

How to develop Customer Experience in a B2B start-up company

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<p>Customer experience must be taken into consideration in every company's business planning nowadays, since a great amount of business happens online. Customers are more aware of what they want, even before they contact the provider of the product or service, and a positive customer experience can really make a difference when decisions about choosing a provider are being made.</p> <p>Customer experience means more than just customer service. It can be understood as the overall feeling a customer gets out of the process of buying a product or service, and it is something that can extend throughout the customer's entire life.</p> <p>In this thesis, the possible ways of developing the customer experience are being studied from the point of view of a Finnish start-up company, TalentAdore, that sells software to B2B-customers using the SaaS business model. This thesis is done as a procedural qualitative development project, by applying theory to the commissioning company's case.</p> <p>The special customer journey in this kind of business is explained and applied to the case of the commissioning company. The development of customer experience is then explained through theory. On the empirical side, a Net Promoter Score survey is carried out with the company's existing customers. The results of the survey are then analysed, and the conclusions are used to give ideas for improvement of the customer experience in the commissioning company. Online tools and platforms are also suggested for use in collecting feedback and responding to customer requests, as well as software for keeping a record of the CRM and marketing automation. The importance of customer feedback and active communication with customers in different stages of their customer journey is also discussed.</p> <p>As a result, this thesis suggests procedures for how to involve all the members of the team in the creation of customer experience. Examples of these are presented in the results section of this thesis. The main conclusions of this thesis are the need of including customer experience management in the company's strategy and the improvement of targeted customer communication in the touchpoints of the customer journey.</p>	
Keywords Customer Experience, SaaS, start-up, NPS	

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1 Introduction

To start with, there is no such thing as a successful company without customers. A company can have all the great products, brands and services, but they alone don't bring in any money. The customers are the only source of all revenue. This is the reality that many companies started to understand by the early 2000s, as they started to create relationships with their customers and to move from being product-oriented towards more customer-centricity. They also started to measure and manage the customer value. (Peppers & Rogers 2011, 37)

According to Peppers & Rogers, on top of being the only source of revenue, there are two other important facts about customers, that support the importance of taking the customers' experience seriously when planning business. First is, that the customers are scarce. There is only a certain amount of people interested in a certain product at a certain moment and they can always decide to go elsewhere. Customers cannot be borrowed at a bank and returned with an interest as other type of capital. The other one is, that customers actually create value in two ways: by generating profit today and with the experience they get, deciding whether or not to continue doing business with the same company; and also creating a Return on Customer (ROC) for the company. The ROC is comparable to the company's ROI (Return on Investment) and answers the question How much value does your company create for its customers? (Peppers & Rogers 2011, 39)

Customer Experience (CX) has become a critical differentiator nowadays when all the information is available, and purchases can be made online. If a company knows how to manage the CX, it can make a big difference in the brand preference, customer loyalty and, eventually, sales. (SAS Institute Inc. 2015)

I chose this topic because I have been working as a Customer Success Manager in a company selling a Software as a Service (SaaS) -product since April 2016. In that role I have learned the importance of satisfied customers for a start-up company and found out the need for improving their experience to keep them using the product also in the future. This topic also interests me on the customer's point of view, as great customer experience is very rare and when it happens, it can make a big difference.

1.1 Background: Creation of Customer Experience

When you first think about the word customer experience, what comes in mind is the feeling the customer gets after buying a product. Instead of being only about the quality of the

product or the customer service, CX actually has to do with everything related to the buying process. It lasts throughout the whole process, and everything matters, for example, if the marketing is done honestly or if the product lasts after the warranty period (Goodman 2014 p.11). Figure 1.1 shows how customer service and customer experience are related according to Löytänä & Korteso (2011). Customer experience is formed in all the interactions between the company's different departments and the customer, while customer service is only one part of it.

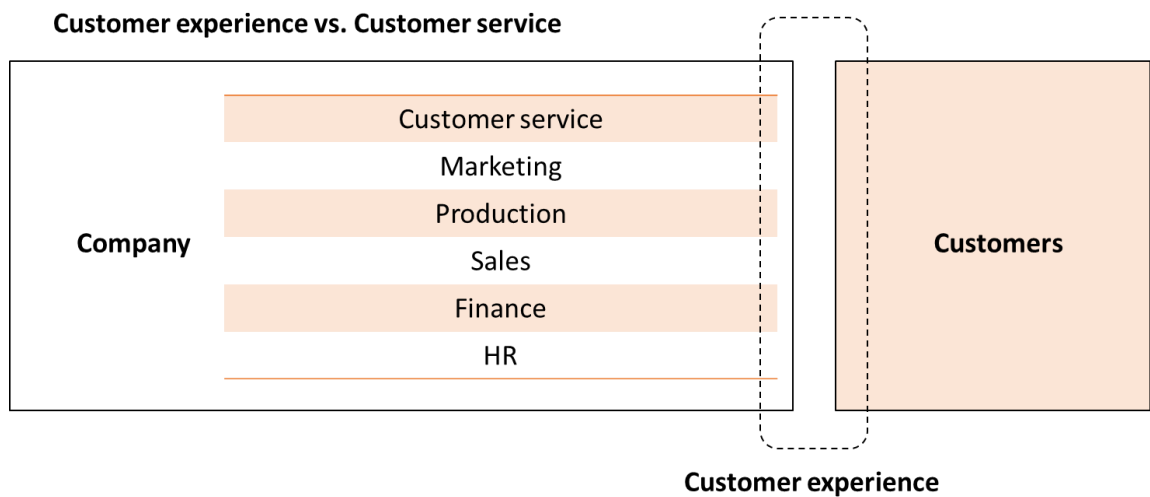


Figure 1.1 Customer experience vs. Customer service (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 15)

Another simple definition for customer experience is the customers' overall perception of their relationship with a company or its brand, that results from all their interactions during the whole customer life cycle (SAS Institute Inc. 2015).

Based on those definitions, we can assume that there are many things that affect the creation of CX. In the following chapters, I will go more into detail about the different aspects of CX creation, but in short, it is about the company strategy and involving the CX point of view in every business process.

The customer's experience is often the key factor of the customer's return to that service or product. John Goodman points out in his book *Customer Experience 3.0* that even if there has been nothing wrong with the product, the CX might still have been bad if the customer has felt deceived or given false information by the company's marketing (Goodman 2014, 13). Therefore, it is crucially important to ask for feedback, because only the problems that are known can be solved.

John Goodman also introduces in his book the financial aspect of CX, as it can have a massive effect on sales and revenue. Based on over 1000 studies managed by J. Goodman across all industries, complaints that do not come directly to company's attention decrease the customer loyalty for at least 20%. This means that the company is losing one out of every five silent, dissatisfied customers to competitors. For example, if a customer is worth of 100€, for 10 complaints received, the company might be losing 50-200 customers which means a loss of 20 000 to 250 000€ in revenue. When considering B2B-businesses, where the value of a customer can be thousands or millions in revenue, the problem of silent, unsatisfied customers gets even bigger. (Goodman 2014)

This also speaks for the importance of collecting feedback. More about feedback and how the CX can be measured will be discussed in chapter 4.

1.2 Objective and limitations

The objective of this research is to find the touchpoints in the commissioning company's customer journey that can be used to improve the communication with the customers and their engagement. I will suggest activities that can help the commissioning company to provide great customer experience in those touchpoints and therefore help them differentiate from their competitors.

The thesis will be delimited to the measurement and development of customer experience, based on theory and using some related concepts which will be introduced shortly. The practical part is limited to an NPS survey performed to the commissioning company's existing customers. When discussing the customer journey, this research explains the traditional customer journey, and how the one of a SaaS company differs from it. Different touchpoints are explained with practical examples of the commissioning company. The objective is to be concrete and suggest actions that can easily be understood and used in every-day work.

Some terminology regarding the measurement of customer value is introduced shortly only for the purpose of proving the importance of customers and their experience. These concepts are not explained in detail nor used in the case of the commissioning company.

In this research, the term 'Customer' is used loosely in different meanings; in some cases, it means a lead or a prospect (that has not yet made the purchase) and in some other cases it means an existing and paying customer. Which one is meant, should become

clear in the context. The words 'buyer' and 'lead' are also used for referring a possible future customer.

1.3 Research approach

This thesis is a procedural qualitative development project, in which the theory and practice take turns and the theory is applied to the commissioning company's case by zipper method. The result of this thesis is a suggestion of concrete actions for how the commissioning company can start improving their customer experience by using new methods and approaches also based on the results of an NPS survey.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In the beginning, the commissioning company is presented. This is followed by some theory on customer experience and the special kind of customer journey of a B2B SaaS-company. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the Development of customer experience including theory and its application to the commissioning company's situation. In the fourth chapter, also a method for measuring the customer experience among existing customers is introduced. The results of the thesis are analysed and followed by conclusions in the fifth chapter.

The last chapter consists of discussion on how the suggested development will help the commissioning company to improve their customer experience. Also, an evaluation on the validity of the research and the survey results, as well as my own self-evaluation are discussed.

2 Commissioning company: TalentAdore Oy



Figure 2.1 Logo of TalentAdore

TalentAdore Oy was founded in 2014 by Saku Valkama, the CEO, and Joni Latvala, the CTO. They wanted to change the current problem in the world of recruitment: lack of communication. How many times people send job applications and never receive any feedback?

How does this influence the employer brand of the recruiting company? Based on this, they created a software that, with the help of Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning, enables the recruiter to give individual feedback to every job candidate by just selecting a few qualities. The software does the actual writing of the feedback, so it takes very little of the recruiter's time. In the near future, the product will include even more communication with the job candidates with a Talent Community, where a certain company's candidates can be asked to join for being available in later recruitments.

In the beginning, the company's name was Equivalentor Oy, which was changed to TalentAdore Oy in 2016. That year the company received some major funding and was able to hire more people and start improving their solution towards what it is now. From the early feedback tool, the software has now developed into a full applicant tracking system (ATS), with which it is possible to handle the whole recruitment process from creating an appealing job ad to hiring the best candidate. It has been named the Virtual Recruitment Assistant (VRA) and the user interface as well as the feedback tool are available in Finnish, English, Spanish, Swedish and German. Figure 2.2. shows the user interface of TalentAdore's VRA, where the basic functionalities can be seen. Figure 2.3 explains the idea of job candidate's evaluation and feedback generation of the VRA.

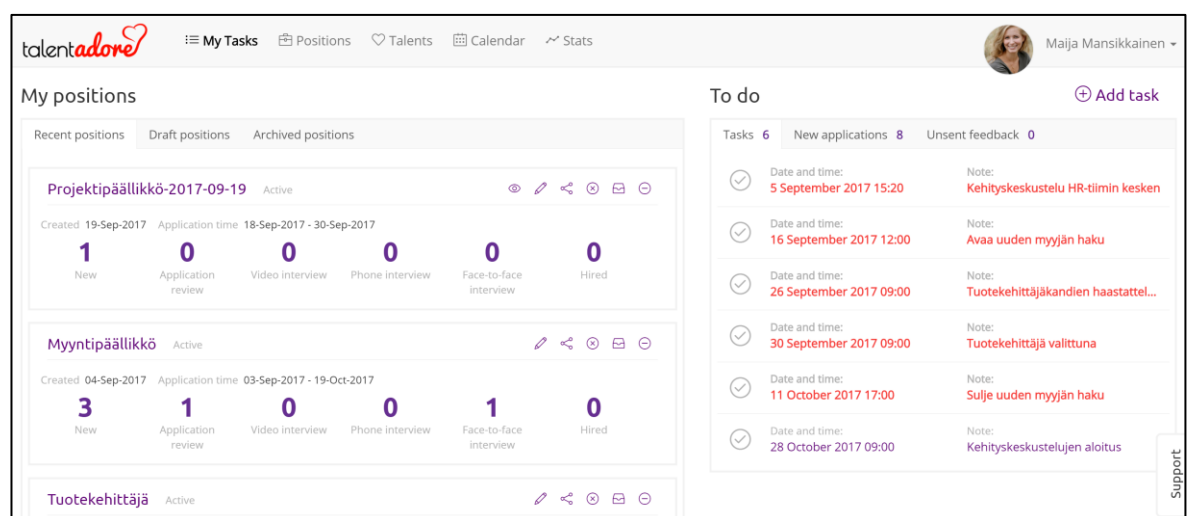


Figure 2.2: Screenshot of TalentAdore VRA's user interface (October 2017).

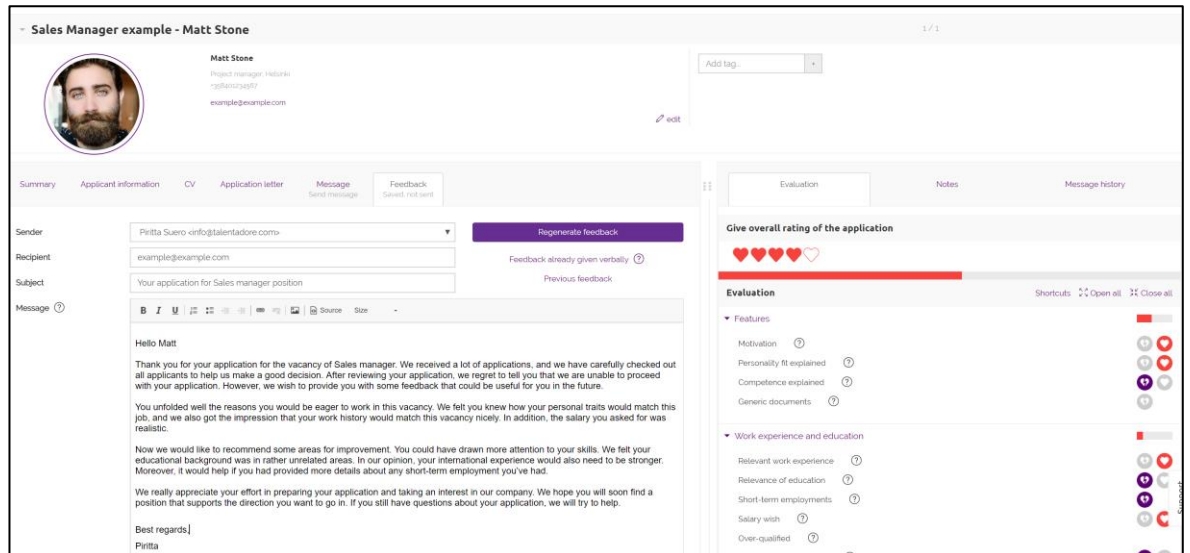


Figure 2.3 A screenshot of TalentAdore VRA's feedback module. The idea is that the recruiter evaluates the candidate with whole and broken hearts and the feedback is simultaneously generated on the left.

By February 2018, TalentAdore has more than 20 customers in Finland and a few other countries and the number is increasing fast.

2.1 The team

Since the two co-founders created the company, TalentAdore has grown to employ 12 people in R&D (4), Marketing (2), Sales (5) and Administration and Customer Service (1). On top of that, there is a group of investors that also participate in the development of the company. All of them are in contact with the customers in one way or another.

TalentAdore office is located in Kerava, but the team uses a lot the possibility to work from a distance. Meetings at the office take place once or twice a week. They also have other free time activities together.

The TalentAdore team is an international and very talented group of young and energetic people that love working together and want to change the world of recruitment towards more human treatment of the candidates. They are open to all suggestions of how to make their customers happier.

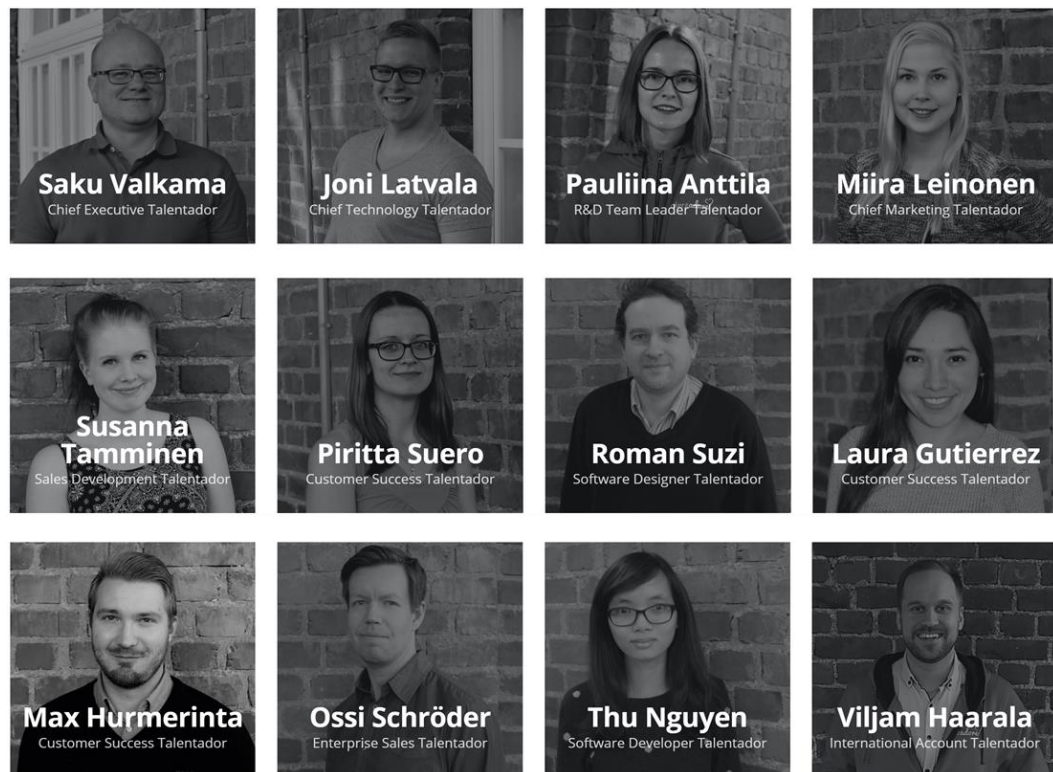


Figure 2.4: The TalentAdore team (TalentAdore 2017)

2.2 Model of Sales and Customer Service

TalentAdore's business model is Software as a Service (SaaS), which means that the application is hosted on a cloud service and used by purchasing a subscription for a certain amount of time. This has become the norm in software sales models compared to the old style of a one-time fee software licences. (Inturact)

TalentAdore's VRA can be sold to B2B -customers in any area of business, as basically all companies recruit employees. The sales model is based on finding potential leads that would be interested in job candidates' experience and its influence on employer branding. Leads are found in events, by referrals in social media, and also inbound, which means that the leads find the company by themselves and make the first contact.

The sales are done by scheduling online demos with potential customers, which are followed by sending an offer if they are interested. Right after sales decision, the new customer is onboarded in another online or live session by a Customer Success Manager (can be the same person who made the sales). After onboarding, the customer can start using the product. The customer onboarding process is shown in figure 2.5.

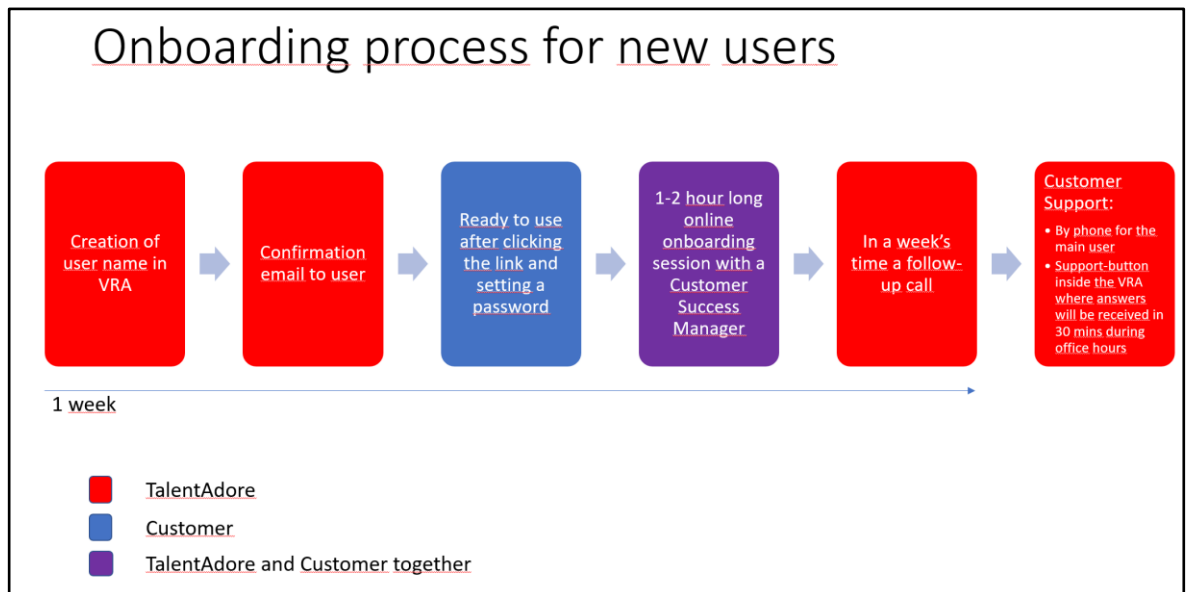


Figure 2.5: New user onboarding process in TalentAdore

TalentAdore VRA has been found to interest two kinds of customers. Firstly, small and medium sized companies that either do not have any recruitment system and want to use the VRA instead of email or excel sheet -based recruitment process, or they want to change from their old ATS to TalentAdore VRA. The other group are the integrators, bigger companies that would like to improve their employer branding by using VRA via integration and only for the recruitment process, separately from their HR system. Integrations to a few major HR-systems are already in process and when finished, they are expected to bring many new customers.

The lead generation in TalentAdore is moving more towards an inbound process, while the company is creating more content and increasing its online presence. HubSpot's platform for Marketing is used to receive demo requests, to deliver downloadable content and to send targeted emails to certain groups of leads and customers, while Pipedrive CRM is used to store the deals and existing customer data.

For Customer Service, TalentAdore uses Zendesk ticketing system, where all the customer inquiries can be answered or forwarded to the right person consistently and immediately. The customer can send a message there via a support button inside the VRA, by email to support@talentadore.com, or via an instant chat window on the company's website. The people answering the customer inquiries or feedback are the Customer Success Managers, and in some more technical issues the questions are forwarded to the R&D team.

3 SaaS Customer Journey

In many cases, a decision of buying a product or service does not happen immediately. Customer journey is a concept that refers to the path the customer is taking via so-called touchpoints before making a purchase decision (Ryte 2018). The purpose for analyzing the journey is to learn more about customers' behavior. When the touchpoints are visible and measurable, as is the case when they are online, the journey can be analyzed to improve the customer's route and to get the wanted action from the customer.

3.1 Customer retention

In traditional software businesses, in which the customer buys a software and then installs it to his own computer, a license is bought once, and the product can be then used forever. In that way, the revenue is created only on the moment of the purchase.

In a recurring revenue business such as SaaS business, where subscriptions to a cloud-based system are paid for a certain period, however, the revenue for the service is also acquired over an extended period of time. That period is called the customer lifetime. Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) is a term that means the value a customer contributes to a company's business over their entire lifetime at the company. When a customer is happy with the product or service, the Customer lifetime will be longer, and the customer therefore generates more profit. Concentrating on CLV means that the company can invest more money on customer acquisition, as the revenue is generated during the whole customer lifetime. (Gotham 2017)

CLV is used a lot in B2C-businesses in e-commerce, where the key is how often the customers come back and make a purchase again. In TalentAdore's case, the CLV is more straightforward, as there is only one product to be sold and it is billed annually. The key point in this case is how to make the customer want to continue their order after the first 12-month period. Thus, the first year is crucial in CX point of view to make the customers want to stay.

If the customer is not satisfied, he will fast switch to another provider and the money invested in acquiring that customer will be lost. This is why, in SaaS businesses, there are two types of sales that have to be accomplished:

1. Acquiring the customer
2. Keeping the customer (to maximize the lifetime value). (Skok 2017)

As, or even more, important as getting customers, is therefore keeping them.

A traditional Customer Journey consists of three stages: Awareness, Consideration and Decision (Hintz 2017). In SaaS companies, however, two more stages can be added to the traditional Customer Journey: Retention and Advocacy.

Customer Success is about helping SaaS -customers to effectively use a product to solve a problem. This means a possibility to retain the best customers of a SaaS company. To create a successful product, it is important to put the customer first, communicate with him often, and listen to his needs when improving the product. SaaS companies often have a Customer Success Manager to take care of these tasks. A specific content for Customer Success can and should also be provided to customers in the different stages of the journey (Bernazzani 2018).

3.2 Stages of the SaaS Customer Journey

The Customer Journey of a SaaS company can be described as in Figure 3.1:

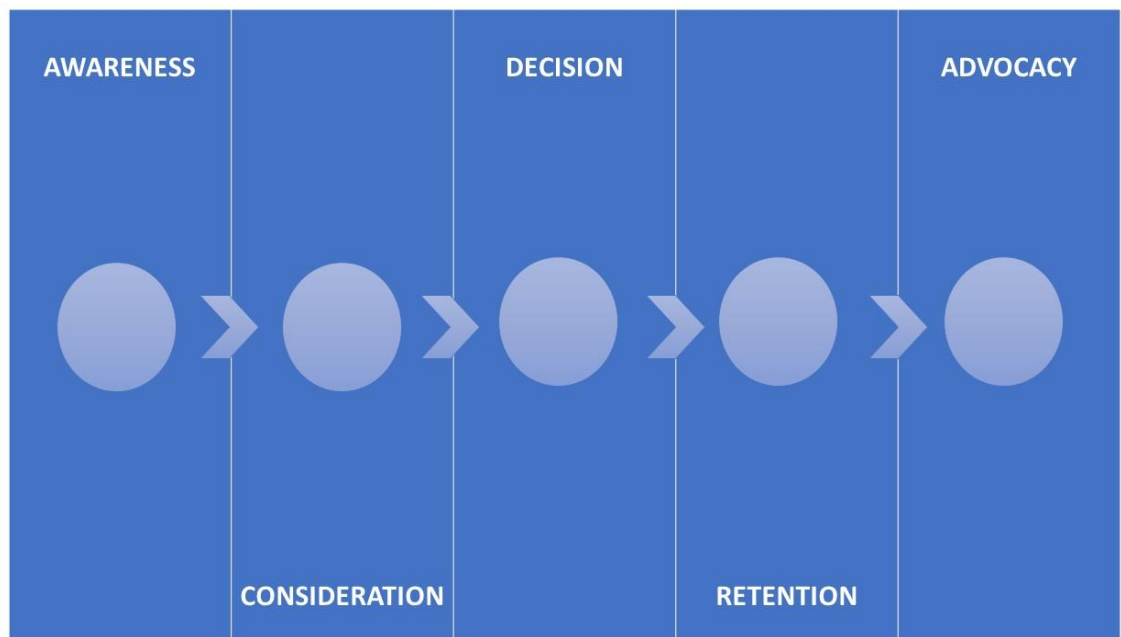


Figure 3.1: Customer Journey of a SaaS company (Inturact)

In the first, Awareness stage, the customers realize the problem they need to solve or the opportunity they want to reach. In TalentAdore's case, this would mean that a person in charge of the recruitments of a company realizes that the system they are using for the recruitment is not satisfactory and starts to look for a better one. For customers in this stage,

the company can provide lots of information to raise interest such as e-books, educational blogs, industry reports and so on. (Hatfield 2017)

When the customers move to the Consideration stage, they have a clear understanding of their goal or challenge and are considering different options how to resolve it. In the case of the recruiting person, he or she would now be considering the different recruitment solutions, asking for demos from different providers and considering the pros and cons of each one of the options. At this stage, the content provided by the company can be for example webcasts, podcasts, blogs or expert guides, to help differentiate the company from others. (Hatfield 2017)

Then comes the Decision stage, where the buyers have decided on which kind of solution they want. Important things to consider from the company's side are who is going to make the final decision, what the buyers like about one solution compared to others, do they want a free trial, on which criteria do the buyers make their decision. Content that could be offered to buyers at this stage are comparisons of features of different providers, case studies, customer testimonials, free trials and demos. After that is a matter of decision which provider the buyer is going to choose. (Hatfield 2017)

The Retention stage is all about retaining the existing customers. This stage comes when the customer has been using the product for a while and has become familiar with it. In this stage, the customers should be provided content about getting the best out of the product, informing them about new features, training courses, guides and e-books, e-mail campaigns and surveys etc. (Hatfield 2017) Using HubSpot as a marketing automation tool enables the company to create workflows that, for example, send reminders and timed marketing emails to a certain group of customers.

In the last stage, Advocacy, the customers turn into advocates of the company. They are fans of the company that love the product and want to spread the word. Now it is important to encourage them. This is done by actively communicating with them and assuring that they are satisfied with the product. The customers at this stage can be provided with social media content, reviews, interviews and testimonials (Hatfield 2017). Customers at this last stage are very valuable to the company as they spread the positive word of mouth, possibly also in social media channels, where it can reach thousands of people, and therefore perform free marketing for the company.

This far TalentAdore has not really been using the full possibility of providing different kind of content in regard with the customer journey stage before the buying decision. On their

web page, there are several calls-to-action such as a button for demo request, for downloading a guide and subscribing to a newsletter. This could be improved by offering help on the page more actively, e.g by asking Are you planning to change your ATS?

3.3 Touchpoints with Customers

In the beginning of the customer journey, the first touchpoint with the possible future customers is when they first hear about the company and become interested in their offering. That can happen through social or other type of media, on an event, through word of mouth from their stakeholders or as a result of active cold-call sales.

The next touchpoint would be when the customer visits the company's website and responds to some call-to-action on the site, such as asks for a demo of the product. To convert the visitor into a lead, it is very important to make the CX of this point very appealing, also by making the demo requesting easy and fast. If the demo cannot be acquired automatically, the demo requests must be answered immediately by the Customer Success Manager or other person in charge.

To turn the leads into customers might be the most difficult task and yet the most important part of the journey. In the sales point of view, this is the deal closing stage. In the customer experience point of view, also the sales experience matters. At this point, the leads are already in the company's CRM and they can be sent inbound marketing messages. The challenge is to draw them in and progress them through the sales funnel to become customers. What is needed for that to happen, is to build trust and a relationship, offer an added value proposition and listen very carefully for any buying signals. (Van Rijn 2017)

3.4 How to classify the potential customers to different stages on the Customer Journey?

When using a CRM, the deal stage in which the customer is in the sales pipeline, can also define that customer's stage on the customer journey. An example of a sales pipeline can be seen in Figure 3.2:

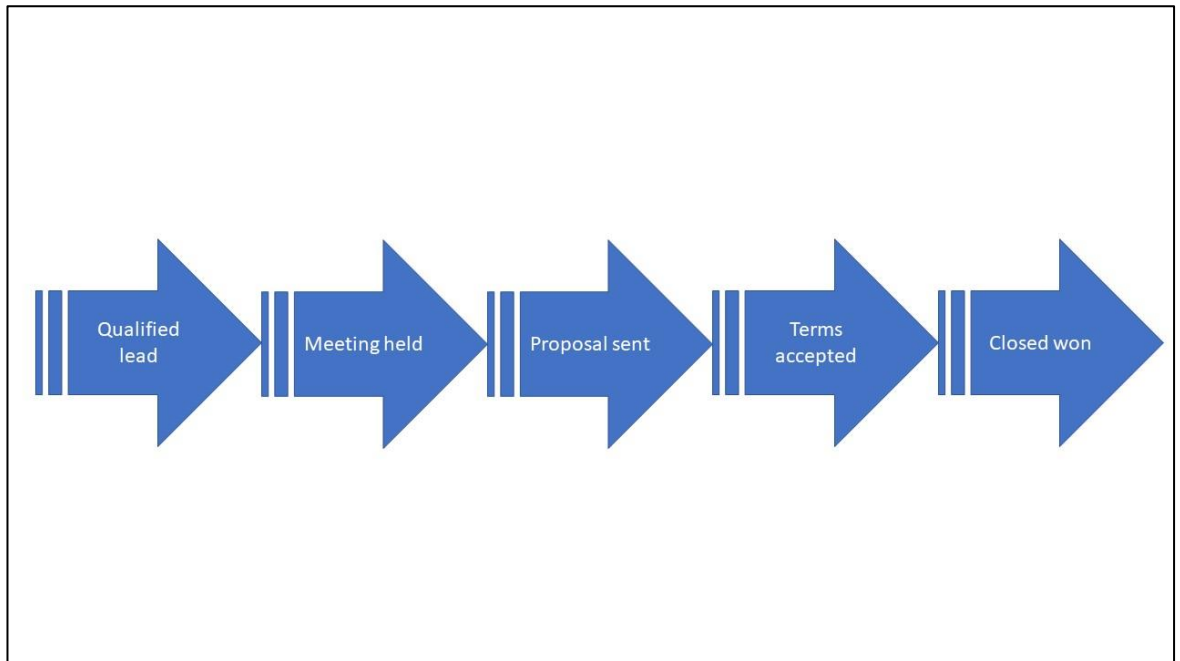


Figure 3.2: An example of a sales pipeline (Pipedrive 2018).

In this case, the leads or potential customers in the Qualified lead - stage would be in the Awareness stage of the customer journey, Meeting held → Consideration stage, Proposal sent/Terms accepted/Closed won → Decision stage. Retention and Advocacy are stages of existing customers and therefore not shown in the sales pipeline, which ends when the lead becomes a paying customer. Now that we can classify in which stage the (potential) customers are on their journey, we can send them targeted emails and other content specific to their journey stage.

3.5 TalentAdore's Customer Journey

In TalentAdore's case, an example of a customer journey could include the following touchpoints, which are also illustrated in figure 3.3.:

1. A company's HR person sees a conversation in a LinkedIn group, where someone talks about his/her experience about TalentAdore's product
2. The HR person goes to TalentAdore's website and reads more about it
3. The HR person gets interested and requests a demo
4. TalentAdore's Customer Success Manager contacts the HR person and they agree a time for online demo
5. The demo is held, the Customer Success Manager sends an offer and the HR person presents the offer and the product to her team
6. The company makes the buying decision

7. The Customer Success Manager and the HR person with her team have an online onboarding session, after which the company is ready to start using the product
8. The Customer Success Manager calls or sends a follow-up email after a few days of usage to ask if everything is fine and offers help

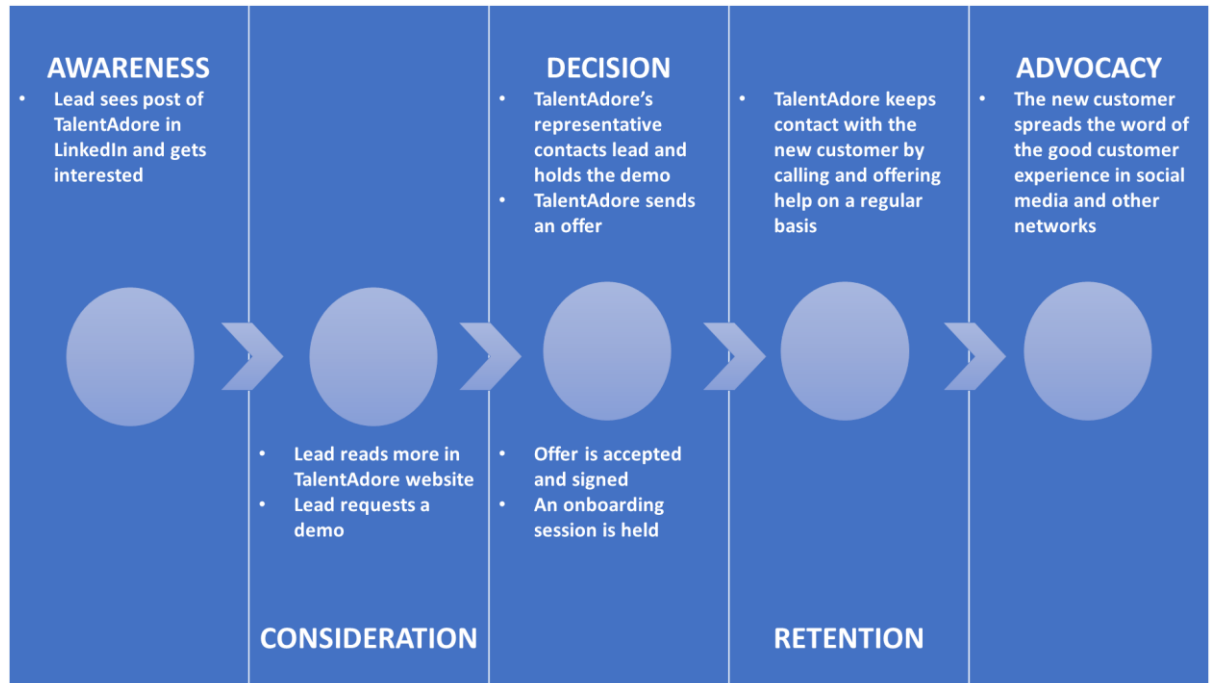


Figure 3.3 Example of a Customer journey in TalentAdore put into Inturact's model.

According to the current situation, the point that could be improved the most in the process of TalentAdore, is the after sales support (Valkama 2017). The onboarding is in many cases the last contact for a long time, and the customer is left alone with the product. The customer journey should not end when the usage has started, but the communication should stay active from the company's part. From some customers' part, the communication keeps active if they actively send messages to support to ask for something, but some customers keep silent and those are the ones that should be especially approached.

As a part of this thesis I have performed a simple survey, targeted to a very specific group of customers, with the idea that it possibly could activate also the inactive customers to give some sort of feedback. This will be explained in more detail in chapter 4.

4 Development of Customer Experience in TalentAdore

In this chapter I will discuss what it takes of a company to manage and develop their CX, based on some literature sources. In the end of the chapter, a simple method for measuring the CX in TalentAdore is presented and analyzed.

4.1 Customer Experience Management

The term Customer experience management (CEM) is quite a new concept that has risen in the end of 2000's. It can be understood as a successor of CRM, but it has a wider perspective on the relationship between the company and the customer. The purpose of CEM is to create meaningful experiences to customers and in that way create more value to the customer and more revenue to the company (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 12). The advantages of CEM are presented in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Advantages of CEM (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 13)

Customer Experience Management:	
Reinforces the customer engagement with the company	Increases the number of development ideas given by the customers
Increases customer satisfaction	Increases the brand value
Increases the number of company advocates	Engages the employees
Increases the possibility of additional sales to customers	Reduces churn of customers
Lengthens the customer lifetime	Reduces negative feedback received from the customers
Increases the willingness of the customer to recommend the company to others	Reduces the cost of customer acquisition
<div>➔ Maximizes the value created for the customer</div> <div>➔ Increase the revenue of the company</div>	

K. Philip points out in his book *Managing Customer Experience*, that CEM is about applying the knowledge of the mistakes that have been done before and not making them again (Philip 2015, 2). It is even wiser to learn from other people's mistakes than of one's own. It is not enough to just offer high-quality goods and services, but companies must compete on a different level by offering an exceptional customer experience through all stages of the buying process, managing the customer's expectations before, during and after sales.

The CEM must be part of the company's strategy and all the employees must understand what it requires from them.

When thinking about a company that already has its standard ways of working, this profound change might be difficult to implement. TalentAdore as a start-up has a good advantage in starting to do the right things from the beginning, as they are just in the stage of planning their strategies. Customer experience management could therefore be included in their every-day work and company strategy. A good starting point would be these six steps of customer experience management shown in figure 4.1:

Six steps of Customer experience management



Figure 4.1: Six steps of Customer experience management (Arussy 2010, Löytänä & Korteso 2011).

4.2 People, Process, Technology

Customer experience is created as a combination of the company's people, the process, and the technology behind it. John Goodman describes delivering a great customer experience as a four-part framework (figure 4.2), which starts with doing things right the first time. This means that to deliver great CX, the expectations of the product must be set accurately, and the employees must have the tools to deliver what was promised.

In TalentAdore's case the people and the technology are in order and the one thing to really improve is the process. This simple framework can be used to make sure all the parts of the process are working adequately.

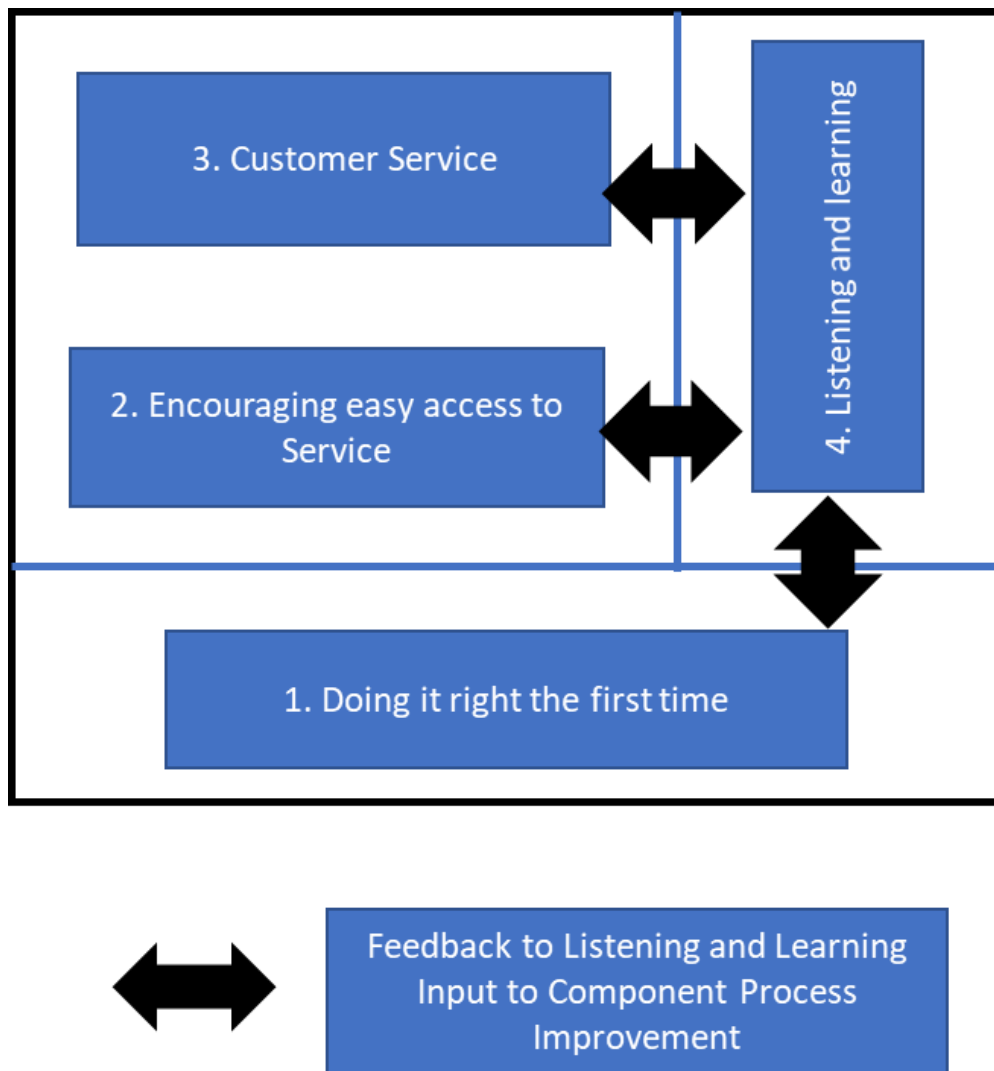


Figure 4.2: Four components of the customer experience strategy (Goodman 2014)

The second part according to Goodman is that the customer can easily access the customer service. Many times, complaining requires too much effort from the customers which makes them think that the company is not even willing to help them. This is the challenge with those TalentAdore customers that keep silent after starting the usage. Then the easiest way for the unhappy customer might be to change provider and the customer is lost. This easy access is created in form of a chat- or email-based customer support where the customer gets an answer right away or in a reasonably short time. In TalentAdore, a customer support system based on Zendesk has turned out to be a good

solution for the active customers, but the silent ones also need another way of approaching.

Goodman's third component is a good customer service system, that also creates emotional connection, and prevents the problems before they appear. This would, in my opinion, include a specific person responsible for each customer, who would not only answer to questions and problems but also proactively tell the customer about new features or other relevant things. TalentAdore's customer service system is also still lacking some consistency since there has not been very many customers to serve. Very soon there will also be a need for more customer service agents available at the same time to efficiently answer the customer service chat and email.

The fourth part, Listening and learning, is all about listening the customer for any signs of things that could be done better, be it in the product, in the delivery or the usage. It is not about fulfilling every wish of the customer, but instead telling honestly what can be changed and what cannot. The base for these four parts to work and progress is the efficient use of customer feedback to improve the service and finally the whole experience.

For the customer experience management to become effective, everybody in the company must engage to it. Alan Pennington talks about a Customer Intelligent Company, where the staff knows what experience they are required to deliver, understand how their actions impact on the customer, including both frontline and back office teams; enough time and resources are spent to train staff to deliver the brand promise, and small course adjustments are made every day to improve the experience (Pennington 2016). For TalentAdore, this training of the employees could be included in weekly meetings, so everybody would always be aware of not only the new features, but also of creating the brand in a common way.

4.3 The importance of customer feedback

As stated previously with the words of John Goodman, the feedback from customers is crucial, because you can only fix the issues you know about. Now, how to collect that feedback, when many times the most silent customers can be the unsatisfied ones?

The most obvious way would be just to call the customer and ask what is going on and if the product has been satisfactory. This should be done frequently, and especially before the end of the contract period to incentivise them to continue the usage. This is one of the most important tasks of a Customer Success Manager. Another good way would be to

make a survey on customer satisfaction, such as a simple NPS survey, which will be explained below.

To get more accurate and specific feedback, the feedback collecting can be done continuously and systematically in all kinds of touchpoints, be it in marketing, production, or sales. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 199). An example of this are messages asking for feedback sent back to the customer after a phone call to customer service.

One important thing regarding feedback is, do not collect feedback if you are not planning to react to it. In the case of continuously collecting feedback, it should be analysed regularly, and changes made accordingly.

4.4 Measuring Customer Experience using Net Promoter Score (NPS)

“If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it” (William Thomson (Lord Kelvin))

In TalentAdore, many intentions of receiving feedback from the customers by making a survey have been made during the last year, but none or very few answers have been received. This fact gave me an idea of performing a very simple survey, which is easy to answer and would give some valuable information of what the customers think about the company at the moment.

One of the easiest way of getting customer feedback is a simple Net Promoter Score (NPS) survey. NPS was originally created by Fred Reichheld, Bain & Company, and Satmetrix and presented by Reichheld in 2003 (Reichheld 2003). The idea of NPS is to measure the loyalty that exists between a provider and a consumer. It is performed by asking a simple question to customers: “How likely would you recommend [Company] to your friends or colleagues?” in a scale from 0-10. NPS result values range from -100 to +100, and the values above 0 are considered good, more than +50 are excellent (Bain & Company 2017). NPS can also be used in other situations such as measuring employee loyalty.

The answers to this question are then analysed so that the customers that gave a 9 or 10 are called Promoters, those who gave 7 or 8 are called Passives and the ones that gave 0-6 are Detractors. The result of the survey is a simple number derived subtracting the score of the Detractors multiplied by the number of Detractors from the Promoters (num-

ber x score). The Passives do not affect the NPS result. For example, if we have 3 Promoters that gave 9,9 and 10 and 3 Detractors that gave 3,4 and 5, the NPS would be $3(9+9+10)-3(3+4+5) = 48$.

To make a real use of the results of NPS, the answers cannot be given anonymously. When the company knows who gave them for example a 5, they can easily tackle the issue by calling the customer, asking for more feedback and offering some help.

NPS could be even more widely used in B2B-businesses. In the Bain & Company article (Bain & Company 2017), NPS is used to build loyalty in B2B companies. They also give ideas on how to delight a B2B customer, such as creating economic and strategic value for the business, simplifying their daily operations, being trustworthy and nice to work with. When customers and employees are in a continuous dialogue, the employees learn exactly which elements of the business most appeal to or annoy the customer. In that way, the customers can be served for the needs they really have, not just the ones that the company assumes they have.

In the case of TalentAdore, a continuous NPS survey as a widget in the VRA would be a great idea, so the users could answer it whenever they are using it. The current score could be then available for all the staff and updated for example every Monday.

4.5 Performing the NPS survey

I performed a simple NPS survey to TalentAdore's customers by sending them an email with a link to the survey. The question was in Finnish as the email was targeted to Finnish customers. The survey included also an optional space for open comments. The respondents had to leave their name and company information before answering. A screenshot of the survey can be seen in Appendix 1.

The target group of the survey was made in HubSpot by adding to a mailing list all the registered users of all the paying Finnish companies, whose contract was valid at the moment. HubSpot was then used to automate the email sending to this specific group. A screenshot of the automated email template can be seen in Appendix 2. The survey was sent to a total of 172 people from 18 customer companies.

4.6 Results of the NPS survey

The answering rate was 11/172, which equals around 6%. 11 out-of-office -messages were received and 1 person did not work in the company anymore. The results of the survey are shown in figure 4.3.

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of respondents	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	3	0

Figure 4.3. Results of the NPS survey

The NPS score of this survey is 27. This is the number of Promoters (3) x their score (9), as the rest of the respondents were Passive (7 or 8) and there were no Detractors that would have lowered the score.

The results can be considered fairly good, although the answering rate was quite low. On the other hand, all the respondents gave a score bigger than 7, so none of them were very unsatisfied. There were neither any excellent scores given, so there are certainly things to be improved. We also have to remember that the score the respondents give is about the whole company and also other things than just the customer's experience can affect it. Customers might be unhappy with some features of the product or just the company in general.

As mentioned earlier, the main points of improvement in TalentAdore's CX would be communicating with the existing customers more after onboarding and keeping the dialogue open with them (Valkama 2017). According to the answers to the open question in the NPS survey, the main points of improvement on the company level are in the product and the user experience and these results will be handled by the R&D department.

5 Results and Conclusions

Based on the theoretical background of CX and its formation, its application to the commissioning company and the NPS survey performed, the conclusions for improving the CX in the commissioning company are presented below.

The most important conclusion is that the customer experience management should be included into TalentAdore's company strategy. It has to be present in the daily activities, as it is a continuous process that needs continuous managing, organizing, measuring etc. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 166). In TalentAdore's case this would mean that the sales people must think about it when they discuss with leads and customers, R&D people must consider it by making the features more usable from customer's point of view, and marketing people have to remember to be honest and up to date in marketing activities.

A good starting point for including customer experience management into TalentAdore's strategy would be to define the six steps introduced by Arussy (Arussy 2010) and shown in figure 4.1. in TalentAdore's case (Valkama 2018). This way the target customer experience would become clear for everyone. The team could then go through the steps together and redefine their targets all over again.

Collecting and handling feedback is another important task to be done. Responding to every feedback personally is crucial (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 189-191). The existing channels for feedback in TalentAdore are now Zendesk-based chat and mail, but this will also be improved by giving the customers a possibility to give feedback continuously inside the VRA (Anttila 2018).

On more practical and detailed level, I have collected some ideas and insights for making the experience better.

Here are some ideas for how to approach customers after the first customer onboarding session (Leinonen 2017, Anttila 2018):

- Call them a few days after the onboarding session and ask if some questions or ideas for improvement have arisen
- Send them an email with some tips that would especially match their business case
- Classify in which stage the (potential) customers are on their journey, and send them targeted emails and other content specific to their journey stage using the automated marketing tool of HubSpot

- To engage the CEO in CX by sending the customers a monthly Newsletter from the CEO (Bernazzani 2018)
- Enable customer rating in Zendesk, so that immediate feedback on customer service can be received constantly. This can then be analyzed together. (Anttila 2018)
- Implement a continuous NPS survey inside the VRA (Anttila 2018)

In table 5.1 I have gathered some procedures and suggested how changing them could improve the CX.

Table 5.1: Suggestions on how to change some daily tasks to improve the CX (Leinonen 2017, Anttila 2018)

Task	How it is done now	How it should be done
Answering the demo requests	By a sales person that can also provide the demo	As soon as possible, could be also done by the Customer Success Manager
Answering chat	Immediately by Customer Success Manager	Immediately, during office hours, on other times chat messages converted into normal support emails.
Answering support emails	By R&D	Immediately or as soon as possible by a Customer Success Manager, then move it to R&D if necessary
How is the customer request for new features handled	No clear procedure, which prolongs the process and makes customer wait	There should be a clear process and rules for what can be promised to a customer without authorization from the CEO
Improving CX on the company level	Not part of team discussions	Taking CX improvement as a part of the weekly team meetings

6 Discussion

In this final chapter I will explain how TalentAdore will benefit from this work. It will be followed by evaluation of the thesis process as well as of my own learning during it.

6.1 Benefits of this research for the commissioning company

The biggest benefit for TalentAdore is that the concept of CX has now been brought up and the tools and methods for improving it are now available to the whole team. As the number of customers is increasing, it becomes all the time more important to take care of them. By using the full potential of tools such as Zendesk and HubSpot, TalentAdore will be able to communicate more efficiently with the customers. This process should start with analysing the customer journey in different situations and finding and taking advantage of the critical touchpoints in marketing activities (Hatfield 2017).

By starting to actively manage the customer experience as Löytänä & Kortesoja suggest, it can be improved as the weak points will become clear and easier to tackle. As customer experience management is part of the company strategy, its implementation is different in every company (Löytänä & Kortesoja 2011, 165) so TalentAdore should find their own way for creating customer experiences that exceed the customers' expectations. Also, to differentiate from competitors in the same area of business, customer experience management is the most effective way to become the market leader (Löytänä & Kortesoja 2011). TalentAdore has many competitors in the ATS business, and by investing in customer experience it is possible for them to become a forerunner in the business area (Löytänä & Kortesoja 2011, 164).

The NPS survey benefits TalentAdore, even though the answering rate was low. It is the first survey done for the company that actually received some answers from non-anonymous participants and especially from customers. This survey is possible to make continuous by putting it to TalentAdore's VRA and this will be done in near future to receive and handle feedback constantly (Anttila 2018).

6.2 Evaluation

The process of this thesis was quite long, and the idea developed and changed quite a lot on the way. I was all the time working for the commissioning company, and the situation with customers changed a lot during the process. When I started the thesis, there was no

customer service system in use, due to very small number of customers. In the summer 2017 we started using the Zendesk ticketing system for receiving customer feedback. I have been in an active part in answering the customers through it and in my opinion, it has been a good choice. Since starting my thesis, the number of customers has almost tripled and different needs to serve them have come up. Recently, the chat tool on TalentAdore website has been implemented and already some leads have been acquired through it.

Information and theory about the topic of this thesis was very easy to find as it has been very popular in marketing-related articles. More difficult was to decide, which sources are the most trustworthy and accurate according to this kind of commissioning company's case. I found dozens of online articles on customer experience but only a few of them were worth using as reference. The theory I found in some books was in my opinion too complex and I found it a bit difficult to apply to this company's case. Some basic theory and research was found in books, but I preferred the online articles because they are practical and up to date. The book in Finnish by Löytänä & Kortesoja was very practical and provided lots of information, which is why I used it in many ways.

6.3 Self-evaluation

Before starting this thesis, I had very little understanding of what the customer experience really consists of and how it could be improved. While studying from books and online articles, I found some very simple and useful tools and got some ideas that can easily be implemented in the case of the commissioning company. Thinking about the customer's journey and the touchpoints between the customer and the provider helped me understand the timing and content of customer communication, that could help in improving the customer experience.

While I was finishing my thesis, the customer support tasks increased a lot and at one point I was the only one answering to the questions, naturally with the background help of the R&D-team. I had many insights, such as the importance of how and when to answer the messages. There is an urge to answer as fast as possible, but then also the quality of the answer can suffer. On the other hand, if the customer is taught that we answer immediately, then this standard should keep on like that despite of who is in charge of answering. As a result of these insights, we decided to limit the chat to office hours from 8 to 17. To normal support messages, the first answer should come immediately, but it can be general and tell that more detailed answer will be given later.

On the chat, we received in the beginning also a little bit irrelevant messages, so we decided to require user identification with name and email address before starting the chat. This has turned out to be a very good decision, as after that there has been only relevant chat messages coming.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: NPS Survey form

* 1. Kuinka todennäköisesti suosittelisit TalentAdoren VRA:ta ystävälle tai työtoverille?

0 – EN LAINKAAN TODENNÄKÖISESTI

10 – ERITTÄIN TODENNÄKÖISESTI


0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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* 2. Kertoisitko vielä nimesi ja yrityksesi:

3. Halutessasi voit antaa meille avointa palautetta:

LOPPU

Appendix 2: Template of the survey email sent to customers from HubSpot



Edit rich text module

Hei **FIRSTNAME**

Olemme iloisia, että käytät TalentAdoren Virtuaalista Rekrytointiassistenttia! Haluamme kehittää asiakaskokemustamme, ja siksi pyytäisimme, että vastaisit lyhyeen kyselyymme seuraavan linkin kautta:

<https://fi.surveymonkey.com/r/6MP233V>

Vastaaminen kestää noin 2 minuuttia.

Kiitos arvokkaasta palautteestasi!

Muistathan, että tukemme on aina käytettävissäsi osoitteessa support@talentadore.com.

Ystävällisin talviterveisin,

Piritta Suero
Customer Success Manager
& TalentAdoren tiimi

