Pauliina Ramberg

DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN A VIDEO MEETING

-DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

TURKU AMK

TURKU UNIVERSITY OF
APPLIED SCIENCES

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During the year 2020, sales professionals, customers and patients have had to consider how the customer could be met effectively in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The perception of meeting the customer has changed. MS Teams meeting and other remote meetings have come to everyday life. In many contexts, we talk about the digital leap. For many years, this change has been predicted to be permanent. In the healthcare sector, in particular, the digital revolution is still in the beginning.

As part of this thesis, a survey was conducted with 57 respondents. Respondents consisted of patients, nurses, and doctors who had been met remotely during 2020. 56.1% of respondents said it was as easy to meet remotely as than face to face. A large proportion of respondents (43.9%) felt that meeting in a video conference was not as easy as meeting face to face. Respondents who felt that remote meeting was not so easy also experienced technical problems. 48 respondents (84.2%) believe that the change will be permanent, and remote meetings will continue to be used in the future.

As a result of the thesis, the needs for change that arose during the survey and interviews are indicated to the case company. The aim of this work is to support working in video meetings with customers and to improve the customer experience and customer understanding in the company.

Pauliina Ramberg

DIGITAALINEN ASIAKASKOKEMUS ETÄYHTEYKSISSÄ

COVID-19 KRIISIN AIKANA

Vuoden 2020 aikana myynnin ammattilaisten, asiakkaiden sekä myös potilaiden on pitänyt miettiä kuinka asiakasta ja hoitohenkilökuntaa voidaan tavata tehokkaasti COVID-19 pandemian aikana. Käsitys asiakastapaamisista on muuttunut, ja etäkokoukset ovat tulleet meidän kaikkien jokapäiväiseen elämään. Monessa yhteydessä puhutaan digiloikasta. Vuosien ajan tämän muutoksen on ennustettu olevan pysyvä, mutta erityisesti terveydenhuoltoalalla digitaalinen muutos on kuitenkin vasta hyvin alkutekijöissään.

Tämän työn osana toteutettiin kysely, johon saatiin 57 vastaajaa. Vastaajat koostuivat potilaista, hoitajista sekä lääkäreistä, joita oli tavattu henkilökohtaisesti etäyhteyden kautta vuonna 2020. 56,1 % vastaajista oli sitä mieltä, että tapaaminen oli yhtä helposti hoidettavissa myös etäyhteyden kautta kuin kasvokkain. Kuitenkin suuri osa vastaajista (43,9 %) koki, että videokokouksessa tapaaminen ei ollut yhtä helppoa kuin kasvokkain tapaaminen. Vastaajat, jotka kokivat, että etätapaaminen ei ollut niin helppoa, kokivat myös teknisiä ongelmia. 48 vastaajaa (84,2 %) uskoo muutoksen olevan pysyvä ja että etäyhteyttä tullaan käyttämään etenevissä määrin myös tulevaisuudessa.

Työn lopputuloksena yritykselle osoitetaan ne muutostarpeet, jotka nousivat kyselyn ja haastatteluiden aikana esille. Tämän työn tavoitteena on tukea työskentelyä videoneuvotteluissa asiakkaiden kanssa sekä asiakaskokemuksen ja asiakasymmärryksen parantaminen yrityksessä.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Explanation of abbreviation (Source)
COVID-19	Coronavirus
HCP	Health Care Professional
CEM	Customer Experience Management

1 INTRODUCTION

Today, the customer experience is a solid way to compete, and it's a differentiating factor between companies, especially in situations where companies offer very similar products or services. When products are not that much different from competitors, the company has to try to convince customers in other ways. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, 14–18.) This Master's thesis subject took shape because customer experience has risen to a new value in this exceptional situation, life with COVID-19. Good customer experience consists of several meeting points, and it is also a great feeling to make customers happy.

The purpose of the thesis is to produce information about the customer experience during the video meetings. Video meetings have increased significantly over the past year 2020. Customer experience can be obtained from these encounters, and the gained knowledge has been used in this thesis. The aim of the thesis is customer experience development in the case company; developing sales and customer service to further enhance the customer experience. The objective of this thesis is to support in general working with video meetings with customers after COVID-19 has been defeated in the Nordics. The case company has acquired significant expertise and developed a strong market presence in the field of diabetes, cardiology and pulmonology, neurology, and immunology in the Nordics.

1.1 Backround

In January 2020, we heard of a coronavirus (COVID-19) that has been a big problem in China. COVID-19 virus caused a worldwide pandemic spreading unprecedentedly quickly and effectively to almost everywhere in the world in just a few months. Now it was also here in Finland, and things got worse just in a matter of few days. The schools closed, and the government said it is not safe to go outside in order to protect those who are in the risk group of getting the virus. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. (WHO 2020.) This exceptional situation brought all companies in healthcare field to an unexpected situation.

We suddenly lived in the middle of restrictions and questions: which one is more important; health or economy, risk groups or the rest of the population. We had to consider things from a whole new angle, for example, trust in institutions, decision-making, inequality, and the use of technology. The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra's task is to forecast future developments, and the sudden pandemic surprised even Sitra (Lähdemäki-Pekkinen & Vataja 2020).

Healthcare companies were in a situation that sales representative's access to the hospitals was denied. Sales representatives, who normally spend their worktime with customers on the field, were now sitting at home with their computers. They soon realized that they could help their customers via Microsoft Teams, Skype, or WhatsApp. The team, their customers, and the patients, all had to do a giant digital leap because of the situation. They understood that they had two options: to be passive and wait for the situation to calm down or keep selling their products in a completely new way.

Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the year 2020 has revolutionized the principles of remote work. In the spring of 2020, the emergency law was imposed on public sector employees to work remotely, for whom it was possible. Originally, it was scheduled for early August 2020 to get back to office work. In August 2020, however, as the corona epidemic started to worsen again, the government issued a decision in principle that public sector employees who are able to work remotely should work remotely as extensively as possible. (Government release 13 August 2020.) According to a survey commissioned by Yle in the article by Pantsu (2020), more than a million Finnish employees work remotely, and half of them want to do the same in the future.

Dufta and Wäyrynen (2020) state that the rapid spread of technology has considerably shaped both work and leisure culture. In the spring of 2020, about 40 percent of working-age people in Finland switched to remote work. This is more than a million people. With distance work, we also changed to meet schoolteachers, kids' daycare teachers, and our hobby activities via video meetings. (Dufva & Wäyrynen, 2020.) The crisis has created a situation of uncertainty and discontinuity in which future developments are more open than usual. (Dufva et al. 2020, 3.) Even that we may have imagined so in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 crisis is not disappearing very quickly.

More than 150 million people worldwide have been diagnosed with COVID-19 disease. More than 3,1 million people have died globally at the end of March 2021. Situation

23.3.2021 in Finland was that more than 72 000 people had been diagnosed with COVID-19, and 808 people have died from COVID-19. (WHO 2021.)

1.2 Research questions

Customer experience management (CEM) is important for every company. By understanding customer's needs and supporting customers' important moments, the company can create a confidential relationship that will benefit both parties. When thinking about customer experience management, the business should focus on the importance of customer experience. Customer experience represents the process that is used to manage customers' interaction with a company, product, brand, or service. (Walden 2017, 18–19.)

The aim of this study is to answer the following research questions:

1. How the customers experience video meetings?
2. How to create a better customer experience when meeting the customer via video meetings?
3. How to exploit the remote connection in the future?

This study's research method was quantitative and qualitative. As a quantitative research method, a semi-structured survey was used. As a qualitative method, customer interviews and a workshop were used. This topic is important because after the COVID-19 has been defeated, several companies can develop working from home further, and part of customer contact can be done via video meetings. From time to time, it also seems that the world is no longer the same place, and the companies' employees' way of work and meeting the customer changes. Did we learn something from the COVID-19 situation in the year 2020? How can we develop the situation so that part of the company's employees work remotely from home?

The plan was to start the thesis work at the end of spring 2020. When having enough information about the topic, it was possible to start working with the questionnaire and analyze the results. The writing of the final thesis was scheduled for autumn 2020. The next figure shows the plan for the schedule.

Table 1. Schedule of the thesis work.

	May-Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	March 2021	Apr 2021
Identity research area	▓							
Start of the interviews	▓	▓	▓					
Formulate research questions			▓					
Research strategy, design and select methods			▓	▓				
Literature review	▓	▓	▓	▓				
Data collection			▓	▓				
Write first draft					▓	▓	▓	
Write final draft							▓	▓

When starting the final work in the fall of 2020, it was still thought that the world would soon return to normal daily life. It was thought that the coronavirus problem would end soon. In spring 2021, the scheme of things changed more to the direction of giving up waiting to get back to normal. The possibility is that after the coronavirus, a new normal is where face masks remain a permanent accessory, and people more and more stay at home working remotely.

In Finland, corona vaccinations are primarily aimed at preventing the burden of disease caused by the coronavirus, serious cases of the disease, premature deaths, and loss of life years, and at maintaining the carrying capacity of healthcare. The COVID-19 vaccinations started in Finland in January 2021, and during this thesis, 26,9% of Finnish citizens have gotten their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (second dose 2.7%). Vaccination of Finnish people takes time because the goal is to vaccinate all those who want to be vaccinated, and it will take a long time to vaccinate everyone who wants to. Even once vaccinations have been started, it is not possible to return to a normal life in society immediately; the change will take place gradually. (THL 2021.)

1.3 Data Analysis

The total number of answers was 57, of which 21 were from patients (36,8%), 9 from doctors (15,8%), and 27 from nurses (47,4%). Open feedback in the questionnaire describes the opinions and feelings of the patients, doctors, and nurses. In some responses, the reflection was relatively profound, which is very valuable for this study. Based on the answers received, it can be assumed that the questionnaires were well prepared. It can also be assumed that realistic answers were obtained to the questions.

Content analysis was used as a method of analysis in my thesis research. Content analysis is a method that can be used to analyze various documents, such as interview responses, as in this thesis. The analysis helps the researcher to draw a conclusion and get an answer to the research question. The content analysis seeks to describe documents verbally and to search for meanings in the text by arranging the material in a clear format. Despite the arrangement of the text, during the analysis, the information value of the material must not be lost. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.)

The first step of content analysis was the scaling of the data, transcription, in which the recordings are changed into written form. In transcription, an interview was recorded on a phone's voice recorder, and it was written as text. In this work, transcription was time-consuming. The first interviews were written as clean verbatim, but it was quickly realized that such accurate transcripts were not needed.

2 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

2.1 Customer experience theory

The customer experience is always real. The customer experience is the sum of the encounters, feelings, and perceptions that the customer forms about the company's operations. The customer experience includes the emotional value created for the customer from the use of the service, which consists of the benefits received by the customer from the service. The formation of the digital customer experience is complex progress, and not all parts of the process are always manageable by the company providing the service. The company's role in shaping the customer experience is to be an influencer and enabler. The customer experience consists not only of the physical service experience but also of people's individual interests, imaginations, encounters, feelings, and their sums (Figure 1). The customer experience is an experience that is also affected by the subconscious. The customer experience arises from how the customer experiences the service in their mind. Therefore, customer experience is a unique experience. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, 14–18.)

Figure 1. The customer experience consists of these factors and their sums (Löytänä & Kortesuo, 2011).

Customer experience is the sum of individual interpretations made by a person. It is the sum of the images, encounters, and emotions that the customer forms about the company's operations for themselves. The customer experience is also strongly influenced by emotions and subconscious interpretations. Because of this, companies can choose what kind of experiences they strive to create, but it is not entirely possible for them to influence what kind of customer experience the customer has. For customers, ease of service is important. Companies need to move forward from providing services. The company must put the customer at the center of its operations and thus organize its own operations around the customer so that it can create experience and value for its customer. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, 12–18.)

The customer experience can be seen as one of the competitive factors of competition, and it can be used to influence the customer's choice between companies. The customer experience can be seen as the customer's knowledge of the brand, which is the company's way of highlighting its own strengths. For this reason, a brand can be seen as a promise that includes a guarantee of the quality, price, and other factors that

influence the purchase decision of a company's product or service. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, 10–13.)

The customer experience is everyone's personal perception of the service they encounter. Customers form the image of the company from the first contact. Companies that seek to maximize the sales of their products and services are very short-sighted. Instead, the companies should consider what methods customers use when seeking services or products. (Kosonen & Raulo, 2020.)

There are several differences between creating experiences and providing services. The biggest difference between these is that experience always arises as a customer interpretation. As a company creates experiences instead of merely providing services, it gets new opportunities to increase the value it produces for its customers. The company can deepen its customer relationships and make them more valuable both to itself and its customers. Creating a customer experience does not always even require service but can also be based on giving the customer the opportunity to experience and do things themselves. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011,17–19.)

The customer experience is the sum of the encounters the customer forms about the company's operations. The ensemble of different encounters is therefore crucial when the customers construct their experience of the company. The most popular metrics and surveys that measure the customer experience are based on the customers' experience of the easiness of doing business or their desire to recommend the company to their close associates. These metrics can be used in parallel and in different encounters. For example, taking care of something basic on customer service over the phone may not be an encounter that causes a recommendation, but the customer should find it as effortless as possible. (Korkiakoski & Löytänä 2014, 57, 61.)

Korkiakoski (2019), on the other hand, defines the customer experience from the customer's perception, which is formed when the customer is encountered at different points in the service process. The touchpoints of the service process and the customer's perceptions build the customer experience. (Korkiakoski 2019, 20.)

Customer experience is often perceived as the responsibility of customer service and sales. This is because salespeople and customer service representatives are the company's direct contact with customers. The company often relies on the people working in these tasks to know their job and that the customer experience is formed in the context of the service situation. However, the issue is not so unambiguous as the

customer experience is an entity consisting of the company's background activities, which involves every aspect of the company. Although not all aspects are equally visible in the direction of the customer, they are equally important in the formation of experience. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, 7–10).

The digital customer experience is created when the customer is dealing with the company through digital channels at different stages of the purchasing process. It is important for companies to be able to produce a positive experience for customers on all digital channels. The formation of a digital customer experience is influenced by the emotional experiences that the customer experiences at all stages. The perceived interaction with the company during this process also has a positive effect on the quality of the digital customer experience. (Rawson et al. 2013.)

2.2 Customer experience management

The customer experience consists of layers that are strongly driven by the customer's needs, memories, and emotions. When we talk about the customer experience, it is important to keep in mind that it is not about customer service or the company's own desires. (Bodine & Manning 2012, 38.)

The goal of customer experience management (CEM) is to provide customers with experiences that meet their expectations and increase the value that is produced for customers and thereby increase profit. In managing the customer experience, the idea is that in each customer encounter, meaningful experiences are created, and thus the value that the company generates for its customers is maximized. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, 20).

The purpose of customer experience management is to implement the development targets found in the design phase. Management ensures that the issues to be developed will be implemented within the desired time, budget, and by the right persons. By means of measuring information obtained, the processes are directed in the right direction and are measured by the management. The task is to bring visibility to the customers and implement the relevance of their experiences to the organization. (Korkiakoski & Löytänä 2014, 43–45).

Saarijärvi and Puustinen (2020) summarize that customer experience management consists of two areas: strategic planning and operational implementation, the differences

and characteristics of which the company should understand. In managing the customer experience, it is important to understand which touchpoints are most relevant to the most important customer groups. While outsourcing some touchpoints to a partner may seem like a cost-effective solution, at worst, it can be devastating to the customer experience if the partner company's commitment to the desired customer experience is not at the same level. As the formation of the customer experience is influenced by the subjective experiences of customers in direct or indirect contact with the company, the formation of the customer experience is becoming more and more complex. Thus, companies need to broaden their own perspective on customer experience management and consider how they plan and manage the customer experience throughout the customer path. (Saarijärvi & Puustinen 2020, 77–78).

However, the emergence of a customer-oriented culture is not something that the company's management can create through its own operations, but the entire organization must also realize its own role in success. The customer experience should be made visible in the company. Successful customer experiences should be seen as a success for the entire company, and their importance should be justified. A company culture that strives to promote the customer experience is also a better starting point to look at the customer experience from the customer's perspective and create the conditions for its development. (Saarijärvi & Puustinen 2020, 123–124.)

Fisher and Vainio (2015) emphasize the personality of the customer experience and the personal expectation value of each customer. The customer values experience based on how the service meets or exceeds the customer's expectations. The customer experience is built on the expertise and interaction of the entire organization, which are chained into value chains within the organization. The customer experience is created by producing value or appreciation inside and outside the organization. (Fischer & Vainio, 2015, 164–165.)

When managing the customer experience, one should always understand what factors make up a particularly good and bad customer experience in a company. It is possible to intervene in the production of bad customer experiences and create even better conditions for the implementation of good customer experiences by analyzing these factors. Management requires constant balancing that efforts are not made to standardize customer experiences too much, in which case both bad and good customer experiences are easily lacking. By setting too strict rules and standards, they can lead to mediocrity in the customer experience in the long run. (Saarijärvi & Puustinen 2020, 104).

According to Jain, Aagia, and Bagdare (2017), to create a positive customer experience, the company's management must understand customer expectations. It is important to define what roles the client and the company have in this process. Understanding the resources, the determinants of the customer experience, the formation of the customer experience, and customer reactions help companies effectively manage the customer experience. Organizations can develop tools and techniques to map the experience process.

What is important is the balance in how the company encourages and encourages towards excellent customer experiences, in the creation of which employees would have the opportunity to use their own creativity. The company's ability to produce excellent customer experiences is also a significant form of capital. It may be due to the development of a customer-oriented culture that has accumulated over the years and which expertise is difficult to copy. In this case, it is a result of work done consciously and systematically, for which the employees have jointly committed to taking measures. (Saarijärvi & Puustinen 2020, 104–106.)

Creating customer value is central to a company's success in competitive markets. The customer value proposition has become a widely used term in the business environment. The traditional approach highlights customer need and satisfaction, and value-based selling behavior shifts selling to the implications of using the goods on the customer's behalf. Value-based selling requires more attention to the value the customers get in using the goods than in selling functionalities or customer benefits. (Terho, Haas, Eggert & Ulaga 2012, 178).
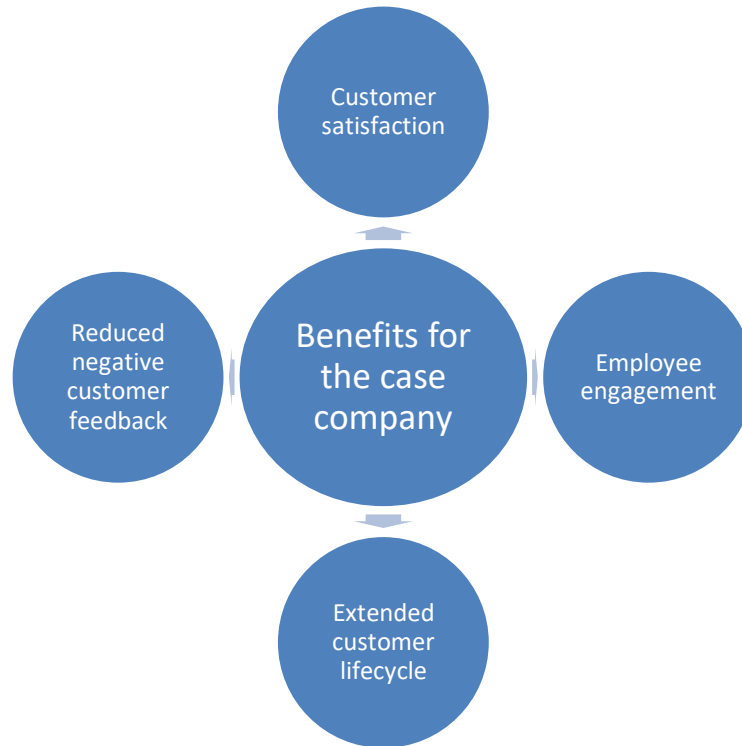
Figure 2. Managing the customer experience has benefits for the company (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011).

Delivering successful experiences to customers and exceeding customer expectations affect customer relationships by improving customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction will reduce customer's willingness to move to use competitors' products and strengthens customer relationships. It has been found that this has an effect also to customers buying behavior, bringing additional sales to the company, as satisfied customers have a lower threshold to cross-purchase different products and services than what they have traditionally bought. Positively delighted customers are happy to spread the word of the positive experience they have experienced with the products and company by recommending the company to other people. This will bring potential new customers to the company. (Lemke, Clark & Wilson 2010). Managing the customer experience has many benefits for the company, such as increased customer satisfaction, employee engagement, extended customer lifecycle, and reduced negative customer feedback (Figure 2). Each organization defines for itself how to lead the customer experience because it is part of the company's strategy. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, 13.)

Developing the customer experience evolves constantly and applies to all functions of the entire organization, be it customer relationship management, support functions,

marketing, quality organization, or logistics. It is important to prioritize those areas that would be most important to become more customer-centric. Managing the customer experience requires persuasiveness, perseverance, and focus on the company from the outside. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, 7–10.) The customer experience should be the starting point for the strategy that is reflected in the company's day-to-day operations and actions of the entire organization. (Saarijärvi & Puustinen 2020, 35).
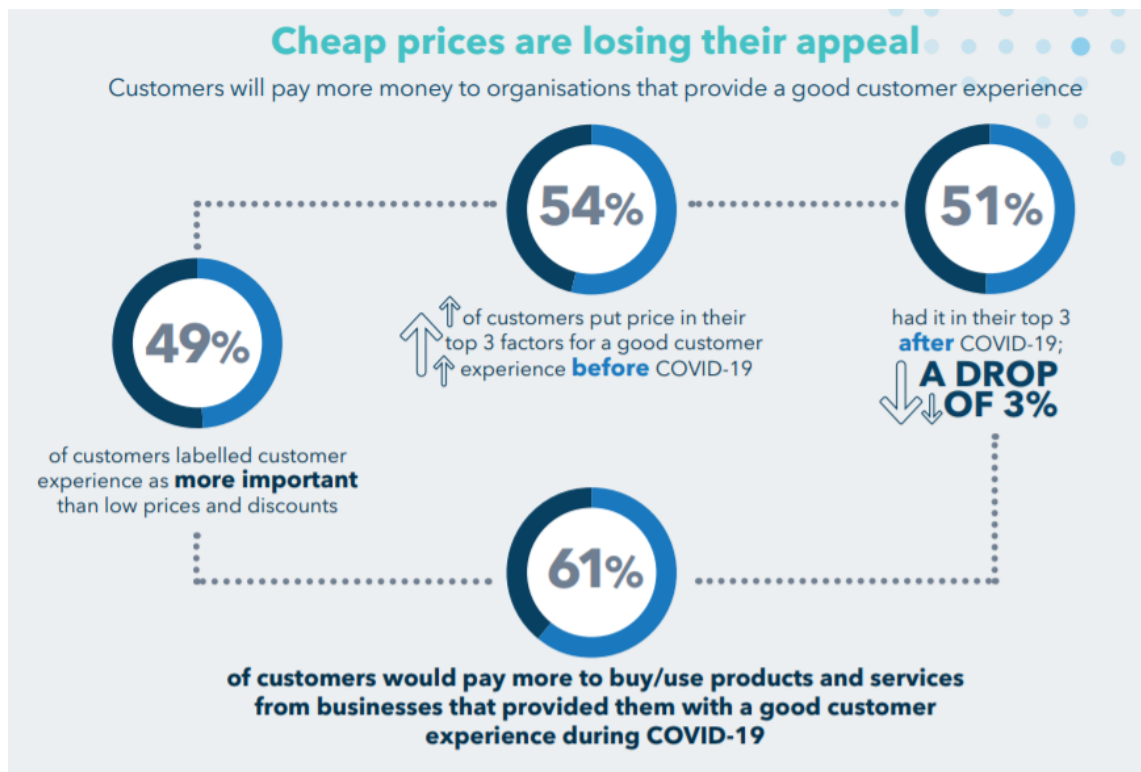

Figure 3. During the COVID-19 crisis, customer experience is more important than low prices.

SAS Institute's research reveals that customers do not have tolerance if corporate customer service has any problems. One-third of customers are willing to abandon the company after just one poor service experience, reveals a study commissioned by SAS. For 89 percent of the customers, two to five bad experiences are enough to switch to a competing brand. Research shows that despite the difficulties caused by COVID-19, customers do not have tolerance if the customer experience is poor. 34 percent of customers would stop doing business with a company after only one bad experience. (SAS Institute 2020.) Almost half of the customers (49%) labeled customer experience

as more important than low prices or discounts (Figure 3). According to Forrester (2020), as companies and brands adapt to changing consumer behaviors due to COVID-19, building experiences that help them engage with their customers will confirm customer loyalty.

2.3 Steps for customer experience management

The fact that management is committed to the customer experience and its management is not enough. It is important that the customer-centric strategy is implemented in the company. Löytänä and Korkiakoski (2014) divide the typical measures of developing the customer experience and linking them to the company's business benefits into three phases: the first steps, the maturity phase, and maintaining continuous development. (Figure 4). In the first step, customers are given promises related to the customer experience, mainly in the form of a marketing phrase, which steers the company's internal thinking in a more customer-centric direction. This step includes measuring customer experience and the biggest pain points, for example, related to customer service. (Löytänä & Korkiakoski 2014, 37).

It is important that the company delivers the promises they have made. Uncovered promises only disappoint customers, and this does not improve the customer experience. At this point, the business benefits of managing the customer experience are still relatively minor, ranging from positive to negative. (Löytänä & Korkiakoski 2014, 37–40).

When a company begins at the recruitment stage to assess applicants 'ability to deliver the desired kind of experience to customers, and the company makes a strategic choice to deploy the customer experience as a competitive factor that differentiates the company from the market, it approaches the maturity stage. In the maturity phase, the benefits of managing the customer experience are already clearly increasing. At this stage, the customer experience skills of the entire staff will be increased, the implementation of the change program will begin, and the customer-centric corporate culture will begin to take root. A customer experience director is elected to the company's management team, and customer, personnel, and financial indicators are utilized in managing the customer experience. Incentive and reward models are also refined based on customer experience. In the maturity phase, development measures and processes are designed considering the benefit experienced by the customer first, and only then the internal benefits of the company. (Löytänä & Korkiakoski 2014, 38–40).
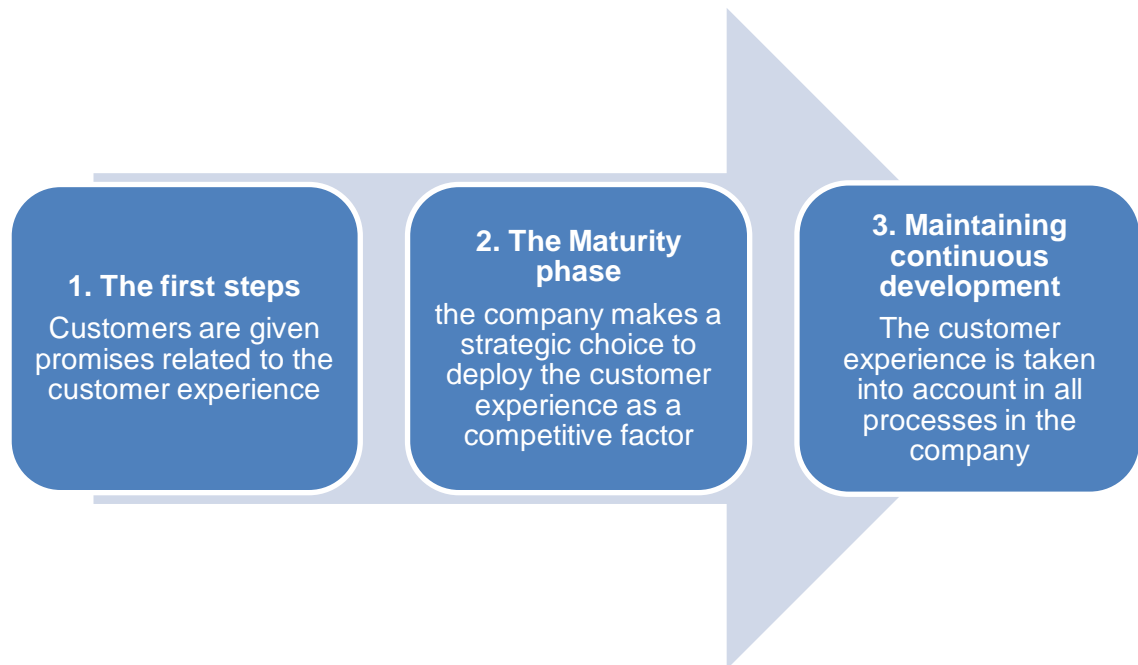
Figure 4. Steps for CEM (Löytänä & Korkiakoski 2014, 39–42).

Reaching the third stage of continuous improvement, a company cannot state that it is ready to lead the customer experience. Customer behavior, needs, and expectations are constantly changing. The customer experience must therefore be considered in all processes, and the company must constantly innovate on how to create new value for customers and exceed their expectations time and time again. Only then can the customer experience be the company's most important means of competition. (Löytänä & Korkiakoski 2014, 39–42.)

2.4 Taking a digital leap

Digital leap has been discussed in sales and marketing organizations before. Pioneering companies have already taken the digital leaps. In March 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic changed the attitudes of many companies and accelerated their first digital leap. A huge digital leap, which until spring 2020 seemed impossible ever to be taken, is now a reality in many companies. Webinars, online training, remote management, and remote meetings have become familiar in every expert organization. The digital leap is leading to the liberalization of competition, and, in addition to the process of change in management, many companies are also forced to reform their business models.

Changes during the digital leap have been shown to have a major impact on business and management. (Tasanto, 2020).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Interviews

Qualitative research seeks to elucidate people's experiences and views on phenomena. Phenomena are studied directly through the interviews between the researcher and the research subject example. (Kananen 2017, 35).

Interviews are important in gaining user knowledge, and it is hard to get a full picture of what people think and how they experience things without asking them about it. The interviewer needs to prepare the interview and think about what he/she wants to learn from the interview and what kind of questions should be asked. (Hyysalo 2009, 125). In the case company, data collection and finding more about the user needs began with interviews which were used as a research method in this Master's thesis. 14 patients and five healthcare professionals (HCPs) participated in the interviews. Before every video meeting, the interviewees were asked what their expectations are, how they feel about meeting via video meeting instead of meeting face to face, and are there anything that makes them hesitant regarding the video meeting. After the meeting, they were asked for their feedback: have all their questions been answered, and do they feel comfortable.

The focus group interviews were audiotaped so the interviews could re-listen. It allows the use of direct quotes in the Master's thesis. The patients' and healthcare professionals' insights – what are they thinking and what is their opinion – can be found through interviews. What was the patient's situation before and after the video meeting? What were the patient's expectations to meet via video connection instead of meeting face to face?

3.2 Semi-structured survey

Semi-structured surveys offer the interviewer some flexibility. It can help the researcher to develop knowledge and understanding. The questionnaire should also provide a clear prompt to the respondent where a more structured answer is required. A semi-structured survey can be comprised of a mixture of closed and open-ended questions.

The research was conducted with a semi-structured survey. The survey (Appendix 1) was sent at the end of year 2020 to an approximation of 30 patients and 50 customers, which were met in a video call during the year 2020.

The survey (Appendix 1) was sent to the customers, nurses and doctors, and patients, which were met by video meetings during the year 2020. The total number of answers was 57, of which 21 were patients (36,8%), 9 were doctors (15,8%), and 27 were nurses (47,4%) (Figure 5).
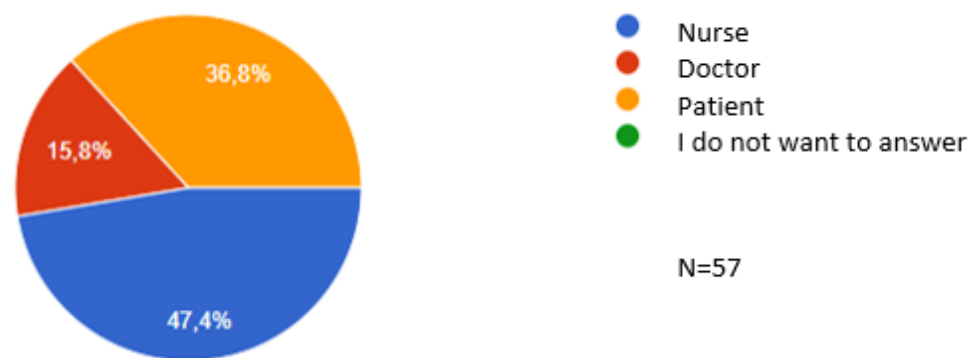

Figure 5. Survey respondents

3.3 Workshop

People generally believe that group brainstorming is more effective than individual brainstorming. The group is more effective and productive in terms of creativity. Brainstorming together with other people can make the group members feel higher satisfaction comparing what they might achieve when doing the ideation tasks individually. In large groups, it is easier to remain silent, and small groups do not produce as efficiently, so the right amount of people in the group workshops is important. (Nijstad & Lodewijkx 2006, 1).

If we want to improve something, such as ways of working or some situation, the group workshops or workshops are a great tool for that. A workshop with four HCPs was organized for this study. During the COVID-19 situation, in order to meet face to face

instead of a video meeting, it was not possible to have more people in the group. In the workshop, it was discussed how to improve existing video meetings with the patients.

4 MEETING THE CUSTOMER VIA VIDEO MEETING

4.1 Participants' experiences

This chapter reviews the experiences of the respondents which arise from the survey. When switching mainly to remote access during spring 2020, many wondered that how we are able to do our work in this unexpected situation. The digital leap taken in the spring was sudden and total. It paralyzed quite a few of us. Few people immediately thought that how we can meet the customer remotely that the customer experience remains good. Survey question 3 is trying to understand how the respondents experienced the situation; was the customer's case as easy to handle remotely than when meeting face to face.

Question 3. Do you feel that the appointment or meeting was just as easy to handle remotely?
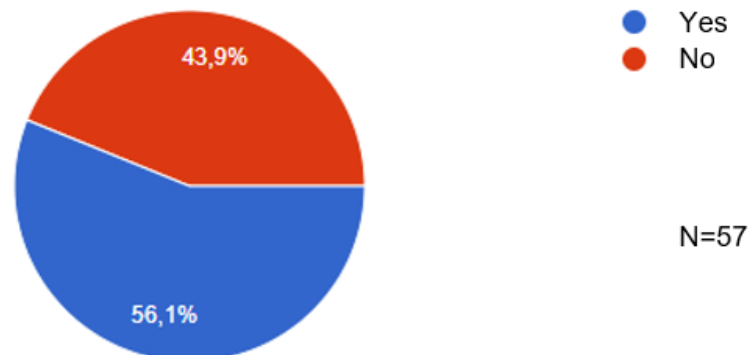
Figure 6. Ease of remote connection.

56,1% of respondents said that it was just as easy to handle the meeting or appointment remotely than face to face (Figure 6). Respondents who experienced that it was not so easy to meet remotely experienced also technical problems. A large part of respondents (43,9%) experienced that it was not as easy to meet by video meeting than meeting face to face. This percent amount is equal to 25 respondents. This answer raises many questions. Here are few customer comments from respondents to this question.

Healthcare professionals

"The customer had a lack of skills and tools for remote collaboration"

"The remote meeting via MS Teams: it is missing the customer's nonverbal communication, which can tell a lot about the customer's current status"

"The picture was not visible due to technical problems and of course the live guidance is different"

Patients

"Things were taken care of, but the meeting remained distant and quick"

"The video meeting was fast and easy. I didn't have any problems related to my Diabetes, so it was an easy way to meet the nurse."

"At first, I was nervous about how the meeting would work with a video connection, but in the end, it went just fine!"

Few respondents felt that meeting by video meeting remained distant and too quick. There is no time for other things, and meeting remotely is different from meeting face to face. It can take time for the participant to relax in a new situation, and relaxed person can give more of themself and ask more specific questions. Participants also had technical problems; for example, the picture was not visible, the microphone was not working right, or problems connecting to the video meeting.

Question 5. Do you feel that the change is permanent, and that remote connection will continue to be used in the future?
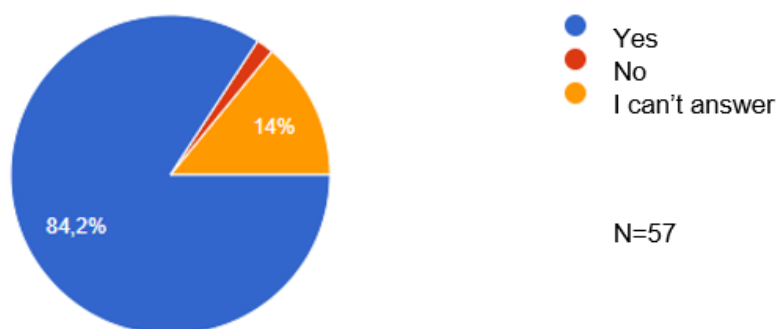

Figure 7. Thoughts on the remote connection in the future.

The questionnaire was trying to find out that do respondents think that the change is permanent and the remote connection will be used in the future (Figure 7). 48 respondents (84,2%) thought that the change is permanent. Interestingly, only one respondent from 57 was against this idea and only a few other respondents (14%) could not answer (Figure 7). It is interesting that respondents really think that we are in this COVID-19 crisis for a longer time, and even after this situation is over, we are not going back to the "old normal". This is the new way to work also after the COVID-19 crisis. Customers are ready to take advantage of a remote connection. Some respondents thought that meeting remotely would save time, for example, from traveling. The remote meeting allows for a more flexible schedule.

Healthcare professionals

"Secure connections that are easy to use."

"Telephone / video meetings / e.g., MS Teams connections compensate for travel and loss of working time side by side: time saving. All appointments that do not require a "touch" could be handled remotely."

"Almost impossible for the elderly. The next generation will better handle the development of technology. We have problems with connections and "security" a lot. Remote connections go well with younger people."

Many customers experienced that the patients who are in working life who do not always have time to come to the hospital or healthcare center or those who live far away would benefit from the remote connection most of all. For those patients who have a good balance in the treatment of the disease and the necessary health technology in use, remote access can be in good use. Some of the respondents thought that the remote connection was way too difficult for elderly people, and the younger generation will handle it so much easier with their smartphones.

4.2 Digital leap for HCP's

This chapter reviews the experiences of the nurses and doctors which arise from the survey. 40 nurses and doctors answered questions 7-10. These questions found out how many from 40 doctors and nurses switched to using remote connection during 2020. Questions 7-10 were for nurses and doctors only.

Question 7. Evaluate how many meetings with your customers took place remotely during year 2020? 1 = None, 2 = less than half, 3 = at least half 4 = all

N=40
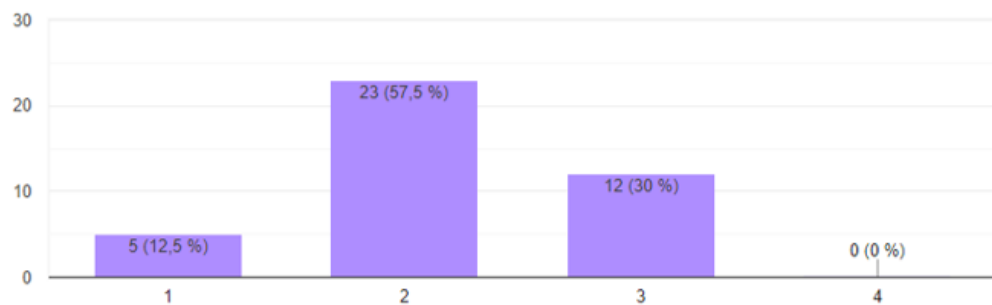
Figure 8. Meetings remotely during 2020.

According to Figure 8, 23 respondents (57,5%) answered that less than half of the meeting with patients was made via remote connection during the year 2020. 12 respondents answered that at least half of their meetings with patients were done via remote connection. As a comparison to this, according to Figure 8, 25 respondents (62,5%) did not have customer meetings via remote connection before the COVID-19 situation. 15 respondents (37,5%) had done less than half of their patient meetings via remote connection. (Appendix 1.) The situation has made many nurses and doctors face

a whole new situation; it was new for many nurses, doctors, and patients, and they were forced to do the digital leap.

Question 9. Evaluate how many of the meetings with your clients took place remotely before the COVID-19 crisis begin.
1 = None, 2 = less than half, 3 = at least half, 4 = all
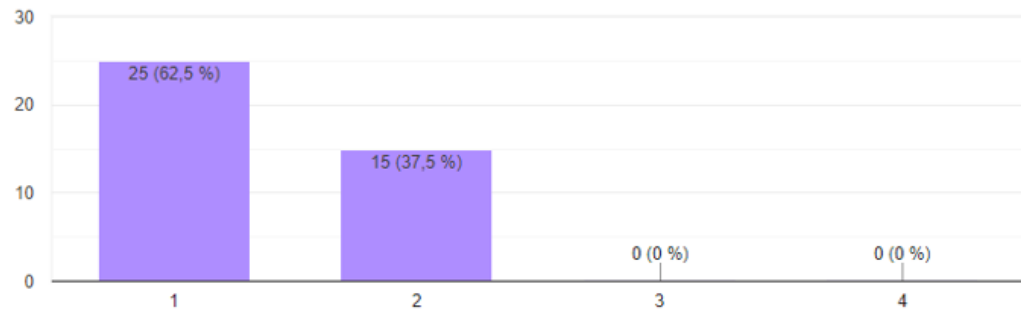
N=40

Figure 9. Remote meetings before the COVID-19 crisis.

As a result of this survey, we can see that the COVID-19 situation accelerated the inevitable transition to the utilization and more efficient use of remote connections. In many respects, customers are also happy to take advantage of remote connections.

Question 10. Would you like to have more training on behalf of your employer for any of the following: N=30
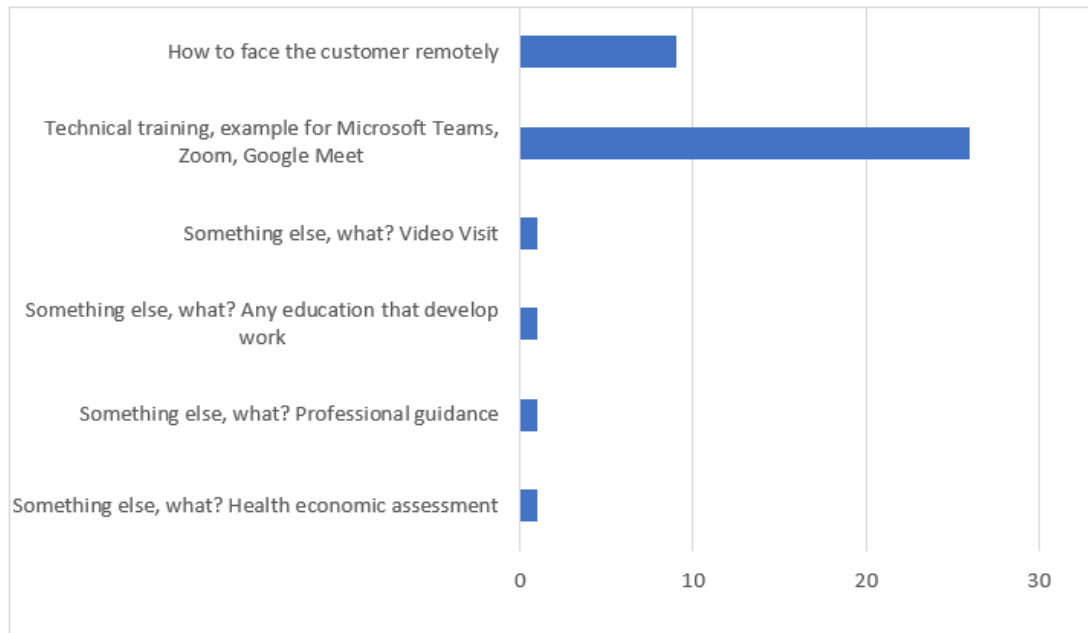

Figure 10. Technical education needed.

According to Figure 10, 86,7% of respondents feel that they need more technical education to this surprising situation; for example, using MS Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom, which are the most used tools for video meetings in Finland. 30% of respondents answered that they would like to have support on how to face customers via remote connection. This came up in the results, and there were also few comments that video meetings remained distant and quick.

"Education needed! How to send invitation and how to join meeting, etc. "

"We need health economics assessment and training to understand that treating patients via remote connection often doesn't get cheaper for society. Profound anamnesis and status often cut down on unnecessarily expensive tests."

One respondent experienced that element that was missing from the remote meetings was the moment when both are silent and when one can sense if there is still something to ask. Meetings remotely are somehow faster. Nine respondents had already had thoughts about how to face a customer remotely, and in the survey, they brought up that they would like to have training for that.

4.3 Interviews with patients and HCPs

This chapter reviews the experiences of the patients and HCPs which arise from the interviews. Interviews included patient interviews (N=14) and healthcare professional interviews (N=5). Before every video meeting, the patients were asked what their expectations are and have they already had questions arise. After the video meeting, their feedback was asked: whether all their questions have been answered and do they feel comfortable. If the HCP was involved with the video meeting, the HCP was participating in the interview. A total of 14 video meetings with patient interviews were done, and 5 of those were ones that HCP was also participating in.

Customers' experiences

In interviews with patients, comments arose that in the video meetings, nonverbal communication such as body language, facial expressions, and vocalizations are lacking when people turn on the microphones one person at a time. When people do not share the same environment in an interaction situation and are unable to read each other's expressions or hear the voices of other people, feelings of confusion may arise. This strange feeling may not occur in video meetings with family and friends because both microphones are open throughout the conversation.

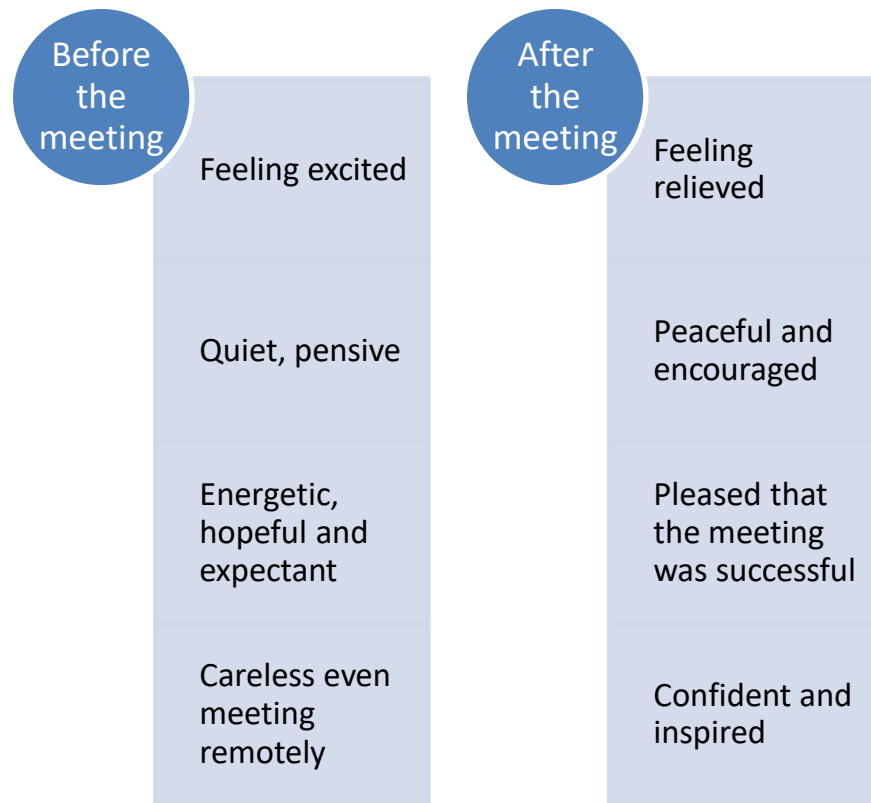| Before the meeting		After the meeting	
	Feeling excited		Feeling relieved
	Quiet, pensive		Peaceful and encouraged
	Energetic, hopeful and expectant		Pleased that the meeting was successful
	Careless even meeting remotely		Confident and inspired

Figure 11. Experiences that arose from the interviews.

Figure 11 is presenting patients' experiences before and after having the video meeting. Most of the patients said the same that there is no possibility to meet face to face in this COVID-19 crisis, so we must accept that the meeting is possible only remotely. Two patients were a little unsure of meeting by video meeting. Five patients were happy that the meeting was organized even we had the corona crisis still going on.

Video meeting instead of meeting face to face

In interviews with patients arose comments that participating in a video call requires more concentration than a face to face conversation. During a video meeting, more energy is used on interpreting nonverbal messages.

Amongst the five HCPs, almost everyone agrees that the meeting happens with almost the same result as meeting face to face. All five HCP chose the video meeting patients they thought are technically proficient and who could attend the meeting remotely. These

five HCPs were happy to meet remotely, and they did not have doubts about the success of the video meeting. Two HCPs said that they had conducted almost all their patient meetings during spring using MS Teams, Skype, or Video visits. They mentioned that this is the new way to work and probably part of the future.

"We are not going to back in the old normal, using video meetings as part of the work is the new normal and this situation will take probably years. No need to go back many years when no one of us believed that we are soon it this situation that almost all of our patient meeting is done remotely instead of meeting the patient face to face."

As Dufta et al. (2020) mention, during the COVID-19 crisis, it has been possible to quickly try and introduce new services and ways of interaction that can be exploited, for example, digital services and ways of interacting. The COVID-19 crisis has tested the functioning of different social systems, and it has made the weaknesses of societies visible. The debate over the "new normal" after the pandemic has challenged us to look at the normal from a diverse perspective. What things do we normalize, and whose normal ones are we talking about? The COVID-19 crisis can help to create solutions that consider the different needs of the population, such as working from home after the COVID-19 crisis. As it was seen in the interview answers, we can also take advantage of remote access in some of the appointments between patients, doctors, and nurses.

Patients' feedback

After the meeting, the patients' feedback was asked: have their questions been answered and do they feel comfortable. A video call can be challenged by a variety of technical issues. Network connections can be lost, which can affect patient's and HCP's willingness to continue using video meetings. Video meetings can also cause fatigue. Fatigue from video meetings has been called Zoom-fatigue. Although at the time of the interviews, everything happened via video meetings, the patients were still happy that the meeting could be arranged. They felt that the meeting was important and, despite the situation, could also be done remotely.
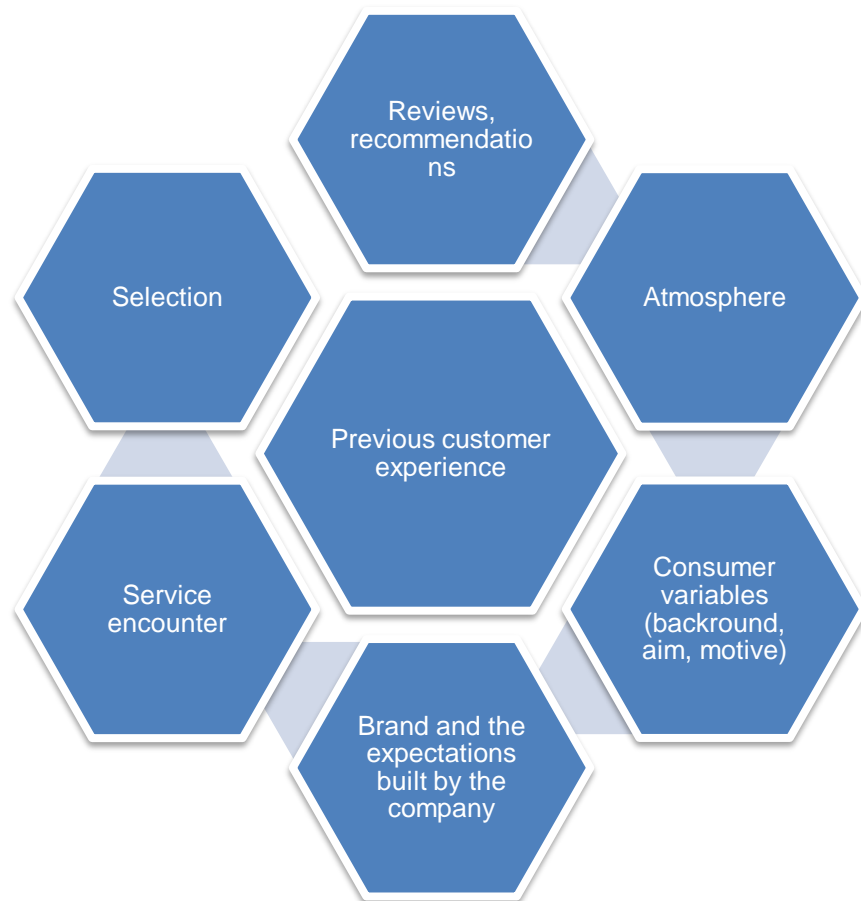
Figure 12. Things that have an effect on the customer experience.

Figure 12 presents which things affect the customer experience based on interviews and responses from the workshop. These things are the same in both face to face meetings and remote meetings. The interviews brought up patients' earlier experiences. Customers' previous customer experiences are affecting how they will experience the situation next time. HCPs mentioned recommendations: if a patient or colleague recommends a product or a company, it has a positive impact. The importance of interaction skills rises when meeting customers or patients remotely. Meeting the customer is acknowledgment, interaction, and cooperation. The encounter with the customer is always a humane event. Human basic needs are to be noticed.

4.4 Thoughts that arose from the workshop

This chapter reviews the thoughts of the HCPs which arise from the workshop. The workshop was organized with 4 HCPs participating. This workshop was organized lastly

after the interviews and questionnaire. The exact questions were not ready before the workshop, but the ideas that could spark a discussion were written on paper. The notes were made during the group discussion.
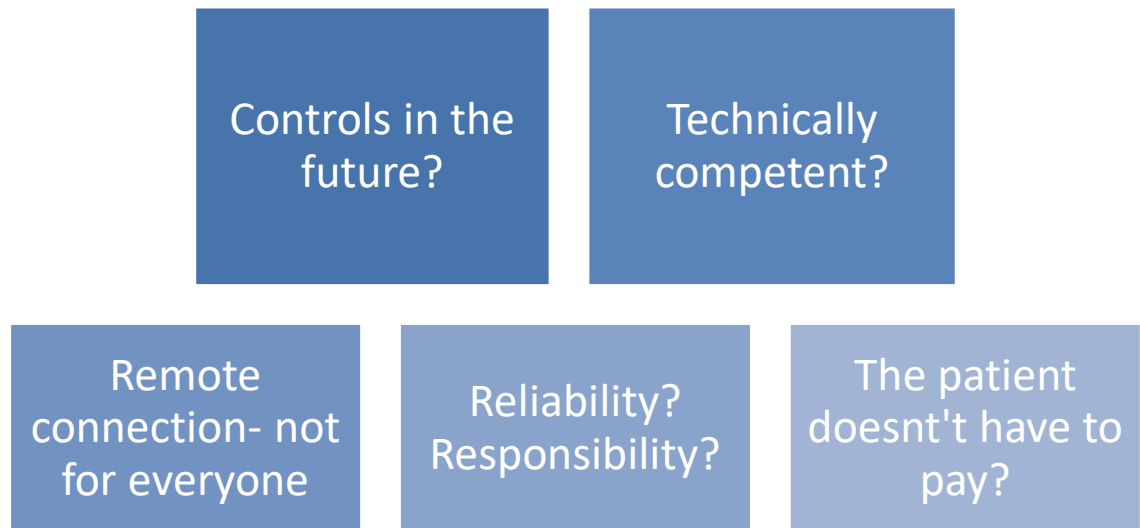

Figure 13. Thoughts from the HCPs' workshop

Figure 13 is presenting thoughts from the HCPs' workshop in a nutshell. One subject that sparked a discussion was that if the visit is made remotely, the patient does not have to pay from the control visit with HCP. If the patient comes to the hospital, they must pay the outpatient department fee. HCP said that they have few young patients who do not want to come to the hospital because they do not have money to pay the fees. They come to visit the hospital if they must, but they would not like to come. This is a big problem because the nurse or the doctor cannot help this patient group so well. This work team had been invited to use remote access to these patients with a good start!

The second subject that also sparked a lot of discussion, was that if the team has a patient who is treating herself/himself well and the patient has a good treatment balance, the visit can be organized remotely, and the patient does not have to come to the hospital. If the patient is not technically able to meet via MS Teams Skype or Google Meet, then it's best that the patient comes to the hospital and meets the HCP face to face in the future also. What was observed in a workshop was that these HCPs had a bit

of tiredness to this remote work they had in spring 2020. They were happy to have face to face meetings with their customers again! Some of the meetings could be done via video meetings if the patient is sick or in a corona quarantine.

Healthcare professionals

"A remote meeting is more intense than face to face meeting, and the power is based on a well-managed entity"

"The use of technology enables meeting the patient remotely"

"If the patient has for example a little flu, we still can keep the appointment time, before the COVID-19 situation we had to cancel the appointment time but now we don't have to anymore. We can still meet but we just change the format of the meeting."

4.5 Challenges from the customer's perspective

As Löytänä and Kortesuo (2011) mention, the customer experience is a unique experience. Therefore, people can experience this COVID-19 crisis in different ways. Some people can easily accept the new situation, but for others, it may bring tiredness that this situation has already continued for a year (the situation in March 2021). There may also be tiredness associated with the introduction of new technology. When meeting face to face is not possible, people just sit in isolation in front of the screen. Normal, subtle, and well-tuned interactions can become tangled. People may notice the importance of a single blink of an eye or a glance at the watch. Psychologically, it is hard.

The annoyance caused by video meetings, in general, is mainly because they are not as perfect as face to face meetings. Videoconferencing became an essential communication tool for businesses, schools, and individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. For some, the transition has been easy, but for others, it has been a challenge. People who are used to go to different places for meetings or lessons are now stuck at home. People need human interaction that, for now, is limited by quarantine regulations.

As mentioned in chapter 2, according to Löytänä and Kortesuo (2011), customer loyalty usually refers to the customer's intention to continue doing business with a particular company instead of changing their business somewhere else. According to traditional

thinking, a company's most valuable customers are its longest and most regular customers, as they bring the most cash flow to the company in the long run. According to the current understanding, the most valuable customers of a company are not necessarily those who buy the most, but also those who encourage their colleagues to do business with the company.

5 DEVELOPMENT REFLECTIONS

5.1 Driven by the customer

A customer at the center

Customer experience is an important part of developing a company's working life. The aim of the thesis was a genuine desire to learn more about the topic and possibly to develop the case company's operations.

Information about the customer experience in the video meetings is produced with interviews and a survey. Knowledge will be derived from the customer experience; ways to promote customer engagement. COVID-19 situation was new for all of us, and it pushed many companies into a new situation. Companies have ways to influence the future ways of working with the customers. Companies should develop their operations without forgetting the customer or the importance of customer experience.

Thinking about customer experience, one conclusion from this thesis is the importance of producing good customer experiences for the customers. This is also crucial for the future success of the case company's life cycle. If a company wants to be successful, it must take the responsibility of developing good and sustainable relationships with its customers. The customer experience should be the starting point for the strategy and actions of the entire organization.

Management always requires constant balancing. According to Saarijärvi and Puustinen (2020), a clear framework for customer relationship management should be created within employees who can implement customer relationship management. The customer experience should be elevated to a common cause for the entire organization.

In the patient responses, ease was perceived as important to the success of the customer experience in video meetings. Good IT skills, the professionalism of the doctor or a nurse, friendliness, and good cooperation were repeated in the customers' answers.

To date, the customer experience in the case organization has not been defined and has not been managed. However, a lot of good work has been done in the company, as evidenced by the responses from customers. Customer feedback has not been collected from different areas, and so far, no general picture has been created in terms of the

customer experience. Developing and managing the customer experience requires a change in culture in the organization. The customer experience should be at the heart of the strategy and considered in the company's actions.

Customer experience is often perceived as the responsibility of customer service and sales. These functions of the company that indirectly affect the customer enable the sales and customer service personnel to create a customer experience that exceeds the customer's expectations. For example, the company's IT department takes care of the functionality of the systems. If systems crash or are otherwise weak, sales staff may not be able to provide the best possible customer experience. Errors in production are also directly visible to the customer. Marketing and advertising are also important parts of creating a customer experience. In most cases, the customer already has some idea and opinion about the company before the first actual meeting with the company representative. To work for a good customer experience in every area of the company, everyone needs to understand the meaning of the customer experience.

Customer's trust throughout the pandemic period

The importance of customer trust was highlighted in the workshop and interviews. Trust is a prerequisite for a customer's purchase decision, and the task of marketing is to create trust. Company management needs to make sure that the same message is transmitted to the customers. Sales and marketing must have the same perception. Poor customer service or information about internal company problems spreads quickly on social media between the customers.

The importance of trust is emphasized by the more complex products or service packages being sold. When trust is strong, working with the customer is faster and easier. If there is no trust, control and supervision must be built, which will make everything slower. Confidence is boosted by the fact that the concrete results are in line with what has been promised. Integrity and transparency with the customers are essential.

5.2 Prospects

Most improvements are needed for the preparation phase

For the customer path, most that need to be improved are the work that happens before, in preparation, for the video meeting. As can be seen from the patient responses, there are both positive meeting points and developmental meeting points at different stages of the customer path. When meeting the customer, the meeting points that should be developed are highlighted as the work that is done before the video meeting. Even among the responses of satisfied customers, communication before the video meeting emerged as a development target for the customer path. This includes preparing for the appointment: patients wanted more personality for this. Here, too, the importance of personal communication and the customer's experience of appreciation were emphasized. With this, the case company can create a better customer experience for meeting the customer via video meetings.

Strengthening the brand

Today's business life has its own challenges, especially what comes to customer relations. Companies can no longer compete only with the price or with the products. They need to develop services and experiences that truly matter to their customers and that competitors cannot replicate too easily.

The year 2020 brought companies to the digital leap. As Kosonen and Raulo (2020) mention, companies should consider what methods customers use when seeking services or products. When strengthening the brand, companies must consider how the image of services is created at the very beginning of the customer path. Image-building must continue consistently throughout the customer path across each channel created for the company. In the digital age, the customer path is very diverse or rather multi-channel. By this, exploiting remote connection in the future is possible.

The use of remote connection in the future

The case company can develop the situation that parts of the company's employees are working remotely from home. Part of the customer meetings can be done via video meetings. Remote access has become more common; patients and HCPs are digitalizing their lives, and remote access allows meetings at a time that suits best. Patients perceive the use of remote access as a simple and seamless treatment service,

although they would preferably have the meeting with a healthcare provider face to face. Some of the meetings with the customers and patients could be carried out via video meetings in cases of illness or, for example, corona quarantine. In the future, there is a possibility to meet the customer on a tight schedule even if the customer is hundreds of kilometers away.

In the year 2021, we are moving towards a time where various constraints limit everyday life. Digital jump has been practiced. Encounters via video meetings are not the same than face to face meetings, and they do not have to be. Face to face meetings produce a lot of pleasure and joy and provide shared insights and learning moments. The digital customer experience is just about serving customers in new environments. The COVID-19 crisis has made it possible for new digital services, rapid experimentation, and deployment. These new ways can be used after these exceptional circumstances.

5.3 Implementation

The product websites came up in customers' development proposals. Even those with a positive customer experience felt that they could familiarise themselves with the products and prepare better for the upcoming video meeting if they have the information available. The usability of the website was not perceived as customer friendly. Information about the products had to be searched from the internet and discussion boards. Customers need to contact the hospital or a company representative because some of the instructions were unclear or the necessary information could not be found on the website. While at the final stages of this thesis, the case company made a product website, which helped many HCPs and patients to find necessary information. As a follow-up, what was learned from that uncomfortable situation, is the suggestion for the case company to launch a product website immediately when the product arrives on the market. By doing this, the customers do not need to look for information elsewhere, and the product experience is as good as possible from the beginning.

The case company can also develop distance working, and part of customer contact can be done via video meetings. This can affect work efficiency, and probably some travel expenses are saved.

A positive customer experience is created when the customer is acknowledged, carefully listened to, understood, and is kept in touch. It is important to keep the promises that

have been made and keep the quality of service high. In order for every employee and all departments in the company to understand the effects of their own activities on the creation of the customer experience, there must be transparency and smooth and simple processes. In addition, employee training is key to a successful service chain.

5.4 Research reliability

The reliability of the study is assessed through reliability and validity. Reliability defines the reproducibility of results and validity defines competence. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2015.) The ethical principles of the research have been taken care of during the work. Data protection (GDPR) has been taken care of throughout the work. Sources and references used in the thesis are also carefully marked.

The survey was conducted using a Google Forms questionnaire that was emailed to approximately 50 doctors or nurses and 30 patients. The mood, hurry, or courage of the respondents to answer the survey truthfully is not known. This always undermines the reliability of the results of surveys conducted using online forms. Verifying whether all the respondents understood the questions is not possible. Due to schedule challenges, the questionnaire was not tested in advance. These factors may undermine the reliability of the research results.

5.5 Further research ideas

One of the most important findings in the thesis has been that the importance of collaboration in a company is emphasized as digitalization progresses. A video meeting is different from a face to face meeting with a client. In a video meeting, emotional things are hard to interpret. It would be a good idea to do further research on this.

The increase in remote work caused by the COVID-19 crisis has forced the digital leap and reduced job place dependency. It has been possible to explore one's own geographical location in a new way. Companies' sales and customer service employees and HCPs desire to work remotely in the future has increased. If digitalization and the work culture make it possible to work remotely, we should consider if it is the best way of working in the future. Is it the best solution in terms of work efficiency and results? It would be a good idea to do further research on that.

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Questionnaire

Asiakkaan kohtaaminen etäyhteydellä koronapandemian aikana

Arvoisa vastaanottaja,

Teen YAMK-opinnäytetyötä asiakaskokemuksesta. Vuoden 2020 aikana olemme joutuneet pohtimaan, kuinka asiakkaan voisi kohdata koronapandemian muuttamassa ajassa.

Pyydän sinua osallistumaan kyselyyn, jonka tarkoituksena on tutkia asiakaskokemuksen muuttumista koronapandemian aikana, kun vastaanotot ja tapaamiset asiakkaan kanssa toteutetaankin etänä.

Vastauksesi on erittäin arvokas, vastausaikaa on 15.2.2021 saakka.
Kaikki vastaukset tallentuvat nimettömänä, jolloin yksittäisten vastaajien mielipiteet eivät erotu.

Alla on linkki kyselyyn. Vastaaminen kestää n. 5 minuuttia.

Kiitän sinua jo etukäteen osallistumisesta kyselyyn!

Ystävällisin terveisin,
Pauliina Ramberg
Turun Ammattikorkeakoulu

*Pakollinen

1. Oletko: *

◯ Hoitaja

◯ Lääkäri

◯ Terveydenhuollon asiakas

◯ En halua vastata

2. Oletko tavannut asiakkaitasi etäyhteyden kautta vuoden 2020 aikana? (Terveydenhuollon *
asiakas: hoitopaikkasi hoitajaa tai lääkäriä)

◯ Kyllä olen

◯ En ole

3. Koetko, että vastaanotto tai asiasi oli yhtä helposti hoidettavissa myös etäyhteyden kautta? *

◯ Kyllä

◯ Ei

4.   Jos tapaamisesta jäi puuttumaan jotain, mitä se oli?

Pitkä vastausteksti

....

5. Koetko, että muutos on pysyvä ja etäyhteyttä tullaan hyödyntämään myös jatkossa? *

○ Kyllä

○ Ei

○ En osaa sanoa

6. Miten voisimme hyödyntää etäyhteyden käyttöä tulevaisuudessa?

Pitkä vastausteksti

Seuraavat kysymykset (7.-10.) on tarkoitettu vain hoitajille tai lääkäreille.

Kuvaus (valinnainen)

7. Arvioi kuinka suuri osa tapaamisista asiakkaidesi kanssa tapahtui etäyhteyden välityksellä vuoden 2020 aikana. 1=Ei yhtään, 2= alle puolet, 3=vähintään puolet, 4=kaikki

	1	2	3	4
	○	○	○	○

8. Arvioi kuinka suuri osa tapaamisista asiakkaidesi kanssa tapahtuu etäyhteyden välityksellä tällä hetkellä. 1=Ei yhtään, 2= alle puolet, 3=vähintään puolet, 4=kaikki

1	2	3	4
○	○	○	○

9. Arvioi kuinka suuri osa tapaamisista asiakkaidesi kanssa tapahtui etäyhteyden välityksellä ennen koronatilanteen alkua. 1=Ei yhtään, 2= alle puolet, 3=vähintään puolet, 4=kaikki

1	2	3	4
○	○	○	○

10. Kaipaisitko lisää koulutusta työnantajan puolesta joistakin seuraavista

☐ Kuinka kohdata asiakas etäyhteyden kautta

☐ Teknistä koulutusta esim. MS Teams, Zoom, Google Meet -käyttöön

☐ Muu...

Lisätietoja tai omia kommentteja:

Pitkä vastausteksti

Kiitos vastauksistasi!

Ystävällisin terveisin,
Pauliina Ramberg
Turun Ammattikorkeakoulu