

# **Customer Relationship Management in Finnish Ice-Hockey League organiza- tions**

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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli selvittää asiakasjohtamisen nykytilannetta Suomen jääkiekon liigaseuroissa ja mahdolliset kehitysmahdollisuudet sitä koskien. Aihetta on tutkittu aiemmin keskittyen vain viiden joukkueen otantaan. Tämä tutkimus avasi mahdollisuuden tutkia asiakasjohtamisen tilannetta kokonaisvaltaisesti kaikkien joukkueiden osalta.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin määrällisenä tutkimuksena käyttäen tutkimusmenetelmänä kyselylomaketta. Kyselylomake lähetettiin kaikille joukkueille (15) sähköpostitse vuoden 2016 loppupuolella. Tutkimukseen vastasi jokaisesta joukkueesta yksi tai kaksi henkilöä. Vastaajien roolit organisaatiossa vaihtelivat toimitusjohtajasta aina myynti-, markkinointi-, viestintä- tai ravintolavastaavaan.</p> <p>Suurimmalla osalla Suomen jääkiekon liigaseuroista on asiakashallintastrategia ja asiakashallintajärjestelmä, mutta silti vain vähän yli puolet liigaseuroista mittaa ja seuraa oman asiakashallintansa tuloksia. Liigaseurat käyttävät pääasiallisesti asiakashallintajärjestelmiä asiakkuuksien seuraamiseen ja hallintaan sekä myynnin ja markkinoinnin apuvälineenä.</p> <p>Johtopäätöksenä voidaan todeta, että Suomen jääkiekon liigaseurat tuntevat käsitteen asiakashallinta, mutta se käsitetään seurojen välillä hyvin eri tavoin. Todellisuudessa myös oikeastaan vain noin puolet liigaseuroista oikeasti hyödyntävät tietoa, jota asiakashallintajärjestelmä tuottaa. Asiakashallinta nähdään hyvin suppeana osana organisaation toimintaa eikä sitä nähdä välttämättömänä osana liiketoiminnan edistämisessä. Liigaseurat kuitenkin kaikki olivat yhtä mieltä, että he voisivat ottaa oppia muiden alojen asiakashallinnasta.</p>		
<p>Avainsanat (<a href="#">asiasanat</a>)</p> <p>asiakashallinta, asiakashallintastrategia, CRM-järjestelmä, liiketoimintatiedon hallinta</p>		
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## Description

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The main objective of the thesis was to examine the current state of customer relationship management (CRM) and the possible future development needs in Finnish Ice-Hockey League organizations. The topic has been studied before from a qualitative point of view by examining the CRM of five different teams in the league. This opened a possibility to study the situation in the whole league.</p> <p>The study was conducted as quantitative research, and the method of the data collection was a survey. The survey was sent to all teams (15) by email at the end of 2016. One or two staff members from each team answered to the survey. The roles of the respondents in the organizations varied from CEOs to sales, marketing, communication and restaurant managers.</p> <p>Most of the organizations in Finnish ice-hockey had a CRM-strategy and a CRM-system, but still only about half of the organizations measured and monitored the results of their CRM. The league organizations mainly used their CRM-systems for monitoring and managing their customer relationships and as helpful tools in sales and marketing.</p> <p>The Finnish Ice-Hockey League organizations seemed to know the concept of CRM, but it was understood in a variety of ways when compared between organizations. In reality, only a few of the organizations actually utilized the information that their CRM provided. Customer relationship management was seen as a very concise part of the organizations' activities, and it was not necessarily seen as an essential part of supporting business. However, the league organizations were unanimous on the fact that they could learn from the CRM of other fields of businesses.</p>		
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## 1 Introduction

The main aim of this thesis was to form an overall view of the current situation of customer relationship management in the Finnish Ice Hockey League organizations. The idea was to study how customer relationship management was defined and understood in these organizations, what kinds of systems were used to facilitate the process and what the future needs might be with regard to customer relationship management.

As Sabri and Shaikh (2010, 231) state in their book, consumer behavior is changing, and customers are increasingly demanding new and customized products. Customers have taken the dominant role in the seller-customer relationship, and this has led the whole field of business to become more customer centered. This raises a question of what the current situation of customer relationship management is in the sport business and, in this case, in the Finnish ice-hockey league organizations.

This case has already been studied by Leino (2016) in his thesis: Asiakasjohtaminen Suomen jääkiekon liigaseuroissa. He examined five different teams and found that these teams were aware of the concept of CRM, but it was understood in many different ways and on different levels. In England, Adamson, Jones and Tapp (2005) also studied applying CRM in the British football industry and how CRM was understood and used in those organizations. These two studies opened up a possibility to examine the current stage of CRM in the whole Finnish Ice-Hockey League.

## 2 Research frame

In this chapter, the assignor of the study is introduced and also the objective of the research. After that, the research problem as well as the research questions are introduced. At the end of this chapter the research methods, the quantitative methods of analysis, the implementation and earlier research are described.

### **Sport Business School Finland**

Sport Business School Finland is a cooperation organisation established by two distinguished universities of applied sciences offering higher education degree pro-

grammes in sport management and marketing as well as open sport marketing studies for professionals already working in the field of sports (SBSF). The fundamental purpose of the Sport Business School Finland is to invite academics, professionals, and students of the sports management area to collaborate with sports researchers and educators and those working in the sports business and sports management field. (SBSF Introduction)

### **Ice-hockey league of Finland**

The topic of this research is Finnish ice-hockey league, also known as “Liiga”. Liiga is ultimately Finland’s most popular ball game and the strongest sports brand and also the most watched sport in Finland (Tässä totuus Liigan yleisömäärästä – lähes ennallaan 2015.)

According to Leino (2015, 5-6.) there are two hundred thousand people who play ice-hockey which is about 3,7 % of the whole population of Finland. There is also 72 thousand players and officials (1,3 %) who are licenced. According to licenced personnel only place where ice-hockey is more popular sport than in Finland is Canada where the amount of licenced personnel is 1,8 % of the population.

Ice-hockey in Finland employs nearly 5000 people when measured in working years. According to a research made by KPGM, ice-hockey has a remarkable impact to Finland’s economy and employment. From the revenue stream of 750 million euros, which formed from the actions of ice-hockey and the actions close to it, brought added value to Finland’s GDP approximately 340 million euros in 2013. These numbers include all the actions in Finnish ice-hockey from the professional league level to junior activity, from equipment production to sales and from arena-investments to everything else around it. Significant proportion (45 %) of this revenue stream comes from the professional level of ice-hockey. (Jääkiekon vaikutus Suomen talouteen ja työllisyyteen 2015.)

Jääkiekon SM-liiga Oy is the administrator of the Liiga. All the teams in Liiga are joint-stock companies and they all hold a share of the Liiga. (Hänninen & Kössö 2016.) At the moment there are 15 teams playing in Liiga (Liiga.fi).

During the season 2016-2017 there were 1 946 968 spectators attending in 450 regular season matches which was 1,8 % more than the last season. The average number of spectators was 4327 per game during season 2016-2017. On the previous season the average number of spectators was 4250. (Liiga.fi)

Half of the Finns are really or quite interested about hockey, and the interest of the Liiga is way ahead of other ice-hockey leagues such as KHL or NHL. According to researches made by Sponsor Insight Tracker and Sponsor Navigator, between different sport leagues in Finland, Liiga takes the first place with the support of 36 % of the Finns. The second most popular was Finnish football league Veikkausliiga (20 %) and the third was Finnish baseball league Superpesis (14 %). (Uusi tutkimus vahvistaa: Liiga Suomen seuratuin urheilusarja 2015.)

## 2.1 Research problem and –questions

When studying a certain phenomenon, there is always problem that needs to be solved. Solving this problem always strives to improve the current situation. (Kananen 2010, 18.) A research problem itself can be a problem. When the problem is unknown, effort has to be put in analyzing the problem. It is important to find the research problem because it is the driving force of the whole research. Without a proper problem, the research does not give sufficiently good information to actually solve the existing problem, and, therefore, the validity of the research is rather weak. (Kananen 2014, 44-45.)

Based on this problem, questions can be generated, which will lead to the answers concerning the problem and help in solving it (Kananen 2010, 19). There can be one or more research questions (Kananen 2014, 46). Through the research questions the problem can be analyzed and seen what it contains as well as how the parts connect to each other and how they affect the problem itself. The shape of the questions is important because the answers will be different depending on how the question is asked. (Kananen 2010, 19.)

The questions can be in the form of: what, how, why or how much. When examining the questions, a certain type of logic can be seen between them. The basis of all the

questions is the “what”-question. It gives a direct answer to what is being researched. Without the “what”-question there cannot be any other types of questions. (Kananen 2014, 46.)

In this research the idea was to study, how customer relationship management was defined and understood in these organizations, what kind of systems were used to facilitate the process and what the future plan might be in regard to customer relationship management. Based on this, we can define the research problem:

*What is the current state of the customer relationship management (CRM) in the Finnish Ice Hockey League organizations and what are the future needs and expectations to CRM in these organizations.”*

From this problem, the research questions that would help in solving the research problem could be derived. The two questions for this research were:

*What is the current state of the customer relationship management in Finnish Ice Hockey League organizations?*

This question was the foundation for the whole research. It gives a clear understanding of the position and importance of customer relationship management in the Finnish top league ice hockey teams. In addition, it directly answers the main research problem of this research.

*What are the possible development needs in customer relationship management from the organizations’ perspective?*

The league organizations themselves have the best experience in what has and has not worked in their own customer relationship management. By asking this question and combining the results from all the organization, this study hoped to form a broad perspective of what the development needs were in customer relationship management in these ice-hockey league organizations.

## 2.2 Research methods

A research problem can be solved with a combination of different methods that can be called research practice or the manner of approach. The selection of the research practice is one of the most important decisions that a researcher has to make in the

beginning of his research. Since all the choices in scientific research must be justified and since the choice has to fit in with the studied phenomenon and research problem, choosing only the practice is not sufficient. It must produce the right type of information so that the problem can be solved. (Kananen 2015, 63.)

According to Kananen (2015, 64), research practice is like an umbrella combining science and philosophy. It consists of methods, such as data collection, analysis and different ways of interpretation that are typical for each and every different type of research practices. As alternatives there can be two types of research practices: qualitative or quantitative. There can also be other ways of dividing this, but these two are the most common ones. (Kananen 2015, 63.)

The research methods themselves can be divided into the data collection and analysis methods. Data collection can be done by using observation, theme interviews, interviews, questionnaires and different kinds of documents. The goal of this all is to collect enough relevant material to form the data for the research. (Kananen 2014, 47.) Questionnaires and surveys that represent quantitative research can be analyzed by using statistical methods. The data consists of numbers which will give results as a different distributions and key figures. Qualitative research, where the data is collected from documents, interviews and observation, gives verbal results that can be interpreted far more freely. (Kananen 2014, 48.)

This study was quantitative because the purpose was to form an understanding of the current state of customer relationship management in the whole Finnish Ice Hockey League and examine the possible future needs and expectations related to the CRM. The data collection was conducted by using a Webropol survey. As a base for the survey was the questionnaire that Adamson, Jones and Tapp (2005) used in their study that examined the state and use of CRM in the British football leagues.

### **Analysing methods**

In quantitative research the results are presented with different types of charts, such as straight distributions and cross tabulations and with statistics. These charts have standards for their form and regulations that should be obeyed in scientific presenta-

tion. (Kananen 2010, 103.) This thesis, which was implemented as quantitative research, was no different. Therefore, the results of this research were analyzed and presented by using these charts.

Straight distribution means a chart that examines the distribution of the answers between different variables when looking at individual questions. The results can be reported as the exact number of how many people answered the different options or as a percent distribution of how large a percent answered each option. However, when conducting quantitative research, the proper way of presenting charts is by using the percentage-chart. (Kananen 2010, 104.)

The difference in cross tabulation, when comparing to straight distribution, is the fact that instead of examining one variable in a question, there are two variables. By its structure, the cross-tabulation chart follows exactly the same standards as a straight distribution chart. A cross tabulation chart also has to be presented as a percentage-chart. (Kananen 2010, 105-106.)

### **Reliability**

The goal of the research is always to obtain as reliable and trustworthy information as possible. When determining the reliability of a study, there are two factors that can be used to measure it: validity and reliability. Validity means that the right issues are being examined in order to obtain the right answers to the research problem. Reliability means that the results gained from research are lasting and repeatable. (Kananen 2011, 118.) As Kananen (2011, 119) points out, the trustworthiness of the research remains rather weak if the research methods and the research practice have been implemented without considering validity and reliability.

### **Earlier researches**

Adamson, Jones and Tapp (2005) studied the use of CRM in sports in their article: From CRM to FRM – Applying CRM in the football industry. The study was conducted in England by interviewing different football clubs from different leagues and by using questionnaires. The study focused on CRM, how football clubs understood and used it and how the special nature of sport and its fans should be taken into consideration when implementing CRM. The results showed that there was an increasing

awareness of the benefits of general business disciplines, but the knowledge of CRM and its benefits seemed to be far from it. Many clubs that were interviewed in this research had good levels of education about the need for CRM for efficient transaction marketing, but less understanding of relationship building or loyalty. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp 2005.)

Customer relationship management in the Finnish Ice-Hockey League organizations has also been researched before from a qualitative point of view by Leino (2016) in his thesis: *Asiakasjohtaminen Suomen jääkiekon liigaseuroissa*. In his research, Leino focused on five different teams. He found that the people in charge of these teams' customer relationship management were aware of the concept of CRM, but it was understood in many different ways. The data from the small sample showed that collecting and utilizing customer information was seen more important than actually making a strategy based on CRM. (Leino 2016.)

### **3 Customer relationship management**

Customer Relationship Management is neither a concept nor a project. Instead, it is a business strategy that aims to understand, anticipate, manage and personalize the needs of an organization's current and potential customers. In order to do so, the organization's strategy must be tailored for each market segment. (Brown & Gulycz 2002, 27.)

From the firm's point of view CRM aims to increase the loyalty of profitable customers and to increase the profitability of loyal customers. In the customer's perception, an effective CRM program means that the firm satisfies the customer more completely than any competing supplier around. (Fjermstad & Romano 2006, VII.)

According to Brown and Gulycz (2002, 27-28), organizations need to understand the following four strategies in order to be effective in managing their customer relationships:

1. A customer strategy must be defined. For an organization to fully understand which products and services to offer to different customers, there must be a deep understanding of each customer segment and their needs.

2. A channel and product strategies must be created. In order for the organization to ensure sales productivity and effective channel management, it must define how they will deliver products and services efficiently and effectively.
3. The organization must understand the importance of a solid and integrated infrastructure strategy. The strategy will comprehend not only technology but also the organizational structure and organizational competencies. The infrastructure will support the organization's ability to execute their customer and channel strategy and to be a business that is easy to do business with.
4. In order for the organization to have lasting customer management, a performance management strategy and an action plan are required. For it to be effective, the organization needs to prepare a performance program that will track its performance and be capable of alerting the organization about changes that are necessary for continuous improvement.

However, it is fair to ask why customer relationship management and, therefore, customer satisfaction is such an important aspect of business. The answer is that customer satisfaction can achieve benefits. Companies are increasingly interested in customer satisfaction as a competitive weapon because the traditional bases of differentiation, such as product features, price and distribution are no longer sufficient (Brown & Gulycz 2002, 33). As Brown and Gulycz (ibid.) also say, these so called traditional ways of differentiation are easy to copy, and once organizations attain a certain level of manufacturing excellence, all the organizations become the same and there is very little variation.

There are multiple reasons why customer relationship management is important for organizations. Good customer relationship management results in good customer service. Companies that give good service and achieve high levels of customer satisfaction achieve a 12 per cent return on their sales compared to the 1 per cent return on sales for companies that give poor service. Moreover, companies that have higher levels of customer satisfaction generally receive a higher market share than their competitors that have lower customer satisfaction. This will also lead to a stronger perception by their customers, which allows the organizations to demand a premium price for comparable products or services. (Brown & Gulycz 2002, 33.) In a conclusion in the words of Fjermstad and Romano (2006, VII): *"Indeed, the foundational premise of CRM is the high level of financial return on customer loyalty."*

Companies that also focus on inner customer satisfaction, such as that of the employees, have not only reduced their turnover, but have also had success in attracting new employees. In addition, when an organization focuses on satisfaction in all areas, they do not have to waste money on advertising job vacancies because positive deeds spread positive messages. Positive word of mouth has a strong impact in business life, and it has been seen that organizations that give good customer service are known in their communities as companies with which to do business. Customer loyalty is strong, and most organizations are aware that it costs five to ten times more to acquire new customers than it does to keep the current ones satisfied. (Brown & Gulycz 2002, 33-34.)

In summary, according to Anderson and Kerr (2002, 1-2), customer relationship management can be the single strongest weapon to ensure that customers become and remain loyal. With customer relationship management, loyal customer is not a happy coincidence created when an exceptional customer service representative, salesperson or product developer responds to a customer need. Instead, this creates data that can be turned into information, and that information can be turned into customer-satisfying action, which will bring the results.

Whether the customers are internal or external, consumers or businesses, whether they connect electronically or face to face, from across the globe or across town, customer relationship management is the ticket to success. (Anderson & Kerr 2002, 2.) And as it is well said in Customer Relationship Management by Emerald Insight Staff (2005, 163.): *"In a complete turnaround from a few years ago it is now the customer, not the company, who dictates what appears in the market."*

### 3.1 Development of CRM

The history of CRM starts with the earliest retailers who wanted to make sure that their customers returned. For example, if sellers and shop owners in ancient Rome had new items from a new colony available, they would let their best customers know. And when the same seller asked their customers the next day whether they liked the new merchandise, they collected feedback. That is the earliest form of CRM. (Gosney & Boehm 2000, 3.)

According to Oksanen (2010, 21) the first literal bookings of the word customer can be found from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. The actual relationship management was considered couple hundred years later and the concept itself, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), came into usage as late as in the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even though the concept is fresh and pretty new in the world, it is quite worn out. As Oksanen (2010, 21) directly says, only a few organizations are interested in discussing of the essence and the importance of the CRM to the business. Everybody just wants to get straight into business.

One reason for the fast burnout of the concept CRM can be the fact that as a term it is so multidimensional. It comprehends things such as organizations system to handle its customerships, process to control marketing and sales, manner of an approach to identify and acquire customers and the business strategy to maximize the profitability and the satisfaction of the customers. (Oksanen 2010, 22.)

But how does CRM contain so many aspects of different things and has become such a vast concept? According to Baran and Galka (2013, 37-43) most people see that the roots of CRM are in the multiple different areas such as relationship marketing, marketing research, B2B relationships, resource planning, customer contact centers, sales force automation, campaign management tools, web and channel integration, diffusion of personal computers, direct-response marketing, relational databases and industrial and services marketing. As it can be seen, the list is long and versatile, which has led to the fact why CRM covers so vast field of different business opportunities.

In the early 1990s, the managing director of Mitsubishi in the United States noticed, that there was an increase in the number of competitors who offered high-quality products. Competition got lot harder, because now consumers faced an unlimited number of high-quality choices. This led to a point, that companies had a hard time to stand out from the crowd and differentiate themselves just by using their products and brand alone. In order to companies to hold on to their customers in this increasing competitive environment, creation of bond between companies and customers was needed. This strengthened the loyalty of the customers. (Baran & Galka 2013, 43-44)

Through this need the CRM was developed. It became a tool of differentiation now that the products themselves became so similar and parallel in so many sectors. CRM enabled companies to reduce their costs of expensive mass-marketing efforts and at the same time increase their results through their communication efforts. This has improved the effective usage of multichannel marketing and management for the companies, to which the customers have become accustomed. (Baran & Galka 2013, 61.)

Even though the effectiveness of CRM, not all the companies have successfully implemented the usage of CRM, for a few reasons. Sometimes the revenue goals are not achieved, and the budget becomes overrun. In some cases, companies even abandon their CRM efforts. Companies think that there are many barriers to actually successfully implement the CRM system, but they can be overcome. (Baran & Galka 2013, 61.)

Development of CRM has come to a point, that it to be successful, companies need to adapt a relationship marketing philosophy across all their functional areas. Top management needs to communicate with the employees about the benefits of CRM orientation and to support their efforts throughout this development. For the CRM to be used properly, the CRM start-up teams should consist of multiple fields of people, from IT to business unit managers. Also, every action, the business plan and the business strategies, must precede the CRM development and not the opposite. It must be remembered that before implementing CRM, companies should develop success metrics to also measure the usefulness of CRM. (Baran & Galka 2013, 61.)

### 3.2 Lifecycle of a customer

According to Mäntyneva (2003, 15.) understanding and recognizing the needs of a customer are the core points for a successful customer relationship management. Company which has the best understanding towards its customers has the best capability to predict their customers buying behavior and therefore act according to them. By knowing what the customers want, the better chances the company has in making more profit. (Mäntyneva 2003, 15.)

As soon as a company understands the different phases of customers' lifecycle and understands the lifetime value of the customer, the benefits of it are endless. Through this understanding, company can determine the current and maximize the future cash flow. Realizing the value also allows company to increase their customer-ships, lengthen their duration and also add value to it. These lifecycle value -benefits are easy to state in theory, but in reality, it is much harder to actually define the value of each customer segment as precisely. (Mutanen 2005, 1.)

When looking customer relationship management from a traditional point of view, customers' lifecycle can be divided into four different phases: customer acquisition, annexation, developing and maintaining (Mäntyneva 2003, 15). In figure 1 we can see, that all different phases have their own unique features, that has to be taken into consideration, when designing customer relationship management towards different kind of customers.

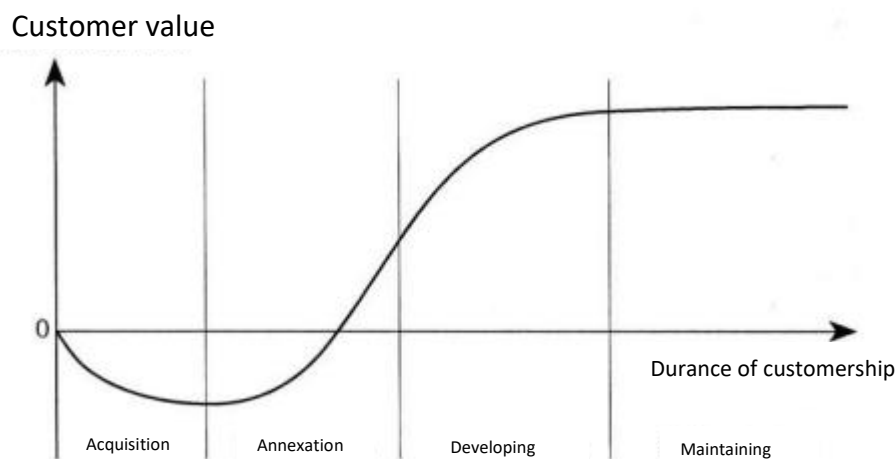


Figure 1 Customers lifecycle phases. (Modified, Mäntyneva 2003, 17.)

Usually the duration of customership and rise of the amount of transactions are the key points what make the customership profitable. Loyal customers are usually the most profitable because they don't demand the costs of new customer acquisitions. This active and loyal customership can't be bought; it either generates or doesn't. If the company doesn't segment their customers, all the customers will be treated equally from the customer relationship management point of view and this will lead to bad results, because some customers are more profitable than others and that's

why they need to be treated differently. One can say that one of the greatest challenges in customer relationship management is to carry customer through the different phases in his lifecycle. (Mäntyneva 2003, 18.)

### **Acquisition**

First of all, customer has to be acquired. In acquisition of new clients, the purpose is to make the first transaction as profitable as possible for both sides and this way create a new customership. The biggest challenge in this phase is to refine the customership. If the customer has been acquired unprofitably and the customer doesn't stay as a client for the company, there is a great risk to make lot of losses in a long run with this kind of strategy. (Mäntyneva 2003, 18-20.)

Most of the times acquisition of new customers is a lot costlier than developing the existing customerships. So, from the customer relationship management point of view it would be more profitable to concentrate on the needs of the existing customers than only focus on acquiring new customers all the time. A common mistake in some companies who work in sales is to make new customers on the cost of existing customers. By segmenting customers and defining their needs it is easier to find the balance of effort for each of these phases. (Mäntyneva 2003, 18-20.)

### **Annexation**

It is obvious that the customer priorities vary when looking different products, so it is hard to simply explain how the annexation of the customer should be done only by boosting the sales of one product. Basic solutions won't usually fulfill the needs and expectations of all the customer segments and therefore the range of products and services ought to be developed to match the desires of the customers if the company wants to hold on to its new customers. (Mäntyneva 2003, 20.)

According to Mäntyneva (2003, 20-21), also the number of products the customer buys from the company will have its own affect in the duration of the customership. The vaster variety of products the company can offer and sell to its customer, the bigger the odds are in maintaining a long customership. As Mäntyneva (2003, 21) himself says, the customership is at its most fragile state at its beginning and if the

relationship only builds itself on one or two transactions, it can be said that the foundation of the customership is not very strong.

### **Developing**

When developing customerships, there is possible to make targeted plans and operation models for different segments. Purpose of these actions is to deepen the relationship between the customer and the company. By these actions the goal is to increase the company's share of the total transactions that the customer does in life. The segments that have been formed through the ways of customer relationship management create a mass, critical enough, that justifies the creation and initialization of these operation models. (Mäntyneva 2003, 21.)

Mäntyneva (2003, 21) says that an already committed customer base is full of profitability potential. This means that if companies focus better on their existing customers, enforce their marketing towards them and put effort in developing their customer relationship management, the existing customer segment will show a significant potential in growth.

As said earlier, most of the time acquiring new customers will become much more expensive than focusing on existing customers. According to Mäntyneva (2003, 21), in some cases, by decreasing customer losses by couple percent companies can increase their profitability considerably. Of course, the interrelationship of these figures depends largely of the field of business and the existing competitive situation. Nevertheless, the mistake most companies do by concentrating on acquiring new customers and making losses can be fixed by concentrating more on developing the customer management of the existing customers.

Customer relationship management allows companies to maintain their customers and more commonly profitable execution of customership marketing. Requirement for good customer relationship management is to understand the customerships financial profitability and the potential concerning them. (Mäntyneva 2003, 21.)

### **Maintaining**

The last phase of customer lifecycle is maintaining the customer. To maintain customers, it is important to understand customers in a deeper level and to recognize

their true needs. In order to make proficient customer relationship management decisions when considering if to put effort in maintaining customer or to just let go, companies need to figure out those customers who are most likely to change their customership to another company and what is the potential and profitability of those customers in a financial point of view. (Mäntyneva 2003, 22.)

The changes in the customers buying behavior can indicate the possible intention to change the provider. Possible signs for this can be the change of customers address, complains made by the customer or reduce in sales. If a company has a customer relationship management program which reacts and alarms from major changes in the customers data, these actions can be the signals that the program reacts to. (Mäntyneva 2003, 22.)

It is important to remember that all the customerships are not profitable for the company and therefore not to be maintained. For company to know their exact customers they must form the criteria of a good customer based on their current and potential profitability. Because the change of customership doesn't happen overnight, the company should try to effect on the customer's decisions when they are planning to change to another company, not when they are already leaving. (Mäntyneva 2003, 23.)

## **4 Customer relationship management in sport organisation**

The unique characteristics of the sport and its fans need consideration when developing or implementing CRM techniques. The notion that building relationships with customers' increases their loyalty has been one of the core aims of CRM strategies. Within sports, loyalty levels are assumed to be much greater than in conventional industries and this has led to a belief that fans' loyalty can be taken for a granted. This phenomenon in sport has been accused of ignoring the needs of fans and it has been seen as taking advantage of their deep loyalty and fanaticism. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp 2005, 156-157.)

According to Adamson, Jones and Tapp (2005, 159) the primary initial strategic platform for sports club CRM is segmentation. Segmenting works well when there is considerable heterogeneity in the customer base. The gathering and organizing of the

supporter transaction and characteristics data that CRM demands for its channel integration and direct marketing activities allows a variety of segmentation approaches.

There are couple problems when looking into sport organizations CRM. For instance, when focusing on one on one marketing, organizations tend to look and treat customers as individuals. But actually, the supporters desire to be seen as a group: they see themselves as “we” rather than “I”. Another problem is the service. There is a lot of written literature of the essence of service delivery in sports context like answering ticket office phones quick and on time, good quality food, stadia facilities and so on, but there is rather little research on how different segments value these different factors. For example, more casual fans, who see the attendance to a sport event as a form of entertainment than tribal worship, may place a higher priority on the services, when comparing to hardcore fans, who only care about their team’s success and are hardly concerned about the services. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp 2005, 158-159.) This is why using CRM properly in managing sport organization is so important, because if you don’t know how to treat different segments of customers correctly and treat their needs, you don’t get very far with customer satisfaction.

### **Customer profiling**

Adamson, Jones and Tapp (2005, 157) say in their article, that one study has highlighted different segments of sport fan, for example, that are not loyal to one team, or may be attitudinally loyal but not behaviorally loyal. They have also found, that for some fans a relationship building approach may be appropriate in supporter retention, while for other types of fans transaction marketing may be profitable.

Supporters may be split by their differing loyalty, their differing psychological and physical needs from the club and their geodemographic characteristics. According to a table in Adamson’s, Jones’ and Tapp’s (2005, 160) article, there are five different typologies of fan characteristics.

First typology of a fan is a temporary fan. This type of a fan is a fan for a very specific period of time and after this period the patterns of behavior revert back to normal. The second typology of a fan is a local fan. The motivation for a local fan to support a certain team, event or a player comes from geographical factors. This suggest if this

person moves to another area then the original identification with the team would significantly reduce. The third one is the devoted fan. This type of a fan remains loyal to the team despite the time or geographical boundaries. Fourth one is the fanatical fan. This type of fan is almost obsessive in its support for its team or an individual. With the fanatical fan there is at least one aspect of its life that provides identification with the team that is stronger than being a fan. The last typology of a fan is a dysfunctional fan. Those individuals who gain their main source of self-identification from their object of support are categorized as dysfunctional fans. Hooligans are categorized as this type of fans. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp 2005, 160.)

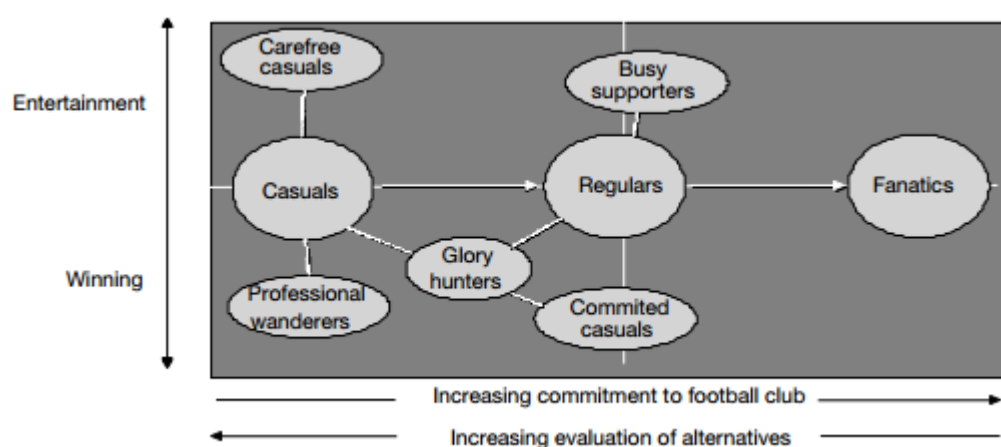


Figure 2. Segmentation methods based on attitude to type of team performance and commitment to the club. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp 2005, 161.)

Figure 2 summarizes the key segments in sport business customers, mapped here in two dimensions: supporter benefits and supporter behavioral commitment, according to Adamson, Jones and Tapp (2005, 161). The vertical axis illustrates how different groups priorities their team winning versus the entertainment that the game itself provides. The horizontal axis shows the differing levels of commitment that different groups have towards the club.

As seen in figure 2, the segments of supporters can be differentiated in so many ways. The scale goes from carefree casuals to professional wanderers, from glory hunters to seriously committed fanatics, from regulars to busy supporters and etc. The differentiating factors between segments focus on whether the customer thinks

that the entertainment factor is the most important thing for him/her or the result of the game. Other factor is that is the customer committed to the team or the club or does he/she just enjoy sport and therefore is open to alternatives instead of just one team/club.

### Commitment of a sports fan

For many, sport represents an important safety valve. An escape from everyday life almost. As Adamson, Jones and Tapp (2005, 161) say in their article, supporters have dreams, hopes and desires for their team that may depart from the reality of their team's performance. For many fans the success of their team reflects to their self-image. Some may identify with their team's success by basking in reflected glory or some may identify with the perennial struggles by so called underdogging. In some cases, if the success of their team is a strong part of their identity, fan will switch allegiance and stop actively supporting their club, at least for the while that their own club is losing. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp 2005, 161.)

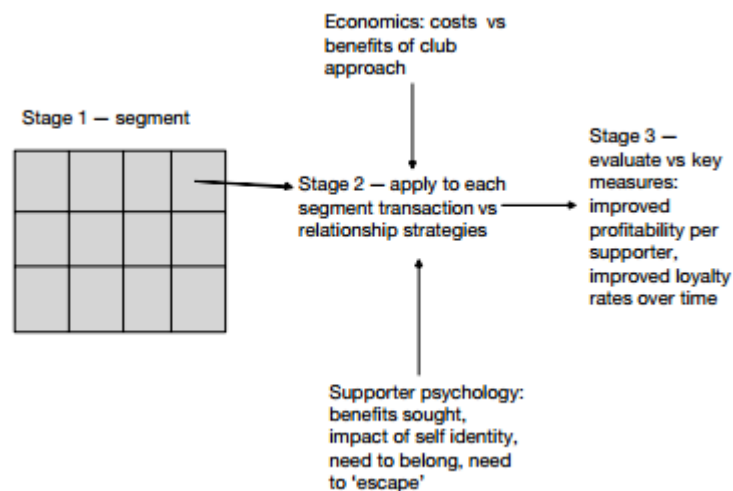


Figure 3 The conceptual underpinning of CRM in sport franchises. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp 2005, 160.)

Different segments of supporters have their own identified needs and therefore club's need to react and balance these with economic needs of the club in order to organize a mixed transaction-relationship delivery depending on the segment. More casual fans, that are not that interested in creating a relationship with the club, may be more willing to be sold at and they expect an economic transaction such as entertainment in return for a payment. The tricky ones are the committed fans. They may

feel a strong sense of ownership of the club, wish to actively participate into the club's activities and crave for recognition for their loyalty. These are the fans that clubs should focus on more carefully and concentrate on developing the relationship approach towards them. Because committed fans have more expectations towards their team, like they demand success, and they are more likely to drift away if these expectations are not achieved. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp 2005, 161.)

## 5 Business Intelligence

Business Intelligence (BI) –solutions give companies and public organizations access to information that describes their business activities. This information gives these companies and organizations ability to make more justified decision and to control the direction of their actions. (Hovi, Hervonen & Koistinen 2009, 74.)

Business intelligence can be seen as improved customer relationship management, because by analyzing the aggregated customer information, business can provide improved customer service responsiveness, discover better opportunities and therefore increase customer loyalty. For instance, business intelligence can help businesses to evaluate customer lifetime value and short-term profitability expectations in order to distinguish profitable and nonprofitable customers. (Loshin 2003, 2.)

According to Svärd and Linjama (2015, 13), Hovi, Hervonen and Koistinen (2009) say in their book that BI can be divided into two different schools: quantitative and qualitative. From quantitative point of view BI is seen as analytic usage and control of the information organization has collected internally about its business. The original source of information in this interpretation are the organizations internal databases and information systems such as customer relationship management system. All this knowledge is structured so basically it is easy to save into relational database. This structured information is mainly always numeric data. (Hovi, Hervonen & Koistinen 2009, 78.)

From qualitative point of view BI is seen more as an exploiting and controlling the information that the company gets from its rivals and the markets in general. The original source of information comes from outer data banks, news agencies and other more public sources of information. As compared to quantitative point of view,

where all the information is structured, in qualitative it is the opposite. All the information in the qualitative point of view comes from deed and document based material so it is not structured information. (Hovi, Hervonen & Koistinen 2009, 78.)

According to Williams and Williams (2007, 2) BI can be seen in a broader perspective as a business information and business analysis in the context of key business processes. By analyzing information from your own actions and also from outer environment, companies can gather data to get support and enforcement for their strategic and operative decisions (Svård, Lehtonen & Linjama 2015, 13). But BI is not just focusing in the data produced by these systems. The two greatest barriers to BI-driven performance improvement are the lack of business vision in how BI can drive performance and the lack of will to actually do the changes to the process that BI demands. (Williams & Williams 2007, 23.)

## 5.1 Goals for BI

The main goal for using BI is to speed up and improve organizations ability to make decisions. Before the BI was invented there was this tool for earlier decisions called Decision Support System. Even though the terminology has changed during the years for more saleable the basic principles have stayed the same. It is still about getting better information for the users to support decision making. (Hovi, Hervonen & Koistinen 2009, 80.)

In a fast changing and up tempo operational environment the usage of Business Intelligence is emphasized. Digitalization, internationalization and tight competition bring their own challenge, so gathering information and analyzing it gives advantage to anticipate and fasten the decision making. (Svård, Lehtonen & Linjama 2015, 13.)

One of the other main goals that BI-solutions have is to answer to the user needs on real time. As the nowadays business environment is so hectic the right information at the right time gives a bigger advantage than ever. On the other hand, the goal for BI-solutions is to bring information in an already measured format, but also to enable the search for undefined information. The later of these two truly measure the usefulness of the BI-solutions. Because of this kind of undefined information, many BI-

solutions have redefined themselves through different questionnaire and reporting features to be able to fulfill this goal. (Hovi, Hervonen & Koistinen 2009, 80.)

One goal of BI is also to support organizations strategy and to get closer to the goals organization has set up. This is one of the hardest goals to achieve in most organizations, because BI-solutions often gets isolated and the connection to use BI through whole organization all the way to the top gets left rather weak. BI works best when there is clear quantitative indicators which can be used to define clear and measurable strategic goals. Through these measurable goals BI offers organizations to increase sales, save in costs, open new business opportunities and improve the operative effectiveness. (Hovi, Hervonen & Koistinen 2009, 80-81.)

All an all, according to Loshin (2003, 2.) a proper BI can lead to increased profitability by, decreased costs, improved CRM and decreased risks. Because BI simply answers to very basic questions about how a company does business.

## 5.2 Usage in Sports

According to Rasku (2015, 19) Sport Business Intelligence (SBI) is defined as rational and continuous development of sport event and organizations using advanced data-collection and sophisticated analyses to support informed decision and quality improvement. The core idea in this definition is to apply the models of modern customer-oriented business and transfer them into sport business. When defining SBI, the unique nature of sport, the fans, the athletes, the sport clubs and the events have to be taken into account and to be understood that these factors create the core of customers, service contributors, performers, service providers and the experience itself. (Rasku 2015, 19.)

One of the biggest format for consuming sport as a service and experience is the sport events. (Rasku 2013, 19.) According to Rasku (2013, 19) the production of an event as an experience has been studied and formatted by Pine and Gilmour (1999) who also introduced the concept of an experience economy. Through this concept has been generated several studies that have aimed to analyze and increase the customer value of events as systematically produced events. (Rasku 2013, 19.)

Because many well-organized sport events can and have become brands that are recognized and appreciated by consumers, the consumer experience creates expectations for the people who have consumed the experience but also for those who have not but have been exposed to the brand. These expectations lead to an expected value in the minds of potential customers and to a decision should they purchase the experience. Customer expectations can be considered as the heart of satisfactory experience and it can be affected before, during and after the event itself. Therefore, the data collection process in SBI applied to events should follow the event lifecycle: Pre-, during and post-event. (Rasku 2013, 19-20.)

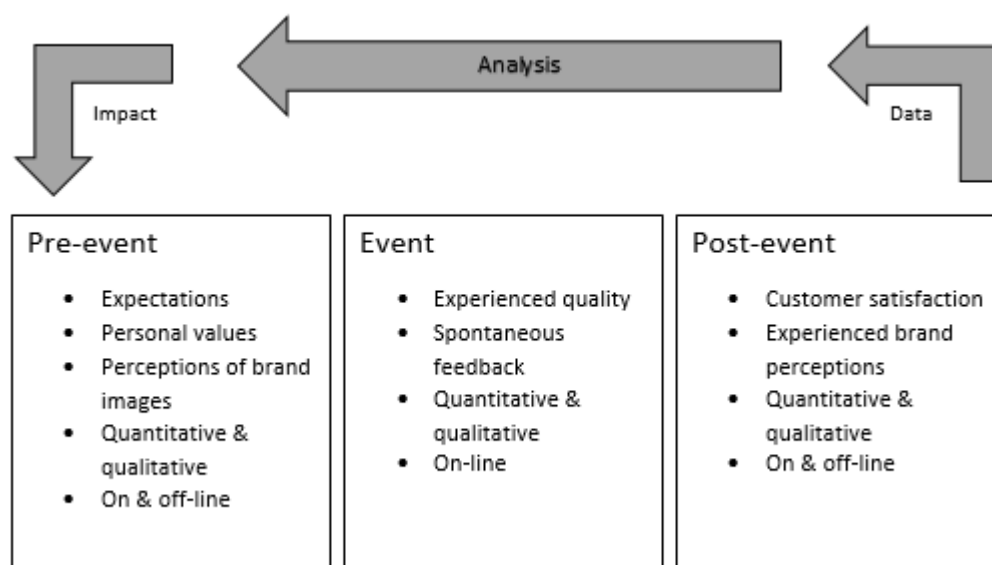


Figure 4 The process of sport business intelligence applied to a sport event. (After Rasku 2013, 20.)

In Figure 4 we can see these three different stages of data collection of event production lifecycle. In the pre-event stage it is possible to collect customer data for example about the personal values and perceptions of brand images that customers have towards sponsors and partners and everything surrounding the sport event. The pre-event stage is vital when determining the possible expectations of spectators, participants and partners. Through the feedback the event organizer can plan and adjust the event beforehand and this way also exceed the expectations given. At this stage social media networks offer a good opportunity for data gathering because

sites like Facebook and Twitter can generate spontaneous expressions of expectations, opinions and customer views worth monitoring. (Rasku 2013, 20.)

During the event phase, customers are usually in the middle of enjoying their experiences and at that moment customers usually don't want to be disturbed. At this point they don't usually want to respond to any inquiries, but the customers should always have the possibility to give spontaneous feedback, if they so desire. The event phase differentiates from the pre- and post-stages of data gathering, because when in these two stages there is usually plenty of time and more opportunities to gather data, at the event itself the feedback needs to have an opportunity to impact actions immediately. Therefore, technology and methods that allow the customer to give online feedback, should be applied, whereas in pre- and post-stages it is acceptable to do the data gathering with pen and paper if you want. (Rasku 2013, 20-21.)

As said earlier, during the post-event respondents have more time and more opportunities to respond to questionnaires and interviews as they have during pre-event. At this stage customer is able to reflect upon the experiences and the satisfaction of the event as a function between expectations and experience. After the event the collection of customer data about the experience, most memorable moments, personal values and perceptions of brand images of sponsors and partners and subsequent consumer behaviors is possible and also at this stage the responses are valid and trustworthy. (Rasku 2013, 21.)

The process of the sport business intelligence applied to sport event can be described as an ongoing circle. The data and experiences that have been recorded from the event and post-event will be analyzed. This analyzed information will have an impact on the future state of mind and how the next event will be approached in the future. As Rasku (2013, 21) says, the arrow in the figure 4 illustrates the continuity of the business intelligence process and also the nature of event production. Therefore, it can be considered that the post-event period is actually the pre-game period of the next event. This type of constant communication with the customer/consumer and development of the event important and gives a competitive advantage. Reacting to customer needs keeps the customer interested and rewarded and away from competitors. (Rasku 2013, 20-21.) In this chapter we have only focused on a single sport

event and the process around it, but in sport business the same sport business intelligence can be applied to a whole season also. The event part of the figure can be seen as the season itself or as a one game and the pre- and post-events as the transformation from season or a game to another.

## 6 Research results

### 6.1 Introduction of the research

All the 15 different teams from the Finnish Ice-Hockey League, called “Liiga”, participated in answering the Webropol – survey. From these 15 different teams, 18 people answered to the survey. Most teams had only one person answering the survey, but there were three teams who had two respondents. That is why the sample size is 18 even though there were only 15 teams. When analyzing the results, we had to take into consideration the fact that some teams answered twice, which could affect the end results. All though the sample size is rather small, it represents the entire “Liiga”, and therefore it is valid.

Organization	Title
Oy HIFK-Hockey Ab	Sales manager
Liiga SaiPa Oy	Communication- and marketing manager
Lahden Pelicans Oy	Sales- and marketing manager
HC Ässät Pori Oy	Sales manager
Oulun Kärpät	Communication manager
KooKoo Hockey Oy	Sales- and communication manager
JYP Oy	Sales- and marketing manager
Ilves	Communication manager
Rauman Lukko Oy	Communication- and marketing manager
HC TPS Turku Oy	Sales manager
Jukurit HC Oy	Sales manager
Jukurit FC Oy	Coordinator
Tappara	Sales- and marketing manager
Hockey-Team Vaasan Sport Oy	Marketing manager
HC Ässät	Sales manager
Oulun Kärpät Oy	Restaurant manager
KalPa Hockey Oy	Marketing manager
HPK Oy	CEO

Table 1 Teams and the personnel who participated in the survey. (N=18)

The size of the organizations varies greatly when looking at the revenue from the past season. Among the 15 organizations that Liiga consists of, the average revenue from the past season was from four million to eight million. Out of the 18 respondents, 12 responded belonging to this scale. There were also organizations at the both ends of the scale. Two respondents answered that their revenue from the last season was under two million. There was also one between eight and nine million, one between nine and ten million and two respondents answered that their past season revenue had been over ten million.

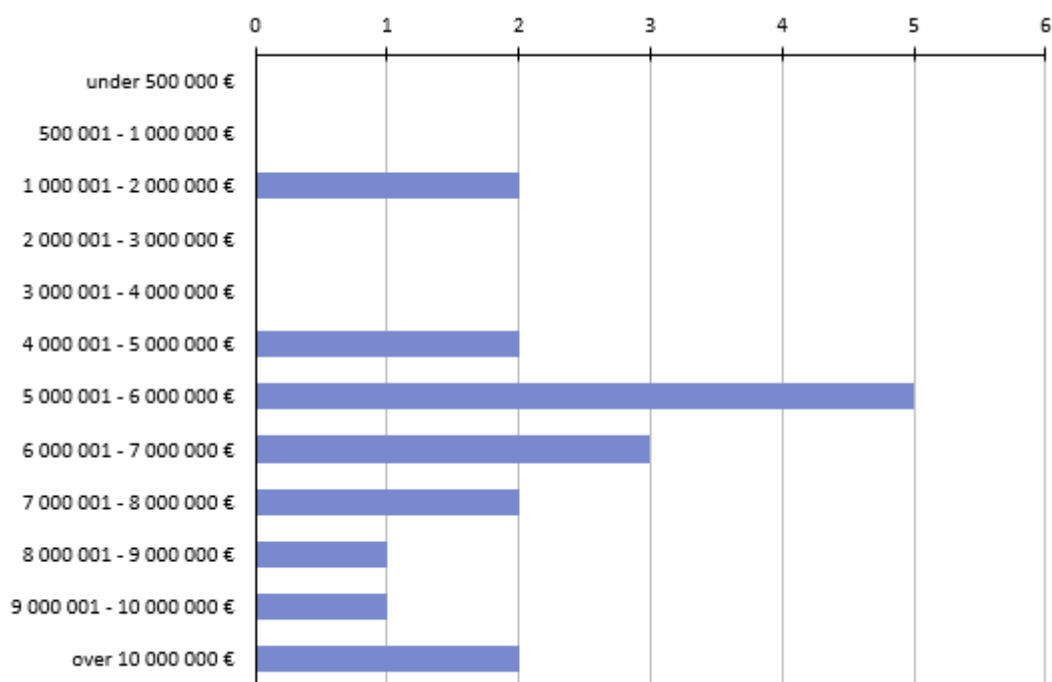


Table 2 Organizations revenue from the past season. (N=18)

The size of the organizations also varied when looking at the number of their paid personnel and the different job titles that the different organizations had in their rosters. The number of personnel that the different organizations had varied from six to 14. The average for most of the organizations was between eight and ten.

17 of the respondents answered that they had a full-time CEO in their organization. Out of the 18 respondents 14 reported having a marketing manager. 16 organizations had a sales manager and only 9 reported having an account manager. Eleven

respondents said that their organisation had a sales representative and eight had sales assistants. Eight of the respondents also reported having other sales or marketing personnel, such as: a VIP – service manager, digital marketing coordinator, marketing designer and a marketing executive. All the paid personnel in the organization were full-time and no organization had any paid part-time employees.

	Full-time	Part-time	None
CEO/ General manager (N=17)	17	0	0
Marketing manager (N=18)	14	0	4
Sales manager (N=18)	16	0	2
Account manager (N=13)	9	0	4
Sales representative (N=15)	11	0	4
Sales assistant (N=11)	8	0	3
Other sales or marketing personnel, what: (N=10)	8	0	2

Table 3 Position of the paid personnel. (N=18)

When asking, whether the organizations had a strategy concerning their customer relationship management, 14 of the 18 respondents said yes, two said that they were planning it and two said that they did not have any strategy for their CRM.

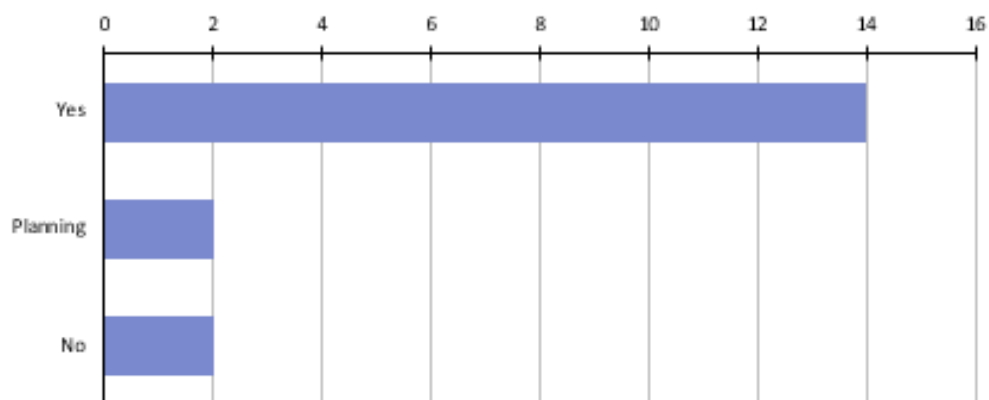


Table 4 Does the organization have a CRM-strategy? (N=18)

The 14 respondents who said, that their organization had a CRM-strategy, were asked whether their organization measured the results of their CRM. Out of the 14, nine answered yes, and five out of the 14 said no

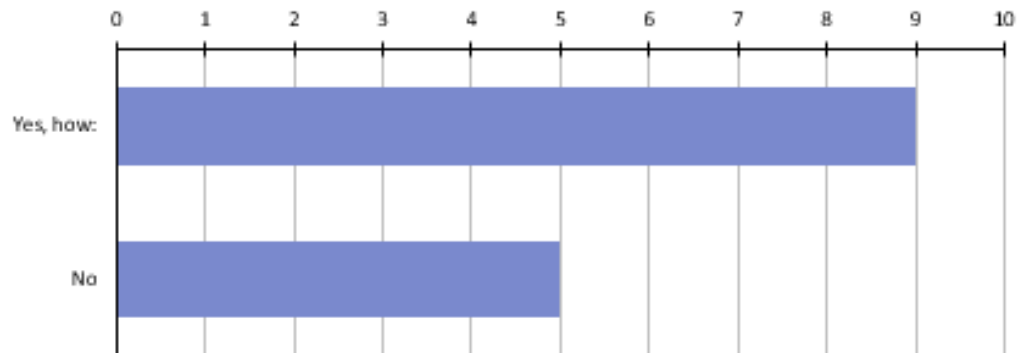


Table 5 Does the organization measure the results of CRM? (N=14)

## 6.2 What is the current state of the CRM

When asking whether the organizations had an actual customer relationship management system or a similar platform in use, 16 said yes and two said no. The respondents, who said yes, were asked what kinds of systems they were currently using. Five of the 16 respondents said that they were using a system called Wisenetwork, two were using Timeworks, another two Salesforce, and the rest were using numerous different systems, such as Greenforce solutions, webCRM, Microsoft dynamics crm, Visma Severa, M-files and Vine.

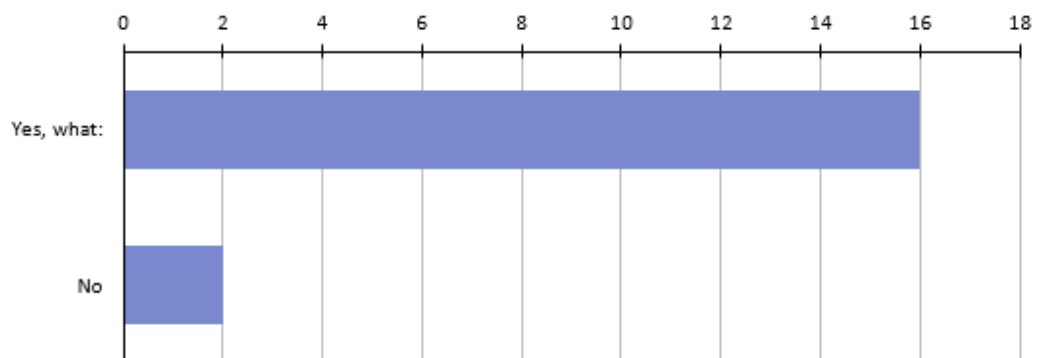


Table 6 Does the organization have a CRM-system or a similar platform in use? (N=18)

The organizations were asked to shortly describe their CRM with a few main ideas. The answers were given in an open format. 16 respondents answered to this question. The first idea was related to the characteristics the CRM. The most frequently highlighted characteristics were control of the customer register and customer data, management and monitoring of sales, calendar management and marketing. In addition, managing the reservations and billings came up in the answers.

The second CRM issue was about those in charge of the use and control of the CRM. There were 15 answers to this question. In six of the organizations every member of the paid personnel was in some way in charge of controlling and using the organization's CRM in their own field of work. In six other organizations, the control and use of CRM was concentrated more on the marketing and sales personnel. In the rest of the organizations, the CRM was handled by one or two persons or by no one.

The third issue, that the organizations were asked to describe about their CRM, was to tell how the organization was actually using and utilizing their CRM. 15 of the respondents answered to this question. In six organizations, CRM was used for monitoring the sales of the organization and as a helpful tool for sales. Apart from tracking sales, one organization used their CRM to track and manage their schedules and meetings. Two organizations used CRM for their marketing. Six of the organizations used CRM for managing and tracking their customer relationships and for contacting their customers as well as for their billing and forming special offers to their customers. In individual cases, some organizations used their CRM for renting their facilities.

The next question asked, whether the use of CRM had brought them the expected results. The question was followed by another question depending on their answer. If the respondent said yes, they were asked what kinds of results they had gained by using CRM. If they said no, there was a question asking why it had not brought the expected results. 14 respondents answered to this question.

Nine of the 14 respondents said that the use of CRM had brought them the expected results. When asked what kinds of results, seven of the organizations said that the control and the management of their customer relationships had become much easier and more manageable. Three of these seven respondents also said that through this customer relationship management their sales had risen. Three respondents said

that by using their CRM the collection and saving data had become much easier, and that it had led to fewer mistakes made in the customer service.

Five respondents, who said that the CRM had not worked in a way that they expected, justified their answer by saying that either their CRM was not yet fully functional, there were some minor details missing from it or that the current system that they were using had not been updated to the current date and, therefore, it had not brought the results. Moreover, in two organizations the reason was the fact that the implementation of their CRM had been delayed by the lack of responsibility of the person in charge of the implementation or simply by the fact that the whole organization had delayed the implementation.

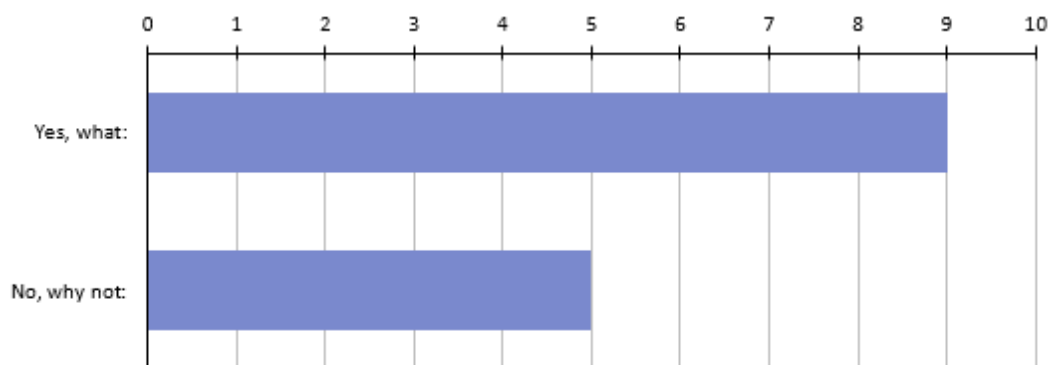


Table 7 Has the use of CRM brought the expected results? (N=14)

Two of the 18 respondents, who had said in an earlier question that they had not implemented CRM in their organizations, were asked why they had no CRM – system. One reason was that there was no suitable and sufficiently easy system available and also that there were insufficient resources to invest in a more expensive system. Another reason why CRM had not been implemented was that the previous personnel in charge of it had not been able to decide and/or that they had relied on “Liiga’s” joint project which eventually did not lead to anything.

### 6.3 What is the future of the CRM

When asking respondents about the future of the CRM in Finnish ice-hockey, the first question was: Do you believe that CRM in an essential way of gaining more customer

profit in Finnish professional ice-hockey in the future? All the 18 respondents answered to this question and 15 of them said yes and three said no.

From the respondents, who said yes, seven argued that CRM will be an essential tool to manage their customerships more effectively, interact with them with more precision and efficiency and that way gain more profit through these actions. Four of the respondents also said that CRM will be a tool to enhance sales and marketing towards customers. As one of the respondents directly say: "It is certain that leading with knowledge and targeting sales and marketing are the keys to better profit."

The respondents who said that CRM will not be an efficient tool in the future reasoned their answers by saying that the growth of their organizations profit will be done through sales, not by managing their customer data. One reason also, why CRM was not considered an efficient tool for the future, was the fact that organization considered other problems to be more urgent and bigger than the lack of customer-ship knowledge. CRM is seen as a good supporter of sales, but the actual CRM is not seen as the main tool to grow the profits or organization.

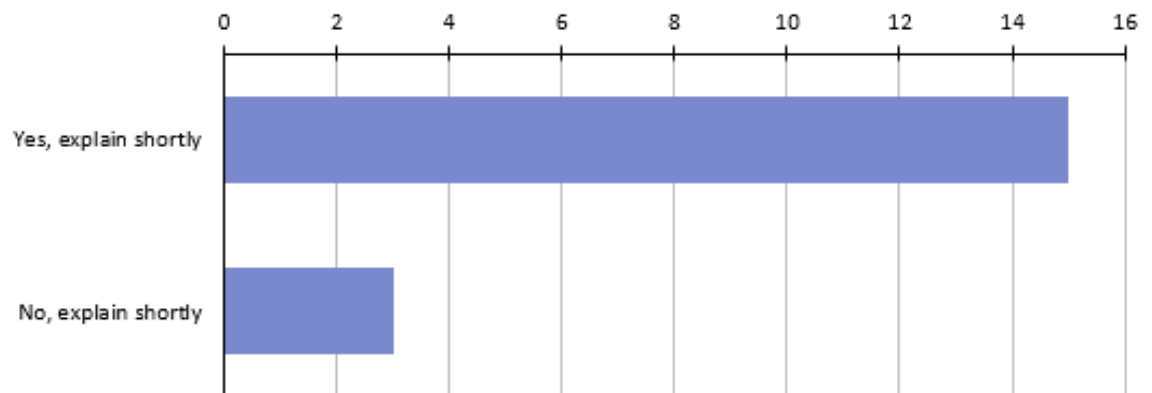


Table 8 Do you believe that CRM will be an essential way of gaining more client profit in Finnish professional ice-hockey in the future? (N=18)

18 respondents were asked that do they think that they could as a sports organization learn from or use CRM systems that are being used in the organizations that are in the field of business. All 18 respondents said yes to this question.

Respondents were asked to explain shortly why they think that they could benefit from it. Two of the 18 respondents said directly that business is always business and

that the sport organizations business model does not differ from any model of a profit pursuing organization. Seven of the respondents believe that utilizing the knowledge of customer relationship management and customer behaviourism would be beneficial also for sport organizations in developing a functional CRM – system. Even though everybody answered yes, couple respondents believe that CRM which has been tailored to specifically answer the needs of a specialities of the sport industry, would work better in favour of a sport organization. Also, one opinion was, that if the CRM can be expanded to focus on singular customers and ticket buyers, the benefits and tracking would be more productive.

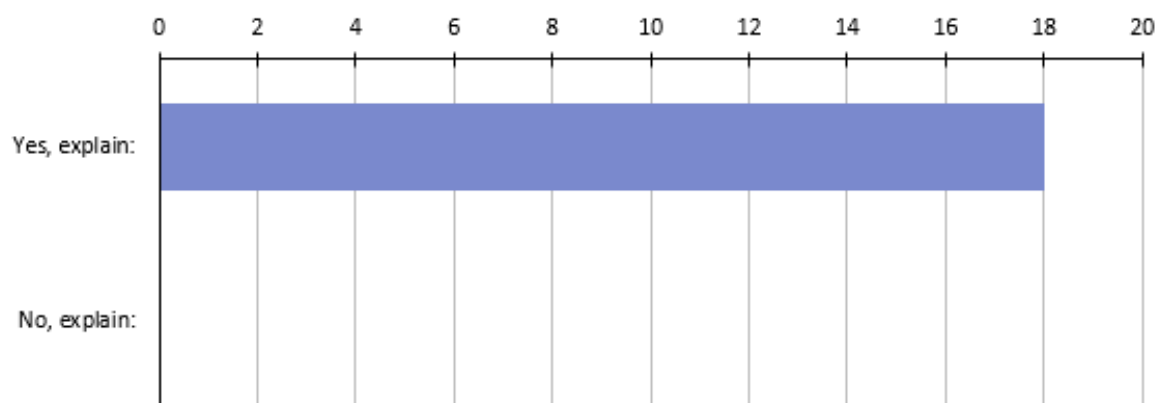


Table 9 Do you think that sports organization like yourself could learn from or use CRM systems that organizations use in the field of business, and therefore benefit from it? (N=18)

Next question that respondents were asked was: what kind of features do you expect the CRM to have? 15 respondents answered to this question. Biggest thing that popped up from the answers was management. Seven of the respondents think that control and management of the customerships, all the data, sales and the sales process, website and basically management of everything should be featured in the CRM – system. Three of the respondents said that one of the most important features of the CRM should be accessibility and user friendliness. Three respondents also said that management, control and support of sales is one major feature they want the CRM to have. Other features that popped up from the answers that singular respondents keep important are automatization of the CRM, analytics from the data, flexibility of the system, mobile feature and clear segmentation of the customers.

When asked about what information the respondents would hope to get out of CRM – system, 13 of the respondents answered. Nine of the respondents said that they would like to get information about their customer history, the development of their customer data and the ratio of active and passive customerships. Six of the respondents showed interest in getting information about their customers buying behavior, tracking and the history of their sales, the development of their sales and also precise information about the sales per customer. Five of the respondents answered that they would want the CRM to provide information about their business associates, sales of these businesses and the contact information of the associate's management. Singular mentions that some organizations would like to get through CRM are customer surveys, more profit and happier customers in general.

## 7 Conclusions

Even though the Liiga itself consist of fairly few teams, there are major differences when comparing these organizations. When looking the revenue of these organizations from the past season, the vast differences might end up affecting the performance of the organizations and the capability to compete with other organizations.

The differences in revenue can also be seen in the amount of the paid personnel. The largest group of paid personnel that "Liiga's" biggest organization has is 14. The smallest has six. When comparing these teams and the current status of their CRM, we have to take into consideration the size and the revenue of these organizations.

### Current stage of CRM

Most respondents declare that their organization owns a strategy concerning their CRM, but in reality, only about half of them actually measure the results that CRM provides for them. Measuring the results of the CRM and using that information to make decisions and develop the organization is the key point of CRM as Baran & Galka (2013, 61.) slightly hint out. So, the fact that only about half of the organizations in "Liiga" actually do so, gives a representation that the use of CRM is at a fairly early stage in most of the organizations in "Liiga".

When asked if the organization has a CRM system of a similar platform in use, 16 of the respondents said yes. The answers of the respondents reflect that the CRM systems at the moment cover a vast variety of different areas that organizations demand such as management of customer register and data, tracking of the sales, marketing, calendar management and etc., but when respondents were asked follow up questions, the reality was much different.

As Baran & Galka (2013, 61.) say, for CRM to be successful, the responsibility and the philosophy of the CRM should be spread out through the organization. When asked from the respondents that who is responsible for the implementation of CRM in their organization, only six answered that everybody in their organization is responsible of the implementation in their own fields. Six other respondents said that the responsibility is more or less on the shoulders of the marketing and sales personnel. Rest of the respondents said that there is either one or two people responsible of the implementation or then there is none. For CRM to be successful, top management needs to communicate with the employees about the benefits of CRM orientation and to support their efforts throughout this development in the whole organization (Baran & Galka 2013, 61). According to these replies and reflecting them to the words of Baran & Galka (2013, 61.) it can be said that there is much to be developed to have a successful CRM in all the organizations in "Liiga".

Another fact that supports this claim, is the responses that were given when asked about how the CRM is being utilized in the organization. As earlier mentioned, 16 of the respondents said that they have some sort of a CRM system. But when asked how it is being utilized, six of the respondents said to use to track sales and use it as a helping tool to increase sales. Six respondents said to use it to track and manage customer register. Two said to use it to control and manage marketing. Then there was one who said to use it to track and manage schedules and meetings. And one another respondent said to use it to rent facilities to others. The fact that only few organizations actually use CRM system to manage and track their actions and these few also do it in a very narrow way by focusing only on a certain aspect, gives an image that organization don't really know how to use and utilize these systems properly and that there is lot to be developed.

Even though the usage of CRM systems is at its early stages in “Liiga”, it clearly has brought some benefits for the organizations. Out of the 14 respondents who responded to the question if usage of CRM has brought any results, nine answered yes. From the respondents who said yes, seven told that through the use of CRM management of the customer data has become easier. Three said that through easier customer data management sales have grown and also three said that through easier data gathering and saving data there has been less mistakes. These responses clearly indicate that CRM has brought positive results.

There were also five respondents who said that usage of CRM system has not brought any results, but their arguments don’t actually give any good reason why CRM itself wouldn’t work properly. All of these respondents said that CRM doesn’t fully work, something is missing from it or it hasn’t been updated to the present day. Two respondents also argued that personnel who had been responsible for the usage of CRM earlier, hadn’t taken enough responsibility in implementing the CRM to the organization or either the whole organization had delayed the matter. Anyhow, these arguments don’t necessary give any valid reason why the CRM system itself wouldn’t work when implemented properly to the organization.

Reasons why some organizations don’t have any kind of CRM system indicates that it is a rather new area for these organizations in the field of sport business and that these sport organizations don’t realize the importance of CRM systems yet. Why it seems like this is because couple organizations who don’t have any kind of a CRM system in use argue that they haven’t found a proper and easy enough to use kind of system and that organizations have not had enough resources to invest in this kind of systems.

### **Future visions of the CRM**

When asked about the future of the CRM in the “Liiga” and the importance of it, 15 out of 18 respondents do agree that it does have an important role to play in raising customer revenue. Even though the usage of the CRM systems is at an early stage in the organizations of the “Liiga” it is clear that most organizations have understood the importance of it in the near future and are willing to put more resources to develop its use.

Three of the 18 respondents did answer no to this question. They argued that growth of the organization happens through sales, not customer relationship management, other problems are bigger and more important than CRM and that the CRM is seen as a good support for the sales but not as the main tool to grow organization revenue. But as Brown & Gulycz (2002, 33.) mention, CRM can achieve benefits and work as a competition weapon, because traditional ways of differencing from competitors such as product features, price and distribution are no longer sufficient. Even though most of the organizations see that CRM is one of the key tools to organization growth, it is clear that because it is rather new area for the organizations in "Liiga", all of the organizations are still not convinced and ready to believe that CRM will be a key tool in sport business.

One thing that all the respondents were agreeing on was the fact that organizations in "Liiga" could use or benefit from the same CRM systems that are already being used in other fields of business. As some respondents said, business is always business. This seems to be the case, because everybody agreed to the claim that they could benefit from systems that are being used in other fields, but this raises a question why some organizations are reluctant to invest in using and implementing CRM system into their own organization.

All in all, even though some organizations seem to lack faith in the usefulness of the CRM in the future, most of the organizations have understood the core meaning of successful CRM. When asked about what information CRM system should provide for the organization, most answers were about customer history, customer data development, customer buying behavior, tracking down sales and specific information about individual customer behavior etc. As Mäntyneva (2003, 15.) has very well put together, understanding and recognizing the needs of a customer are the core points for a successful customer relationship management. And therefore, the better understanding the organization has towards its customers, the better chances the company has in making more profit.

## 8 Discussion

The goal of this thesis was to find out what is the current stage of the CRM in the Finnish ice-hockey league organizations and what are the possible development needs in customer relationship management from the organizations point of view. According to research results and conclusions, thesis can be looked as a successful one, because these goals were achieved. The Webropol survey, which was used to do the research, can be seen as the right research method for this thesis, because it provided information of the situation in the whole Finnish ice-hockey league.

### Reliability

As Kananen (2011, 119) says, if the research has been done without consideration of the validity and reliability, the trustworthiness of the research will be left rather weak. This research can be seen as valid, because if this same research would be done to any other sports league in Finland or anywhere else in the world, it would provide the same type of information of the leagues' current stage of CRM use and the future needs and expectations for the CRM systems that they would use.

And as Adamson, Jones & Tapp (2005) have earlier researched the same topic in England, but within different football clubs from different leagues, the results of the research show very similar results as this thesis, so the results of this research can be seen very reliable.

There are 15 different teams in "Liiga". All the teams were asked to answer to this research and therefore it can be assumed that if there would be 15 different answers, the response rate would be seen as 100%. In this research, there were 18 respondents out of 15 teams, so it can be seen that the results of this research are very reliable, and they cover the situation of the whole league. The answers are reliable at the moment, but if the research would be done at the end of current year or a year from now, the results could be a lot different. But the results are reliable at the moment, because the goal of the research was to answer to the question that what is the current stage of the customer relationship management in "Liiga".

**Potential follow-up research topics**

Because this research only focuses on the Finnish ice-hockey league organizations and their customer relationship management, it is easy to utilize this same research foundation to other levels of ice-hockey in Finland and to other fields of sports also. As said earlier, when discussing about the validity of the research, the use of this research would provide other organizations in different leagues the same type of information and would be beneficial for them in developing their own customer relationship management.

Also, there is a possibility to do research concentrating on the Finnish ice-hockey leagues CRM with more depth. One option could be a research about the CRM systems itself. Because the current stage of CRM and the usage of it is spread out at the moment and vastly different in all the organizations, the goal of this kind of research could be to find the best and mutual solution to this problem.

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