors. (Wetter-Edman et al. 2014, 115.)

Where service logic brings a wider interpretation of services and the systems involved, design for services contributes practical, context-specific, and actor-focused methods, facilitating the use of service blueprinting and customer journey techniques in service research. This, in turn, makes these methods more effective for designing service systems and establishing the conditions necessary for actors to co-create value. However, there is a need to further explore the co-creation processes and systems could be part of the customers' overall value creation and what should remain fully in the control of the provider. (Wetter-Edman et al. 2014, 118.)

As design for services is looking at the context from a wider perspective, service design as a working methodology and practice can bring the human-centric point of view to the value implementation practices. Systemic development tends to take the viewpoint of the provider, or their internal practices and service design methods can be utilized to actively incorporate the customer perspective. Actively focusing on the customer point of view can also provide insights to the mismatch in the intended value and the actual value for the customer. This can support organizations to adopt continuous improvement development practices that is based on customer experience attributes. (Yu & Sangiorgi, 2018.)

3 Customer Experience

3.1 Definition of customer experience

The customer experience (CX) is holistic sum of the interactions, perceptions, emotions, and value a customer is having as the results of a company's actions (Verhoef et al. 2009, 32). According to Meyer & Schwager (2007, 118) CX includes both direct and indirect contacts the customer has with the company or brand. Direct contacts happen during different (service) interactions, such as purchase, and are often initiated by the customer. Indirect contacts happen when the customer is exposed to the company or brand in ways that do not include the company directly, such as reading reviews or interacting with a 3rd party. Through perceptions before the actual relationship, customers may already have some experience with certain companies or brands, laying the foundation for the nature of the customer experience (Maechler et al. 2016).

Typically, the realization of a customer experience is examined via touchpoints. Touchpoints are interactions between the customer and the provider. There is a wide range of interactions: those directly involving the company and its representatives, like visiting a website or attending a sales meeting, as well as third-party representations of the company. This also encompasses interactions that customers may engage with subconsciously. As all of the previous experiences have an impact on the future experiences, also every exposure to a brand, whether active or passive encounters, has the potential to influence the customer's perception and experience. Especially from marketing and branding perspective this emphasizes the importance of creating a cohesive brand presence across various channels, even when direct engagement may not occur (Meyer & Schwager 2007, 119-120.)

In majority of cases also the data about customer experience is collected via touchpoints. It needs to be noted that the value of the individual touchpoints differs and changes over time, hence making the customer journey relevant. (Meyer & Schwager 2007, 119-120.) As only some of the touchpoints are under the full control of the provide, Witell et al. (2019, 9-10) discuss touchpoint control as a way to manage customer experience. The touchpoints can be under the control of the provider, partner, additional actor in the ecosystem, or the customers. This introduces a dilemma to the provider since the customer experience is impacted by elements out of direct control of the provider.

Related to the dilemma of touchpoint control Zolkiewski et al. (2017, 175) present the challenges in conflicting drivers impacting customer experience. They present an example

where a company has outsourced its IT operations. A variety of touchpoints emerge as managers from both companies may interact to review if a defined KPIs, while their employees encounter a different set of touchpoints during a support case. This scenario illustrates the complexity of multiple customer experiences, which can become counterproductive if superficial solutions are employed just to meet KPIs and actual customer experience is overlooked.

Social constructs and environments also play a big role in the customer experience formation. Typically, the focus is on understanding and defining the customer and company employee dynamic impacting the experience. However, things such as other customers in a store impact on the individual experience. Same principles can be examined also in the online setting and interaction, where for instance a bad review on a company can impact the experiences of another entity. (Verhoef et al. 2009, 35.)

The concepts of value and customer experience are very much entangled and connected. In many cases it is difficult to separate one from the other, since value creation can be facilitated by customer experience and vice versa. Similarly, as with the value creation, also customer experience varies depending on the context, goals and perceptions of the entity having the experience (Verhoef et al. 2009, 33). Meyer & Schwager (2007, 119) use the example of a feature-rich product which, depending on the customer, can result in either a highly positive experience or a confusing and negative one. This underlines the significance of a well-crafted and targeted value proposition to maintain a high customer experience consistently across all relevant customer segments.

3.2 Attributes of B2B customer experience

Traditionally B2B CX and business relationships have been rationalized to be more about efficiency and balancing the costs and benefits (Meyer & Schwager, 2007, 119). Dealing with other businesses introduces a higher level of complexity and diversity to the experience. B2B relationships are characterized by their longer duration and greater depth, involving multiple individuals. Suppliers in B2B adapt their offerings and processes to align with the customer's needs to a certain extent. Moreover, the financial value of deals and the overall relationship is substantial. (Maechler et al. 2017.)

As the experience is formed for the individuals involved in the customer relationship, it is crucial to understand the variety of roles contributing to the formation of the holistic B2B customer experience. Particularly from a value creation perspective, the traditional dyadic approach, such as "buyer" and "seller" roles, can be too narrow. In B2B, these roles not

only represent individuals but also their organizations. The buyer and seller roles play pivotal roles in coordinating various value creation elements, extending beyond merely managing transactional buying processes. (Rusthollkarhu et al. 2021, 592.) It should be acknowledged that there are several different actors within especially the B2B customer experience, and it is a challenge to prioritize and identify the most relevant actors. For instance, an end-user in the B2B context can refer to users in the customer organization or it can extend to the vast network of partner, suppliers or customers. (Zolkiewski et al. 2017, 173.)

Since the B2B customer experience can be described more as relationships rather than individual transactions, the interactions between companies should be happening on several levels. For instance, the operational side in provider company should have a direct contact with the same level in the customer company. Establishing various points of contact can enhance visibility into the complexities of the relationship, shedding light on issues and priorities in due time. What constitutes as good experience and bringing value also vary based on the roles and functions of the experiencer. On the operational side the value of customer experience comes from ease of use and on the leadership level it is more valuable to see the potential business value that the relationship can generate. (Meyer & Schwager 2007, 119.) Building a lasting relationship and ensuring higher value require more actions and effort than entrusting the formation of customer experience solely to sales or customer service.

The B2B customer experiences are often seen as not requiring to be exciting in nature, it is important to be remembered that even in a B2B context, it is the people within the companies for whom the customer experience is formed. Neglecting the concerns, rational and emotional needs of the customer can easily lead to a disconnect with the customer. For example, the fear of failure underlies many B2B decisions. (Almquist et al. 2018, 75.) Also, the evolving consumer landscape and digitalization has already for some time been shaping the standards and expectations for B2B CX as well. Similar improvements in customer satisfaction and revenue growth were seen in both B2C and B2B companies that invest in CX improvements. (Maechler et al. 2016.)

Particularly in the B2B context, understanding the intricate relationship between value creation and customer experience is essential. It not only influences the ability to meet diverse needs of the customers and different individuals, but also plays a pivotal role in fostering lasting business relationships and achieving sustained customer satisfaction in a B2B environment.

4 Customer journeys and journey mapping

4.1 Customer journey

The customer experience spans over time, occurring before, during, and after interactions between a customer and the provider organization (Verhoef et al. 2009, 32). To capture the extent of the experience, the customer journey provides a tool to better understand the holistic nature of the experience. The concept of customer journey refers to the series of steps that customers take, as they engage with a company's offerings during the different processes, such as purchase. The engagement can include products, services, or experiences. (Norton & Pine 2013.) The journey approach differs from merely ensuring satisfaction in isolated interactions that consider the organization's products, customer service, sales personnel, or marketing materials. It also takes into consideration the temporal dimension as the journeys can be lengthy and extend across multiple channels and touchpoints. (Maechler et al. 2017.)

A customer's journey starts to form when the customer has a need, and they begin to explore possible solutions to the situation. What separates customer journey approach from more traditional way to examine for instance the purchase funnel, the customer journey aims to understand and track the various possibilities the customer can take to fulfill their needs (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 79).

It is only by viewing the customer's experience through their own context that organizations can begin to understand how to meaningfully enhance the experience (Maechler et al. 2017). When a customer has chosen a solution for their needs, the customer is quite far already in the customer journey and experience. Also, the current customer journeys and the related experiences include a vast number of channels, interactions and options on a global scale (Norton & Pine 2013).

According to Norton & Pine (2013) many organizations recognize the importance and value of customer-centricity and understand that this involves comprehending and influencing these customer interactions. When examined as an organizational management model, customer journeys can help solve the issue of aligning promises and value propositions to customers and at the same time ensuring organizational profitability through better meeting the needs of the customer. For effective utilization, companies must evaluate their strategies regarding customers, resource consumption and guiding the customers along their journey and the jungle of channels and touchpoints without causing discontent. Customer journey can provide also an opportunity to unify and structure the organization to align strategies based on customer needs.

Similarly, as with the CX, the B2B customer journeys have several aspects that differentiate it from B2C. In a B2B customer journey, diversity stands out as a primary differentiating attribute, involving multiple individuals in the experience and contributing to the complexity of relationships. Due to the extended nature of these journeys and the involvement of numerous participants, it's uncommon for a single individual to be part of the entire B2B end-to-end journey (Witell et al. 2019, 7-8). This characteristic results in prolonged customer journeys, encompassing a multitude of channels, interactions, and a plethora of touchpoints involving representatives of the organization and various technologies (Homburg & Tischer 2023).

Zolkiewski et al. (2017, 173) note that it is too simplistic to try to describe B2B experiences through a single journey, such as a buyer journey. Focusing on buyer journey alone would for example discard the generation of value-in-use part of the experience. In B2B there are several, sometimes conflicting, journeys taking place at the same time. As the customer companies typically have different profiles and segments, the B2B providers also need to understand the variety of distinct journeys to accommodate to the needs of different customers (Maechler et al. 2017).

4.2 Mapping the journeys – a tool for CX development

Forrester Research (2010) has defined a Customer Journey Map (CJM) as a visual document that illustrates a customer's interactions with the organization, processes, needs, and impressions during the entire customer relationship. CJMs are also a commonly used tool among service design when working together with various stakeholders.

When creating a journey map, it is crucial to clearly define customer needs and assess how well the company presently addresses those needs. This analysis lays the groundwork for defining the future state, offering a visual representation of the desired experience or service from the customer's perspective. Moreover, CJMs can highlight pain points experienced by customers during different interaction scenarios (Temkin et al. 2010).

Although the foundation of mapping customer journeys is the understanding that experiences are personal (Kalbach 2021, 32), the complexity of B2B customer journeys introduces a multifaceted dimension. B2B customer journeys involve several individuals, necessitating distinctions regarding whose experiences are being examined. Beyond individual perspectives, B2B customer experiences are frequently shaped by ongoing projects, diverse processes, and the active participation of various partners and suppliers (Saarjärvi & Puustinen 2020, 87; 89).

In B2B contexts, another challenge often lies in either overly high-level mapping overlooking relevant processes or stakeholders or, conversely, a map filled with so many details that it becomes unreadable. In both cases the journey map results in becoming a document without any actionable content. Understanding the purpose and usage of the customer journey map should determine the level of detail required.

4.3 Value creation through journeys

Often organizations concentrate on enhancing customer experience by addressing individual customer interactions and touchpoints, resulting in a limited and siloed perspective of the overall customer experience. To truly understand the holistic customer experience from the customer's viewpoint and foster value co-creation, there is a need for new approaches that shift the focus from an inside-out view to an outside-in perspective. Payne et al. (2008, 87) emphasize the importance of comprehending customer processes to grasp how a provider's offering aligns with the customers' ecosystem and delivers value. Providers should focus on mapping the encounter and related processes to uncover possibilities for value co-creation.

Similarly, as the customer journeys, the value creation isn't a linear process. The perceptions may start to impact value creation already before any interaction or relationship with the provider and, the different interactions impact the experience of value in different times and contexts. Value-in-use is an ongoing process where the value is tied to the customer's experiences, logic, and their ability to extract value from the products and resources they use. It's no longer about a predefined product or service bundle exchanged for money. This perspective highlights the importance of understanding and meeting customer needs and preferences as they evolve, contributing to a deeper and more dynamic relationship between businesses and their customers. (Grönroos & Voima 2013, 136-137.) The diversity of actors and journeys within the B2B makes it possible for the journeys to become misaligned. Also, there can be several journeys ongoing at the same time, with the same and different actors involved. This suggests that the provider needs to be able to carry out several different experiences related to the journeys. (Witell et al. 2019, 12, 22.)

To make the complex B2B relationship more manageable from journey perspective, Maechler et al. (2017) propose breaking down the end-to-end relationship into six distinct focus journeys. The journeys are defined to deliver the most value to B2B customers:

- identify the need,
- select and buy the solution or service,

- co-develop or customize to meet the customer needs,
- deal with issues
- use solution or service, and
- reorder.

Taking a comprehensive approach of the holistic B2B customer journey experience pose significant challenges and may present an intimidating task for any company. Nevertheless, a recent study by Homburg & Tischer (2023) reveals that, under specific conditions, investing in customer journey management can be profitable for B2B companies. Notably, such investments can become lucrative for suppliers operating in environments characterized by high customer switching costs. Providers that have advanced capabilities in customer journey management would benefit to concentrate on elevating customers' switching costs by offering interconnected products and services. Additionally, the integration of digital touchpoints can help alleviate coordination costs related to the customer journey. The study recommends that suppliers with a strong service focus consider investments in customer journey management, while also emphasizing the need to develop effective strategies for mitigating coordination costs.

5 Measuring value creation

5.1 Current CX metrics in B2B

The field of measuring holistic B2B customer experiences or customer journey performance is not yet well-established. Various simplistic approaches, such as NPS, CES, or CSAT, are widely accepted and commonly in use for CX measurement. These standardized methods often involve touchpoint-related surveys and questionnaires, but their reach and validity may be subject to scrutiny (Zolkiewski et al., 2017, 176). To gain a comprehensive understanding of CX, a multidimensional approach is needed to measure what really makes a difference in CX (De Keyser et al., 2015, 29). Despite this, many companies find it more convenient to employ straightforward, often single point-in-time measures that can be easily communicated to senior management and integrated into performance tracking dashboards (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

As outlined by Almquist et al. (2018, 77-78) in the value pyramid (Figure 2), the different levels of the pyramid require different measures. The lower levels, involving table stakes and functional value, are easily quantifiable using performance and input-output measures. When moving up the pyramid the value creation includes also more intangible and abstract elements, becoming more challenging to quantify. However, it is at the higher levels of the pyramid that differentiation in the market and increased customer loyalty can be achieved. As Almquist et al. discovered in the survey study, that while customers ranked cost reduction as the most important value creation mechanism, it did not rank among the highest values impacting the NPS score. Zolkiewski et al. (2017) propose that organizations, instead of solely focusing on metrics indicating satisfaction or loyalty, should concentrate on unraveling customer journeys and understanding how these journeys correlate with tactical and strategic goals.

NPS, CES and CSAT are the main CX metrics used also in the case organization. The NPS score is measured ones per year for channel partners and on quarterly basis for end-customer. CES and CSAT are measured as part of different service interactions, such as customer support cases.

NPS

One of the most widely adopted metric in CX is the NPS, Net Promoter Score. It is a relationship-level metric that assesses the likelihood of a customer recommending a service to friends or colleagues. The metric, published in 2003, is believed to have a clear correlation with company growth figures and is seen as predictive of customer loyalty and it aims to

measure how customer experiences influences future customer behaviour. (Reichheld 2003.)

The likelihood of recommendation is solicited on a scale of 0= would not recommend – 10= would definitely recommend. The actual NPS score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. The result is a score that can range from -100 to +100. Respondents giving a score of 9 or 10 are considered promoters, while those with a score between 0 and 6 are considered detractors. Scores of 7 and 8 are deemed neutral or passive and are not included when calculating the score. (Tuulaniemi 2021, 244.)

CES

Customer Effort Score, or CES is a metric to measure how easy and efficient the service encounter or interaction with an organization was. Originally presented as a customer service-related metric, it is widely used to evaluate other touchpoints and interactions. CES tracks the customer experience on a more transactional level than for example NPS. (Dixon et al. 2010.)

CES is measured by asking the customer how much effort they need to put forth to handle the situation, request or other action. The scale ranges from 1 to 5, 1 being very low effort and 5 being very high effort. When combined with other metrics, such as operational measures, it can bring clarity where customers are facing most of their inconveniences. (Dixon et al. 2010.)

CSAT

CSAT, or Customer Satisfaction, is a metric aimed at determining the quality of service and customer satisfaction following a specific interaction or service event (Holma et al., 2021, 263). CSAT can be seen as a supportive metric also to the NPS.

Typically, with the CSAT the respondents are asked to evaluate their satisfaction on a scale of 1–5, where 1 is not satisfied at all, and 5 is extremely satisfied. When appropriately positioned, the CSAT metric allows for a quick measurement of customer satisfaction, enabling organizations to timely respond to any negative experiences. (Kytösalmi & Tuoma, 2019.)

5.2 Benefits and limitations of current metrics

Using straightforward metrics like NPS or CSAT provides a practical starting point for grasping the current state of CX. However, these widely used metrics have faced criticism for

their perceived simplicity, offering insights that are so general that translating findings into concrete actions becomes a considerable challenge (Naguib 2022, 18). Notably, NPS has been a subject of scrutiny; while it serves as a broad indicator of the customer relationship, it lacks the granularity needed to comprehend subtle changes in the actual customer experience (Stahlkopf 2019). Furthermore, it has been criticized for emphasizing score improvement rather than addressing the nuances of the underlying customer experience (Naguib 2022, 18-19).

A common way to collect direct customer feedback is quite often a survey or questionnaire. However, a notable challenge with this method is that the respondents are usually limited to the existing customers of the organization (Naguib 2022, 19), and the outreach is typically quite restricted, in averaging only 7% of customers in B2C scenarios (Diebner et al. 2021). When employing methods such as customer surveys or questionnaires to measure customer experience, it is crucial to ensure that the measurement practices do not disrupt the customer experience itself. Poorly managed practices can lead to customer frustration and result in low-quality data. In the recent years it has also become easier to measure and accumulate data about the customers besides the direct feedback. Unfocused gathering of data often leads to unnecessary and meaningless data that is not actionable by the organization to drive value creation. (Zolkiewski et al. 2017, 176-177.)

5.3 Measuring the value

When looking at the holistic nature of CX and the comparing with the CX metrics currently in use, the need for improved metrics becomes prevalent. Especially in B2B the point-in-time metrics do not support understanding and tracking value creations. The actions and nature of value creation, similar as customer experience, are cross-functional and multifaceted, the commonly used business or customer experience metrics do not suffice or should be considered from other perspectives. In the context of CX and value creation, metrics should encompass the different processes, relationships, channels, and functions that are interacting with the customer. (Payne et al. 2008, 89.)

Zolkiewski et al. (2017, 174, 177) propose that measuring customer experiences should have a strategic purpose. Instead of input – output metrics the focus should be on measuring the outcomes the customer is getting. When focusing on the outcomes the customer is looking for, it is also easier to engage in strategic discussions about value co-creation and enhance also providers business outcomes.

When examining the capabilities and efficiency of an organization delivering the services, the traditional definition of productivity as the ratio of output to input remains functional.

However, applying this methodology in practice to services is challenging when focusing on the customer journeys. In many services, productivity does not solely improve by increasing the quantity of outputs; the content of the outputs also holds significant importance. According to a customer-centric perspective, poor productivity means using inputs for purposes other than benefiting customers. (Jääskeläinen et al. 2010.) Similar challenges are present when looking at the customer journeys. The performance of a journey is not necessarily in correlation with the performance of for example individual touchpoints. Often the organizations are split into looking at the customer experience through the lenses of their own functions and their performance is measured by the efficiency or performance of their responsibility area. (Maechler et al. 2016.) Focusing on only measuring the performance of individual processes or touchpoint, may lead into a biased and inaccurate view to the overall performance of customer experience. There are also organizations that have started to collect a more holistic view of their service performance with integrating financial and non-financial data together (Patti et al. 2020).

One could suggest that there is a strong correlation between the foundations of CX and customer journeys, and the value co-creation mechanisms. Even when the direct touchpoints in the journey are contextually owned by the provider, it is typically that the customer initiates the contact, turning it into a value co-creation situation. Indirect contacts and value in use are entirely customer-driven parts of the customer experience, representing a shift from the dyadic provider-customer framework to a more dynamic relationship.

De Keyser et al. (2015, 23-26) propose a concept that CX is formed through a cyclical pattern where customer engagement and the value come together. According to the concept, CX follow three stages: from anticipation to realization to reflection. In the anticipation stage the customer selects the means to reach a goal. This phase also anticipates the resulting value estimation and, in some cases even value realization starts here. The realization phase is where the interactions and engagement happen, and the customer is actively striving to reach the intended goals. This is also where the customer journey is typically considered to take place. The final stage of reflection is where the actual value is created, and the perceived value gets reflected against the realized value. The stages become a cyclical pattern as they are repeated until the customer either quits the process or reaches the end-goal. The similarities of this concept and the value creation spheres described by Grönroos & Voima (2013, 140-142) are evident.

6 Research strategy

6.1 Qualitative case study

The case study approach is particularly well-suited for exploratory and descriptive research, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the defined research topic within a real-life context. In a case study it is common to include data collection from several sources and it can be used for many types of issues and research objectives. The selection of a case study methodology is grounded in the objectives of this thesis and is ideal for exploratory approach, which is central to this research. Case study allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena in question and is useful in areas where little prior research knowledge exists. In its qualitative nature, this methodology is conducive to understanding the nuances and dynamics that traditional quantitative methods might overlook. (Gray 2018, 262-263.)

Since the case study is limited to the chosen organization and the specific problem, including expert interviews into the body of knowledge will provide the research with a broader perspective on trends and commonalities. In the co-development phase of the research, a design science approach is employed in conjunction with service design methodology. This is done to create an artifact that will serve as a foundation for future development within the case company.

6.2 Dual approach for research strategy

In addition to the literature review, the research employs two methodological approaches: expert interviews and design science research for practical artifact development (Figure 4).

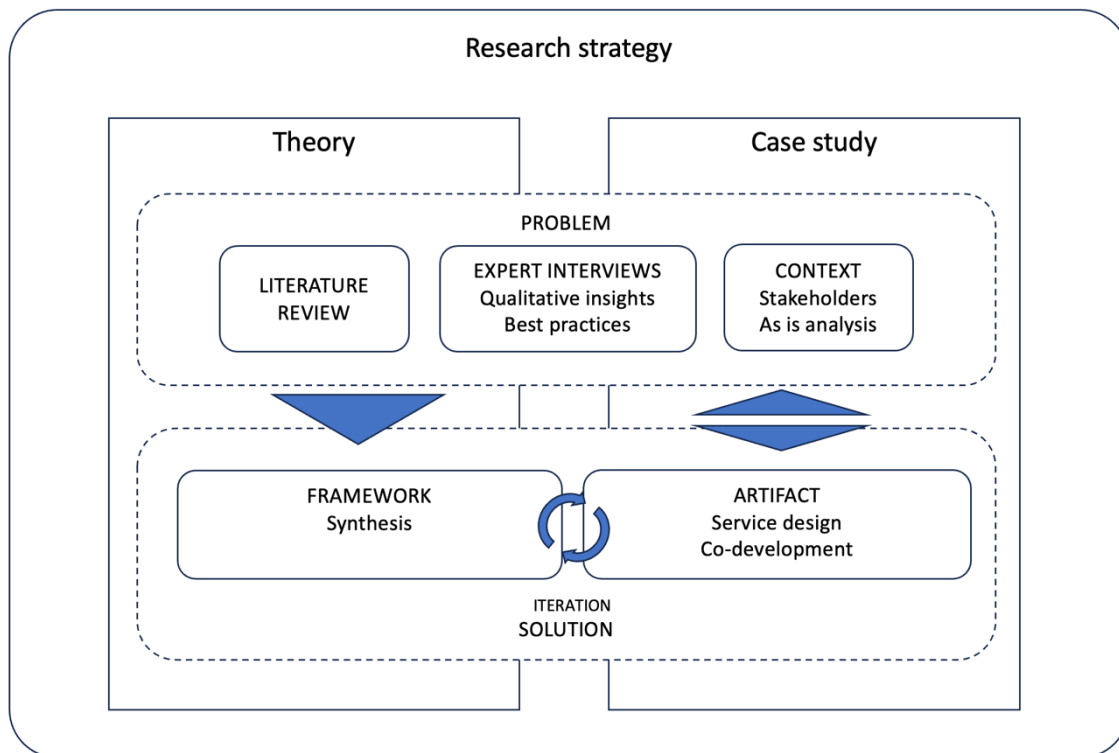


Figure 4. Research strategy

The first methodology involves conducting expert interviews to collect insights from the field. This approach is selected based on its effectiveness in delving deeper into the subject matter (Ojasalo et al., 2021, 106). By collecting real-life examples and insights from professionals in the field, this approach ensures a twofold benefit. Firstly, the development of the theoretical framework is enriched with context-specific knowledge and secondly the artifact development is benefitting from working best practices.

Furthermore, the practical development of the customer journey artifact is based on design science research (DSR), utilizing service design tools and methodologies. The framework development focus on the first phases of DSR process of exploring and identifying the problem; defining the solution criterion; design and development of the initial framework, which is the artifact. The following phases of demonstration; evaluation; and communication are left outside this thesis. (Shirley & Hevner 2013, 342.) Previous service design research demonstrates that DSR is effectively used for creating artifacts like new methods and models, evolving also service design to meet challenges in technology and complex environments (Teixeira et al. 2019, 585).

6.3 Expert interviews

The primary objective of these interviews is to gather real-life examples and best practices concerning the advancement of CX initiatives, customer journey thinking and related metrics within B2B organizations. The interviews are conducted as semi-structured interviews, which allows probing deeper into the different aspects related to these topics (Gray 2018, 381).

The interview discussion guide (Appendix 1) is organized around three themes, each comprising a set of open-ended questions. The use of open-ended questions provides flexibility, enabling adjustments to the sequence and the inclusion of related follow-up questions, facilitating a deeper exploration of participants' responses (Ojasalo et al., 2021, 108).

As qualitative research method the validity of the data collected in interviews is more challenging to manage (Gray 2018, 384). In this case for the semi-structured interviews the validity is managed through the discussion guideline keeping the discussion focused on the research topic. Also, a review and testing of the interview content is done together with another service design and researcher professional. The same discussion guideline is developed in both Finnish and English.

6.3.1 Sampling and recruitment

The focus is on CX experts with extensive B2B CX and customer journey development experience from different fields and levels of organization. To evaluate the maturity and suitability, desk research and network referencing is used to profile and identify the correct interviewees. The goal of this sampling approach is to ensure that the interviewed participants have relevant knowledge and experiences related to the research topic.

The recruitment will happen through reaching out directly to the selected participants via email or social media. After the initial contact is made a more thorough description of the context and development work is emailed to the interested parties. After their confirmation of participation, a one-hour on-line interview time is scheduled. The aim is to interview 5-6 experts.

6.3.2 Interview structure

As interviews are always based on interactions, it is important to establish trust with the participants to gain accurate insights (Ojasalo et al. 2021, 108). To facilitate this, comprehensive information outlining the context and data usage specifics for this development work is shared with participants during the recruitment phase. Same information is re-

capped in the beginning of the interviews to ensure the participants are aware of it and consent to be part of the research. This will be followed by a brief description of the interview content and walk-thru of the session. A consent for recording the interview is also asked.

The first theme of the interview is about establishing an understanding of the participant's experiences in B2B customer experience development and their current role related to this. If applicable, in this section the different CX practices, such as differences between B2B and B2C, in their current organization is also discussed.

The second theme is about experiences in CX measurement practice and customer journeys in the different levels of organizations. Focus is on understanding the role CX metrics and journeys are playing in the different levels of the organisation. In this theme the discussion is also around what are the participant's experiences in developing and driving CX initiative through metrics.

The final theme is about the learnings and best practices. The discussion will be about what have been the biggest successes and what are the things the participants would do differently. The goal is also to find similarities and differences between organizations and industries in adopting CX measurement-based practices.

6.3.3 Analysis

Reporting of the interviews is anonymous to ensure the participant's ethical treatment and higher participation. The interviews are analyzed by using affinity mapping or diagramming. Affinity mapping is a methodology to structure and organize research data through finding similarities and common themes within the materials. The themes are grouped under common theme and findings that are related to each other are grouped and organized by topic. These groups are then titled and further organized into larger categories. (Tuulaniemi 2011, 154.)

The aim is to discover common themes from the interviews that can then be further merged with the theoretical framework. These identified themes will serve as essential building blocks, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic and supporting the theoretical framework.

6.4 Co-creation of the artifact

The artifact development is leaning on the methods and concepts from service design, such as customer journeys. Service design methods have been applied to real-world scenarios, but are lacking in rigor and systematic research basis, hence the methods benefit from

enrichment from other fields of research (Teixeira et al. 2019, 578). Design science research (DSR) provides the academic foundation for the framework development. With the roots in the field of information systems (IS), DSR is an approach that seeks to advance knowledge through the design and creation of artifacts and the analysis of the processes and principles involved (Shirley & Hevner 2013). Service design outcomes can be examined as artifacts resulting from applying DSR to service design. However, it should be acknowledged that the artifacts resulting from a service design process are different in nature from the typical DSR artifacts which involve information systems or software. Service design-based artifacts are based on the understanding the experiences of the different actors involved in process or system. (Teixeira et al. 2019, 585.)

In addition to developing an artifact to solve a defined problem, the aim of DSR is to contribute to the advancement of knowledge of theory or methods. The artifacts and their abstractions are also part of the knowledge and theory building; however, these artifacts have not yet reached the stage of forming a comprehensive theory. Through the artifacts DSR bridges the gap between scientific research and practical application. (Shirley & Hevner 2013, 338, 341.) The contribution of the framework artifact in this study could be positioned to build on the theories and methods used in service development, service value (co-) creation and service design.

6.4.1 Current state analysis

As stated by March & Storey (2008, 726) DSR focuses on problems, developing a picture of the current state and the difference between the desired future state is necessary. The framework development initiates by assessing the current state of CX practices and customer journeys within the case company. These insights are integrated with theoretical background and expert interviews to formulate the initial customer journey measurement framework hypothesis. The definition of the future state and evaluation of the actions needed to reach it is out of the scope of this thesis.

The current journey mappings done in the case company are designed to operate at a strategic level. Thus, also the developed framework is operating on the same level, meaning it is intended to provide a high-level overview rather than granular details, which is crucial for top management decision-making. Through creating a system to measure and quantify the effectiveness and impact of the customer journey, the aim of the framework is to track relevant strategic level metrics and KPIs that reflect the journey's success.

6.4.2 Stakeholder engagement

As outlined, service design is used as a working method to structure and guide the development work. Similarly, as DSR, service design is based on an interdisciplinary approach and can take into consideration different organizational levels and cross-functional operations. Service design offers clear processes to involve and engage stakeholders throughout the entire process (Ojasalo et al. 2021, 71). This approach enables the participation of various stakeholders in the development process, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding and buy-in for improving the customer experience (Stickdorn & Schneider 2019, 44-45). By involving stakeholders in the development process, the resulting framework is better aligned with the needs of different organizational units and decision-making levels within the company. Utilizing service design will also drive a more customer-centric culture in the target company (Ojasalo et al. 2021, 73).

The baseline for the initial artifact is collected through stakeholder engagement across the organization. These engagements are structured to establish iterative feedback loops, ensuring that the framework is also practical and applicable across the different organizations and functions. Identification of stakeholders is based on their involvement in various processes along the end-to-end customer journey, such as lead pipeline or service delivery. These conversations are conducted as individual discussions or small group conversations.

In these discussions, one focus area is on the data currently being tracked throughout the customer journey. It's important to understand the types of data being collected and how this information is used to understand customer behaviors, needs, and pain points in the journey and value creation. The diverse perspectives of the different stakeholders shed light on the current practices and understand what are the datapoints and views bringing most value from the stakeholders' perspective to making an impact on the customer journey. These internal dialogues are also used to understand how effectively the current data is integrated and utilized across different departments. Data silos within an organization can lead to a fragmented view of the customer journey, hindering the ability to deliver a concise and efficient customer experience.

The proposed framework is reviewed with the same stakeholders that were involved in the initial discussions and potentially including new stakeholders. The feedback round is crucial as it brings different perspectives and expertise, ensuring that the artifact is practical, relevant, and effective. The feedback received from stakeholders is integral to refining the artifact. This could involve addressing any gaps identified, simplifying complex areas, or adding new components that were previously overlooked. The aim is to have this as a basis for

future creation of a more robust and applicable framework that aligns closely with the company's and customers' needs. Proposed next steps would be to test the artifact in practice as it would add a practical dimension to the research, allowing for contextual validation of the framework.

This collaborative effort seeks to ensure a holistic perspective that captures the varied aspects of customer experience as well as the operational and business performance goals. Through this approach, the final framework will be a product of collective expertise, ensuring that it aligns with the needs and expectations of all stakeholders involved.

7 Expert interviews

7.1 Conducting the interviews

A series of 5 expert interviews (Table 1) were carried out with professionals specializing in customer experience. The primary aim was to enhance the theoretical foundation with current insights and support the artifact creation with CX best practices.

Table 1. Interviewee descriptions, roles and CX responsibilities

	Current role	Industry	Organization	CX responsibilities
1.	Customer Insight Manager	Engineering	Global marketing	Global CX development, providing programs, tools, and frameworks. Focus on supporting country-level operations. Running Voice of Customer program.
2.	Customer Experience Specialist	Manufacturing	Finance & Business control	Owner of CX practices and programs, such as CX council. Aligning CX targets to business targets.
3.	Service Design Competence Lead	Engineering	Design	Design of user and customer experience for services. Customer experience and design competences development in the organization. CX ambassador program.
4.	Head of Design	Telecommunications	Design	Customer and user experience of digital services. Developing customer experience understanding within the organization with processes and operating models around CX. Manages a team of UX and service designers.
5.	Service Designer	Telecommunications	Design	Design of user and customer experience for digital services. Customer experience competences development in the organization.

As described in table 1, the selected experts represent a range of organizational levels and roles where CX activities are present, contributing to a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with customer-centric initiatives. The responsibility areas in CX also varied a lot and didn't always seem to be tied to the boundaries of the work titles. For example, the roles directly involved in day-to-day CX design operations also had responsibilities in educating and maturing the organization in CX. The interviews collectively provide insights into the practices, challenges and successes of implementing customer-centric ways of working particularly within global B2B organizations. The main insights were to enable data-driven CX decision-making with correct metrics, the strategic use of tools like customer journey mapping, and the importance of change management and buy-in from top management to ensure organization wide adoption.

It should be acknowledged that there may be biases towards design and service design roles in the insights gathered. However, it's essential to recognize that customer experience inherently centers around understanding customers' needs and expectations. These aspects are fundamental to design practices, making it a natural focal point. Design can also help in visualizing and illustrating the interconnected and -disciplinary nature of customer experience.

7.2 Analysis and findings

One of the main discussion points in the interviews was the importance of data in understanding and improving customer experiences. The interviewees have faced the challenges in collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to support CX agenda. NPS was in use as the main CX metric in all the organizations. The relevance of NPS as the main CX metric was questioned, however, it is widely in use and accepted in the organizations, making it difficult to replace. CSAT was mentioned as another meaningful metric alongside NPS, and it was regarded as a better metric on the actual customer experience.

From organizational change point of view the interviewees highlighted the challenges related to organizational structures, ownership, and the need for clear roles in driving customer experience initiatives. Issues include a lack of clarity on who owns customer experience, challenges in aligning global and local strategies, and the slow process of transforming organizational culture towards customer-centricity. In each of the organizations, there were established global guidelines or playbooks defining the expected level of customer experience to be delivered. With the guidelines there is an effort to align CX practices to a certain standard, however, the different countries and regions need to have enough auton-

omy to cater to the needs of the different markets. This on the other hand brings new challenges from global perspective to the efficient management and operations of the CX efforts and highlighting the need for and importance of governance and ownership.

Ensuring top management buy-in was seen as the way to ensure commitment on high enough level in the organization for the CX initiatives to move efficiently forward. Customer journeys were highlighted as the main strategic tool to enable this. The interviewed Customer Experience Specialist has been actively developing CX practices with utilizing customer journeys. When discussing the biggest successes in driving CX initiatives, they mentioned the benefits of visualizing the customer journeys into customer journey maps. They described it as being one of the main tools to facilitate the discussion between CX and top management and to ensure their buy-in. The presentation of the journey with the gaps and successes have illustrated the need for developing common practice for managing CX efforts and the value creation processes. Also, the combining the customer satisfaction data with business data for tracking the journey has enabled the discussion to happen on a meaningful level from a C-level perspective. Being able to discuss CX on this level has underlined the need for a cultural shift, challenges associated with conflicting priorities, and the recognition that transforming a large organization requires persistence and continuous effort. Majority of the organizations didn't seem to be utilizing customer journeys or journey mapping on a strategic level. Quite often the journey mappings are still done as part of design department research and as part of a project. However, there also were indications of leadership-initiated journey mapping projects, providing a foundation that the design team could then build upon to advance their own journey-related efforts.

8 Framework and artifact development

8.1 Synthesis of the theoretical framework

Based on the literature and the expert insights, customer journeys can be examined as a critical interface in business operations that connects the customer, the integrated services and the provider. It also enables the value creation mechanisms to take place and be measured (Figure 5).

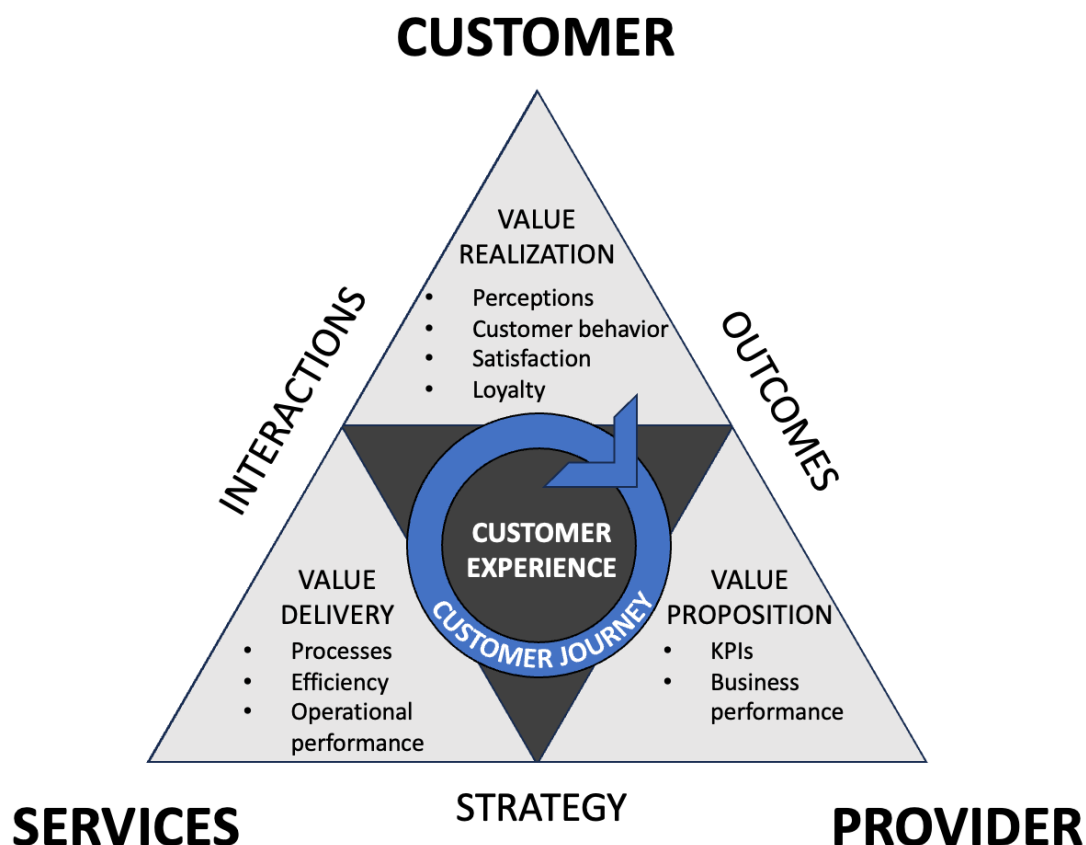


Figure 5. Customer journey as interface in the value framework

The customer-provider relationship should be examined as more than a series of touch-points leading to a predefined goal. From the provider's perspective, their role goes beyond mere service delivery; they act as enablers or facilitators of potential value creation and customer play an active role in the value realization. Customer journey can be seen as a concept that encompasses this holistic customer-provider relationship, thus feeding into the formation of customer experience. Recognizing the dynamic and interconnected nature of customer experience, journeys make it possible to examine this relationship from a systemic point of view that enables it to be designed, measured and managed.

A critical interpretation involves recognizing the active role customers play in value co-creation and value realization, with their distinct attributes such as context, resources, emotions, and perceptions. From a measurement perspective, it is essential to understand how customers perceive the brand, product, or service. These perceptions are influenced by marketing, direct and indirect interactions, word-of-mouth as well as personal and previous experiences with the brand. Beyond perceptions, it's important to monitor actual customer behavior. As customers are active participants in the exchange, their behavior significantly shapes the customer journey and impacts on the realization of value. As the value realization is dependent on the customer's context, the multitude of variables within this context makes it challenging to externally evaluate all the influencing motives behind customer behavior. Satisfaction and loyalty metrics provide a high-level indication of the extent to which customer expectations are met and whether the expected value is realized.

Value (co-)creation is driven by the anticipated outcomes of the exchange, for both the customer and the provider. It should be acknowledged that these expected outcomes can sometimes conflict, resulting in the complexity of managing customer relationships and delivering mutually beneficial value that meets divergent needs and expectations. Through their value propositions, providers set the stage for value creation, offering opportunities for customers to derive value. The provider is using the value proposition to evaluate the effectiveness of the business strategy and operations from their perspective. Defined KPIs and business performance metrics, such as sales volumes, revenue retention or market share, can shed a light on the value proposition delivering the expected outcomes.

The services dimension provides the basis for the interactions to take place and works as the platform for value delivery. This aspect evaluates how well the processes are aligned to meet the customer needs, how resources are managed and utilized in the service delivery process and are the operations efficient and enhancing customer value. It relies on the interactions between customers and providers and that understanding and optimizing these interactions is relevant to the actualization of customer experience. Central to these interactions are the actors and channels that form the concrete platforms for the generation of customer journey.

The role of strategy in shaping customer experience, and value, cannot be emphasized enough. It determines not only the importance of operational performance, aligning capabilities, resources, and processes but also how value propositions are conceptualized and delivered. This strategic direction is pivotal in aligning the organization's objectives with customer needs, ensuring that efforts are not just efficient but also effective. Adopting a

systemic design approach to customer journeys could facilitate better alignment across various functions and organizations, leading to improved customer experience and business performance. Journeys should be viewed as the outcome of executing a strategic plan, with intentionally planned series of events created to provide value to the customers, achieve profitability, and stand out from competitors (Norton & Pine, 2013).

As highlighted in the interviews, illustrating and visualizing the customer journeys can make these abstract and intangible dependencies more approachable and actionable. Mapping out these journeys can make the dynamics of customer interactions and experiences more understandable, thereby facilitating better strategic decisions. Integrating business metrics into this discussion is crucial. It can help in bridging the gap between customer experience and tangible business outcomes, by explaining how customer journeys and CX impact on performance indicators such as increased sales, improved customer retention, and higher customer lifetime value. Applying the same principles into creating a tangible artifact can be beneficial in the development of more advanced CX measurement practices. These practices are essential for understanding how value is created and perceived by the customer and correlating it with key business performance indicators. Together with the customer journey the metrics could serve a dual purpose on customer satisfaction and business efficiency – providing a more comprehensive understanding of how customer journeys directly impact business success. This enriched perspective can provide substantial support to leadership in driving initiatives forward, with the aim of improving and establishing robust CX processes. Such an approach underscores the importance of aligning customer-centric strategies with business objectives, illustrating the direct correlation between effective customer journey management and business performance.

8.2 Case company current state

WithSecure has a long history of working together with channel partners and with the new strategy, the company places even more emphasis on the business via channel partners (WithSecure 2023b; Figure 1). This channel focus has led to a historical tendency to overlook the end-customer perspective in CX. However, during the past year some efforts have been put to gaining a deeper understanding of the end-customer experience. It also enables WithSecure to better support the partner channel by comprehending the status of end-customer experience. WithSecure has also introduced a co-security concept that enables collaborative partnerships with both customers and partners. This approach emphasizes building relationships further and creating value beyond traditional transactional elements, like license sales. It is particularly relevant to the partner channel and necessitates a distinct set of value propositions and positioning strategies towards end-customers.

Due to the realization of the importance of end-customer experience, WithSecure has already undertaken extensive, high-level customer journey mapping of the end-customers of the cloud portfolio. This mapping provides a broad, strategic overview of the end-to-end customer experience. With the foundational mapping in place, the focus now shifts to understanding how the customer journey creates value for both the customers and the case company. This involves analyzing and measuring the stage of the journey to see how it contributes to customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and overall business success.

Regarding current customer experience measuring practices, the focus has primarily been on measuring product-related customer satisfaction (CSAT) scores, net promoter scores (NPS) related to loyalty and, some service-related customer effort scores (CES). The view provided by the existing CX metrics is limited and only giving insights to parts of the customer base. The collection and analysis of different data is also distributed between different organizations. Even when looking at customer experience data points alone, a common, centralized view is missing. The situation becomes more complex when operational and business metrics are included.

It must be recognized that even with strategic journey mapping and other project-based efforts, there is a significant variance in the maturity level of understanding customer experience and journeys across different organizations and functions in the case company. For instance, some departments like technical support actively track and measure their performance using customer satisfaction metrics. In contrast, some R&D organizations lack customer-related metrics entirely and have minimal, if any, interaction with customers. There is also a difference between the organization hierarchy in the maturity. Project-based customer journey mappings have primarily introduced the concept at the managerial level, only occasionally involving individual contributors from other levels.

8.3 Structuring the initial artifact

As the case company has a wide range of products and services, the evaluation of the practical application of the framework is narrowed down to the end-customers of the cloud-based security solution, WithSecure Elements™. Also, this has been the focus for the high-level strategic customer journey mapping done previously (Figure 6).

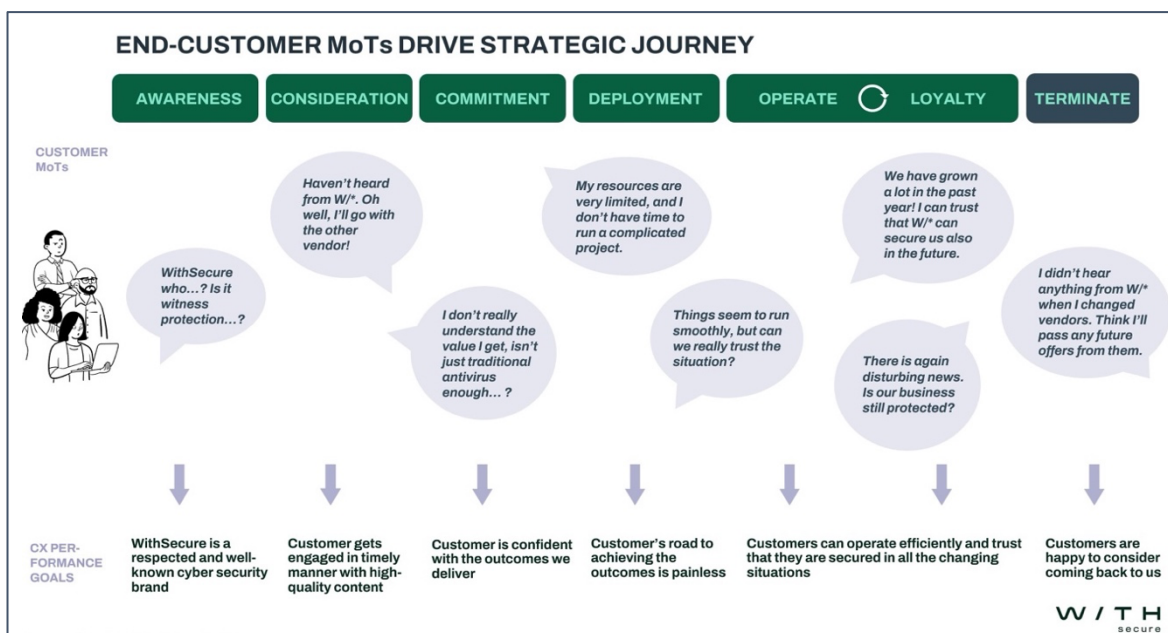


Figure 6. Strategic end-customer journey

The mapping describes the main phases of the end-to-end customer journey with the identified customer moments of truth. These moments are pivotal points in the customer's journey that significantly influence their overall experience and impacting the business outcomes. Furthermore, they are highlighting some of the pain points and opportunities associated with the experience. The mapping also suggests CX goals for each phase in the customer journey. These customer moments of truth and derived CX goals are assessed through the framework, evaluating the journey performance. The selection of metrics are to take into consideration aspects from value realization, value proposition and value delivery. The first proposal for the model is compiled bases on the as is status of available CX, operational and business metrics relevant for the different phases in the described customer journey.

Furthermore, the proposed metrics in the initial model are divided into indicator and success metrics. Indicator metrics are in-journey signals that predict the likelihood of achieving end-of-journey success. They provide insights into the customer's ongoing experience and allow for proactive adjustments. In addition, success metrics are used to define whether end-of-

journey success has been reached. (De Quintanilha & Schmidt, 2019.) Using these two sets of measures helps also pinpoint more granularly the possible shortcomings of the journey. This can provide a more dynamic and forward leaning view, delivering strategic insights greater than relying only on the success measures.

8.4 Stakeholder engagement for co-development

Considering the case company current situation and the variance in CX maturity, it is crucial for the initial model to establish a foundation for a common language around CX value discussion. Establishing a common language is essential to facilitate meaningful discussions and have all the participants capable of participating in it. As highlighted by Edvardsson et al. (2011, 333) from the social construct, communication serves as a vital vessel for transferring knowledge between the customer and the provider. Creating and reinforcing a shared understanding within the organization is equally important, as it is the prerequisite for the organization to be capable of having the same conversations with their customers.

A round of stakeholder discussions was held to collect insights to the first version of the measuring model. The stakeholders can roughly be divided into two different categories. Some of them have a distinct role and responsibility area within the journey, others are not that directly tied to the journey, but have responsibility over items overarching the whole journey (Table 2). The individual contributors were representing senior, managerial or director level within their function.

Table 2. Functions engaged in the artifact development

Aware-ness	Consider-ation	Commit-ment	Deploy-ment	Operate & Loyalty	Terminate
Brand Marketing Lead man-agement	Lead man-agement Sales Technical sales	Order ser-vices		Technical support Product analytics	
Business intelligence					
Offering development					
Customer experience					

Discussions with the stakeholders started by going through the rationale behind the strategic journey and what was the aim of the measuring model. The strategic customer journey map was presented as a comprehensive tool that illustrates on a high level the key actions and experiences a customer has with the case company and its brand throughout the end-to-end relationship. By this introduction it was possible to establish a common context for the discussion.

The main objective of the discussions was to collaborate on selecting the right metrics and to understanding the data currently available, as well as discovering the need for improving or developing current measuring practices. This approach was essential in ensuring that the chosen metrics were relevant to the different functions and also aligned with the broader view within the company. Furthermore, these dialogues provided a crucial step in building a comprehensive understanding of the customer journey.

Early in these conversations, it became evident that there were gaps in the management of the journey. As the topic of CX, and furthermore customer journey, is ambiguous and not following clear processes of the organization, a clear ownership for the different phases is missing. This is particularly evident in the deployment and termination phases. For these phases there is no clear ownership of the related processes. As a result, these phases are largely managed by individual sales representatives or account managers based on their personal initiative and approach.

Also, the discussions highlighted the absence of a centralized view or tools to effectively manage and interpret data from the perspective of the customer journey. There are several instances and purposes for collecting data, but there are gaps in the integration between these tools. For instance, gathering behavioral data from product usage and integrating that to CRM data can currently be done only manually. This is not only a challenge in the tooling but primarily stemming from the lack of common processes. The lack of integrated tools and processes means valuable insights remain siloed, and opportunities for enhancing the customer experience might be missed. This situation underscores the need for improved mechanisms that can efficiently collate and analyze data from different stages of the customer journey, thereby enabling a more cohesive and strategic approach to understanding and improving the customer experience.

8.5 The initial proposal for metrics

To effectively enhance customer experience and ensure its alignment with the overall business strategy, the codeveloped measuring model aims for a comprehensive approach (Figure 7).

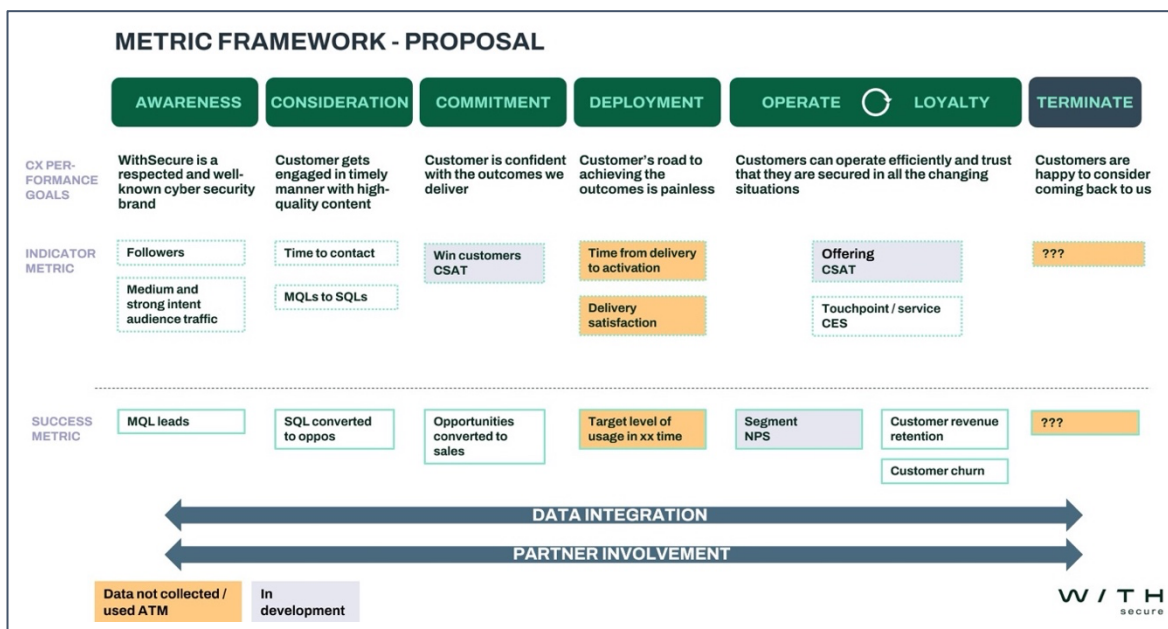


Figure 7. Initial model

The proposal focuses on measuring the customer journey from the perspective of value realization, value proposition, and value delivery. Incorporating measurement points from various points of view to the customer journey, treating these metrics as interconnected components rather than separate entities, aims to foster a cohesive narrative.

The chosen metrics for the artifact capture value creation across different levels, as illustrated in the value pyramid outlined in Figure 2 by Almquist et al. (2018, 77-78). The primary focus of value capture occurs on the second and third levels, encompassing functional and ease of doing business values. To measure individual and inspirational values effectively, collaboration with customers is essential, as these values have the potential to drive significant increases in overall value. The artifact enables the unraveling of customer journeys, aligning with the proposal by Zolkiewski et al. (2017), facilitating an understanding of how these journeys correlate with both tactical and strategic goals.

8.5.1 Value realization

In the framework the value realization is quantified through a combination of behavioural data and standardized customer success metrics at different phases of the customer journey. Collectively, these metrics aim to provide a picture of customer value realization, capturing both the immediate and enduring impacts of the customer journey.

In the proposal, using measures, such as the number of social media followers, serves as an indicator of initial engagement and interest. Based on this behaviour it would be possible to evaluate the success of branding activities in meeting customer needs that further realizes in the marketing funnel conversion.

As the journey progresses further into actual interaction with the service offering, metrics such as time from delivery to activation in the deployment phase, reflecting the extent to which the customers actually integrate and utilize the offered products and services. In the operate and loyalty phases of the more traditional customer experience metrics reflect the value proposition performance from customer perspective. Here the familiar tools of NPS and CSAT are employed. These tools are designed to assess the depth of customer satisfaction and loyalty, offering insights into the long-term effectiveness of the customer journey in terms of value delivery and retention.

8.5.2 Value proposition

Measuring the value proposition, the focus is on the existing business performance metrics. Mainly the focus is on revenue retention from existing customers and customer churn. The journey represents the customer experience in a linear model; however, it needs to be noted that the value proposition associated metrics can and should be tracked in correlation to the journey phase where they realize. Monitoring for instance churn at different journey stages can pinpoint where customers are losing perceived value, guiding strategic adjustments.

High revenue retention suggests that customers find continued value in the company's offerings, signalling an alignment between the value proposition and customer needs. This can be particularly insightful when observed in different stages of the customer journey, such as during onboarding or renewal phases. Churn rate directly reflects the effectiveness of a company's value proposition. A lower churn rate implies that customers are satisfied and see ongoing value in the products or services, while a higher rate may indicate a disconnect between what's promised and what's delivered.

8.5.3 Value delivery

To evaluate the operational service delivery, metrics such as lead funnel performance is a key indicator, providing insights into the efficacy of the initial engagement and conversion processes. Further into the journey, metrics such as delivery process efficiency reflect on reliability and reinforce the perceived value of the product or service. These performance metrics provides insights into how effectively and efficiently the case company can manage the operational processes, which play a crucial role in shaping the customer journey.

Collectively, these metrics provide a multi-faceted view of value delivery within the customer journey. Continuously monitoring and optimizing the operations, it is possible to foster loyalty and long-term value creation. Also, when evaluating the operational performance of the case company processes, the journey perspective gives more insights. It brings visibility to the stages that perform well and evaluate the possible impacts of other driver on the operational efficiency.

8.6 Feedback and evaluation

When reviewing the framework with stakeholders, some highlighted the fact that for example in the awareness phase the selected measures are more inside-out focused rather than illustrating the genuine customer experience. However, the use of these metrics can be justified by the lack of common ground and communication framework around the CX topics. As also highlighted by the interviewed experts, building on the metrics and processes already in use can work as a way to initiate the discussion and lay the foundation for further development.

The shared understanding among stakeholders was that having visibility into various aspects of the organization's performance in regards of customer journey would be crucial to have. Despite acknowledging its importance, achieving this visibility and seamlessly integrating systems to automatically provide this information highlighted as a significant challenge.

The initial suggestion was to conduct this journey level assessments quarterly to gauge performance and gather insights. However, it was recognized that to effectively support leadership decision-making processes, a more frequent cadence, such as monthly assessments, would be more beneficial. While the overarching cadence was proposed to be monthly, it was acknowledged that certain operational metrics embedded in the framework

require real-time monitoring. Owners of specific functions are actively following these metrics as part of their responsibilities, but in the larger context of the journey a monthly cadence would suffice.

In the feedback discussions there was some critique over the current approach of the framework overlooking the detailed touchpoint-level data. However, there is room for improvement in the systematic collection and analysis of the touchpoint level data in the case company. This limits a thorough understanding of customer journeys and the value created at each specific touchpoint. To address this gap, there's a clear need to re-evaluate existing measuring practices and develop new, more detailed methods that can capture the customer interactions at different stages and touchpoints. To accomplish this, it will require further journey mappings to understand the customer relationship on a more granular level.

9 Conclusions and discussions

9.1 Summary of main findings

The aim of this research was to address the gap concerning the lack of methods and practices for comprehensively examining customer journeys in the mechanisms of value creation, specifically from the point of view of B2B sector. The findings of the research indicate that the customer journey functions as a pivotal interface, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of value creation from diverse angles, including the temporal dimension. To evaluate this theory, a framework for measuring the customer journey as an interface was created (Figure 5). The framework proposes a holistic approach to measuring the value from three different perspectives:

- Value realization; encompassing the customer's experience, satisfaction, perceptions, and usage behavior.
- Value proposition; reflecting the provider's perspective on business performance and KPIs meeting customer needs.
- Value delivery: encapsulating the services delivered to the customer, with focus on operational efficiency, and overall effectiveness in delivery and processes.

Additionally, the customer journey serves as a working foundation to examine existing data from a fresh and comprehensive standpoint. Adding this measurement layer to the customer journey, enables the existing metrics to align to the same CX narrative, bringing more value than evaluating each metric individually. With the already established KPIs and efficiency metrics, make the model more adaptable by organizations.

The research has contributed to bridging the theoretical and practical implementation of the value paradigm, by creating an artifact of the presented measuring framework. Even if not yet taken fully into use, as a result of this research, there is now an initial version of a real-world application of the framework (Figure 7). In the evaluation with the case company stakeholders, the concept behind the artifact was seen valuable, however, a hands-on pilot would be beneficial in making it more actionable and demonstrating the value further. It can also be concluded that practical tools, including the presented framework, plays a crucial role in communication and establishing a common language for alignment within organizations.

However, it needs to be highlighted that including the temporal dimension to manage CX and value creation, it underlines the requirement for extensive data integration. This research advocates for a data-driven mindset with the ability to dynamically leverage a diverse

range of data. The centralization or decentralization of data collection and analysis remains a topic for discussion. Acknowledging the potential benefits of central management for efficiency but recognizing the risk of overlooking the importance of customer experience in departments not in direct interaction with customers (Meyer & Schwager 2007, 122). Overall, holistic visibility and – further extended to capability to manage the related process – can be concluded to be corner stones for capitalizing on insights derived from the customer journey measuring framework.

In conclusion, the experiential approach used in this research not only facilitated the artifact development but also supported organizational capability enhancement. The level of CX maturity in organizations is different and the ability to have meaningful discussions about CX vary. Some assumptions can also be made that the framework could serve the same purpose also in other organizations outside the case company. In the expert interviews the CX professionals highlighted the practical tools such as customer journeys as an important way to advocate for CX initiatives. As a practical tool, the framework could be utilized in the same manner in alleviating the common frustration among CX professionals about the lack of a comprehensive, organization-wide understanding of CX.

9.2 Practical implications for the case company

There are certain limitations to the framework and the developed artifact to genuinely quantify the value creation in the case company context. While the proposed metrics provide visibility into the customer journey performance on a strategic level, they provide limited actionable insights for the operational level. This presents the main challenge for proper utilization of the model in the case company. The current approach is too high-level to inform day-to-day operational decisions effectively. However, this can provide an opportunity for identifying high-level pain points, that can help gain leadership support for addressing these issues. This can lead to better prioritization and allocation of resources to enhance the operational development to improve the customer experience. Additionally, the initial objective suggested that the framework could improve the overall customer experience and thus increase customer lifetime value. However, frameworks transition to the piloting phase with further practical iterations will determine its effectiveness in achieving these outcomes.

The logical next step for the artifact would be to move to piloting phase and establish a baseline for the metrics. However, due to the challenges associated with data collection and integration, which makes this process manual and prone to errors, the value of having just this baseline is limited. Furthermore, these challenges in data integration create hurdles in effectively understanding and drawing conclusions about the customer journey. For instance, the ability to integrating behavioral product usage data with business performance

data, could be highly beneficial in indicating when and where the value proposition is no longer meeting customer expectation. It would allow for the identification of correlations between for example the correlation between certain usage patterns in certain journey phase and purchasing behavior. Analyzing such data could enhance also the case company's comprehension of customer satisfaction, offering insights beyond what can be gathered from surveys alone. This issue is present both in a broader, aggregated context and at the individual customer level, making it a critical area for improvement.

As critiqued by some stakeholder in the feedback session, the proposed metrics are based on the internally available data points and may not entirely reflect on the customer reality. Currently, customers have been involved in journey mapping to some extent, but their input is not being utilized in defining metrics that measure value. Engaging customers in this process could provide more meaningful and relevant metrics. However, if engaging with the customers the company's resources and capabilities need to be sufficient in order for the input be acted on.

As the case company's strategy is relying on the channel partner (Figure 1), it becomes relevant to adopt the framework to support partner development. This integration promotes co-development with partners, making it easier to engage and more likely to foster collaborative efforts. This can also play a crucial role in building a trusted partnership between the customer and the partner. The focus here should be on aiding partners in delivering services, which can lead to increased customer loyalty and create a higher cost of switching for customers, fostering a mutually beneficial partnership.

To transform this into an efficient business process in the case company, further education and process development in the organization is necessary. The organization is not yet prepared for the practice of measuring the journey for it to deliver its intended value. The proposed framework in combination with the customer journey can work as a tool for the discussion and initiate conversations about what is truly relevant and valuable to both the customer and the company.

9.3 Reflections on the research process

Design science research focuses on problem solving and improving knowledge through development of artifacts (vom Brocke et al. 2020) and as such it was a suitable methodology for this research. This case study primarily seeks to enhance the knowledge and skills of the organization in recognizing and applying the concepts and mechanisms of value creation to decision-making. By doing so, the research has been able to expand on the common knowledgebase. This is achieved by understanding the customer experience through the

lens of the customer journey. Ultimately, it acknowledges that customers are pivotal to the success of any business, positioning them as the central contributors to the company's success.

Enriching the knowledgebase with expert interviews, provided invaluable insights into varied perspectives to CX at different levels in other organizations. Since CX in B2B context is still lacking in academia, the interviews contributed to a richer understanding of the field and gave insights to practical applications of CX practices.

Undergoing this research process yielded also personal discoveries by its ability to sustaining a meaningful dialogue between the creation of the practical artifacts and the theoretical frameworks during the research process. Taking this iterative approach, it not only enriched the practical applications and underlying theory but also challenged personal and professional preconceived notions and bolstering critical thinking.

9.4 Reliability and validity

The reliability and validity of this research should be assessed based on its usability to the case organization and its potential for generalization. Given its nature as a qualitative case study focused on a single organizational context, certain limitations must be recognized. Specifically, the developed artifact should not be directly replicated in other organizations without careful adaptation. As the contexts vary and the relevance of proposed metrics may differ and give different value. The selection of existing metrics was a deliberate choice to align the theoretical framework with the real-world context of the case company, thus enhancing its practical applicability. However, this doesn't mean that the now proposed metrics would necessarily be capable of measuring the value mechanism to a full extent.

To evaluate the framework's generalizability, further iterations and testing in diverse contexts are necessary. The expert interviews conducted during this thesis showed some indications of similar dependencies and challenges. However, the sample size is limited and only focusing on exploring the problem space, so further validation is crucial. This could include engaging with the same experts for qualitative evaluation of the proposed framework and further expanding the evaluation to quantitative validation with a wider group. Collaborative efforts with other entities would be beneficial in refining and expanding the framework's general applicability and effectiveness.

9.5 Practical and managerial implications

Fully grasping structures for value creation and customer experience might be a tall order in the context of B2B. There is myriad of variables in the customer context, provider resources and the extended ecosystem. Embracing CX to the core of a B2B business requires courage and having a change mindset throughout the company, and as any transformations require advocacy from top management. As concluded by Meyer & Schwager (2007, 121.), depending on the field the executives are coming from can have a big impact on the company's attitudes and approaches towards CX. Executives coming from finance or engineering background may have stronger tendencies in looking at CX as responsibility of sales and marketing, whereas executives with more customer-facing background can be more attuned to CX as a source of value.

To succeed, customer experience management should be a priority across the whole organization, not just within customer-facing roles. Frameworks like the one discussed here are valuable for bridging communication and operational gaps between various departments. Although this approach primarily aligns with business management perspectives, it's important to consider additional strategies, especially when collaborating with departments further away from the customer. If seeking for a more profound transformation, a detailed and comprehensive approach is essential. Organizations should develop specific roadmaps for each customer journey, encompassing the entire process from beginning to end. This entails a thorough analysis of the business implications of optimizing each journey and the strategic implementation of changes in a phased manner. According to Rawson et al. (2013, 93), meticulously refining customer journeys yields significant benefits, such as heightened customer and employee satisfaction, reduced customer turnover, increased revenues, lower operational costs, and enhanced cross-departmental collaboration. This approach necessitates a transition from focusing solely on individual touchpoints to adopting an integrated, journey-centric strategy.

Aligning with customer journeys calls for clear ownership and implement innovative management models. This entails identifying specific individuals responsible for overseeing various aspects of the customer journey, thus ensuring accountability and efficient coordination across different organizational functions. The proposed framework for advancing in this area is characterized by its iterative, data-driven, and customer-focused nature. It necessitates a strong commitment from management, including resource allocation, fostering a culture of change, and an emphasis on continuous improvement. These elements are indicative of the management skills required for future success. Furthermore, achieving a

comprehensive understanding requires cross-functional collaboration. Cultivating a corporate culture that values taking the customer's perspective and exhibiting the courage to do so is vital. Experiential and collaborative approaches like design science research and service design – if executed properly – can effectively support and facilitate this organizational advancement.

9.6 Theoretical implications

This research aims to broaden the existing knowledge base on value creation in B2B in the context of customer journeys. The central proposition is that there's significant merit in examining value creation from the perspective of customer journeys, taking into consideration the systemic and temporal dimension. This approach doesn't seek to reinvent the theories but rather to adapt and apply established concepts to new contexts. It underlines the importance of pushing the boundaries of current theoretical frameworks and developing adopting methodologies. This approach is needed to stay relevant in an era where perceptions, expectations and environments of the customers are rapidly evolving.

At the core of this study is the relationship between customer experience and value creation. In this context, the customer is not a passive recipient but an active integrator, playing a critical role in the realization of value during the relationship. This dynamic underline that CX and value creation are linked and shouldn't be inspected separately. In the B2B sector this is maybe even more important than in B2C, since the impact of the established systems is more widespread. From the lenses of systems thinking, the customer journey can be seen as a complex, dynamic system where each element affects and is affected by others. While existing research has begun to explore this context, there is room for further research in understanding these dynamics in B2B environments.

The contribution of this research to the academic field is twofold. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of an experiential approach in exploring the concepts of customer journeys and value creation. This approach also aids in visualizing and grappling with intangible aspects of customer experience and value. This can drive organizational advancement in these areas. Secondly this research advocates for a more holistic, dynamic, and mutual comprehension of the relationship between customer journeys and value creation in a B2B context.

9.7 Future considerations

It's important to recognize this as an initial attempt to define a framework for measuring value creation through journeys. The topic, in its current breadth, is too expansive to be fully comprehended and actioned upon. While the artifact created in the case study serves as a

good simplification at a strategic level, making it actionable demands further iteration and collaboration. This is expected to be a starting point for discussion with the anticipation of future iterations. Refining and improving the framework could benefit from exploring the customer and provider outcomes and the overarching strategies further.

The focus of this study was primarily on assessing various facets impacting on the value formation from customer journey perspective, yet the mechanisms of value co-creation remain somewhat obscured. To gain deeper understanding, future research could explore the specific contexts of customers and the motivations of various stakeholders involved in B2B value creation. For example, focusing on a single journey from a tangible perspective and mapping the personas involved, and applying the framework to it, can reveal critical insights. As described by Edvardsson et al. (2011), in the context of service delivery, the concept of 'position' not only defines the roles of individuals but also their connections within the service provider's system. A position indicates where customers fit within the service system and the roles they are prepared and able to assume in the provider's social framework. This could lead to a deeper knowledge of the social dynamics at play in the value creation, hence supporting understanding of successful value co-creation and warrants further exploration. However, generalizing these findings may present a challenge due to the diversity of customer ecosystems and the limited visibility into each unique customer environment.

To maximize the value derived from customer experiences, it's crucial to evolve beyond merely collecting and analyzing data. The focus should be to focus on components that genuinely add value to customers and ensuring that the value proposition can be correlated to this value to be mutually beneficial. By prioritizing strategic aspects over exhaustive data measurement and management, it is possible to effectively harness the potential of predictive analytics in enhancing customer experiences. As suggested by Meyer & Schwager (2007, 118), moving customer experience systems and processes toward predictive models can better drive tangible business value. With the predictive approach, a strategic data processing method becomes imperative. Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), can aid in supporting and sustaining the intricate webbing of B2B customer journeys. This becomes even more relevant when moving down to touchpoint level the different channels and the interconnected journeys start to play a larger role. However, often the tooling and activities are directed towards marketing and sales operations with easier to manage funnels. This can create a disconnection in the overall journey, if the other activities in the journey are not managed in a similar manner. (Rustholkarhu et al. 2022.) The current excitement around AI is triggering companies to take action on this topic. Incorporated with the discussion of ways to improve data integration and sharing across departments, further research could provide significant evolution or a holistic management of CX. This could be

a perfect time to focus on the value increase that can be gained from managing customer journeys.

For a long time, the value of exchange hasn't been in exchange of goods or resources. The mechanisms for service value creation have been explored only for few decades, but the pace of change in business and in the society has been accelerating. Increasingly, experiences from our personal lives are merging with professional expectations, pressing companies to evolve to remain competitive. Now is the perfect time to move take a step forward and expand the value concept further. Especially in the B2B sector, organizations that can manage the dynamics of leveraging data efficiently while fostering a culture focused on the customer journey are well-positioned to establish themselves as industry leaders.

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Appendix 1. Expert interview discussion guide

Expert interview structure

Introductions

Thesis background presentation

Theme 1 – Responsibilities and experiences in CX

- **Tell a bit about yourselves and your role related to customer experience and its development.**
- **How is customer experience approached in your organization?**
 - Through individual touchpoints, customer journeys, or something else?
- **Is the concept of customer journeys familiar and is in use for CX development?**

Theme 2 – Organizational CX and measuring

- **How have you approached measuring customer experience in B2B relationships? What metrics do you use and why?**
 - What benefits/challenges are associated with this?
- **Has your organization defined customer experience as part of the strategic?**
- **How was the development of customer experience brought onto the management agenda? What specific measures has been taken to achieve this?**

Theme 3 – Best practices

- **What are the best practices you can share with other B2B companies looking to enhance their customer experience?**
- **What have been the biggest successes and lessons learned in developing customer journeys/measurement?**
- **If you were to start the work anew, what would you do differently?**
- **What future trends do you see in the development of B2B customer experience? What should companies pay special attention to in the coming years?**

Next steps and concluding words.