

CUSTOMER-SUPPORT SERVICE FROM A RELATIONSHIP PERSPECTIVE: BEST PRACTICE FOR TELECOM

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Abstract

Customer-support service in companies has existed for a long time. Today, customer support in companies is differently outlined in comparison to the situation one decade ago; still phone calls or messages over Internet are most common. Customers may phone the companies and ask questions, they can complain and they can ask for support regarding technical devices. However, most research on the topic show customers being dissatisfied with the service they receive under the label of customer-support. One frequently mentioned reason is long queues for customers when they search for help and support on different issues, which again may be caused by the fact that companies in their attempts to renovate the function mostly seem to have focused on cost reducing, which has resulted in unsuccessful solutions seen from the customers' perspective. The purpose of the study is to find out the best-practice for customer-support service in the telecom industry; from the customers' perspective when the relationship strength is considered.

The study maintains a relationship perspective on the best practice for customer-support in telecom. Customers are asked to recall their customer-support experiences from different services and to include the consequences of the customer-support contact and handling. In order to apply the content analysis, innovative principles by Downe-Wamboldt (1992) and Granheim and Lundman (2004) are followed. When customers' experiences are related to actual behavior in customer relationships the results reveal five important areas for the innovation focus: (1) Identification of customers in connection to customer support, (2) Availability of Internet customer support, (3) Proactiveness, (4) Inter-activeness for full understanding and (5) Queues.

Keywords: Customer-support service, customer relationships, active and passive customers

1. INTRODUCTION

Best practice and customer-support service is the emphasis of this study. The particular focus is to find the best practice for the telecom industry by including other kinds of services in the comparison. Other services play accordingly the comparison-standard (Liljander and Strandvik 1993) roles for the best practice. Therefore, customers having experiences from support service during their relationships in services such as banks, public sector and Internet service provider (ISP) are included in the interviews and analyses.

In order to find an innovative solution for the development of customer-support service we apply the logic of best practice. The concept of best practice has its origin in the management area (Bloom and van Reenen 2010). The idea behind a best practice involves the claim that there is a technique, method, process, activity, driving force that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, process, etc. The wish is that the implication of such best practice with the proper processes, checks, and tests a desired result is supplied with less problems and unforeseen complications (<http://sv.wikipedia.org>).

Customer-support service has, along with the general development in services, changed its appearance during a few decades. The personal and face to face interaction is rare today when interactions over the Internet is the most common way of contacting companies (<http://www.wisegeek.com>). The phenomenon customer-support service should not only rely on the technique (Schultze, 2003); its deeper role in the customer relationships should be of importance when designing and maintaining the function in companies. Customer-support service has an important role for the strength of the customer relationships and has also been found to almost equal the image in the telecom service, for example (Roos and Edvardsson 2008). In other words, it is an important dimension of service quality, when service is seen as a perspective instead of a structured issue on business (Edvardsson et al., 2005; Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004). Still the most common causes of instability in customer relationships, such as queuing, persist over the years in repeatedly made studies on customer support (Edvardsson and Roos, 2008).

In sum, customer-support service is a dimension of the customer relationships. Based on this view the guideline, when dealing with customer-support service in companies, would preferable be service as a perspective. The function of customer support service is within this perspective defined by customers, and companies should provide the prerequisites needed for the service, i.e., companies should provide customer focused support in order to enhance the experiences by customers in the interaction with the company. Therefore, the definition of customer-support service in this study is “the company function that is designed to support customers on different matters, by taking the relationship strength into consideration, and regard and relate the service to the mission of the company”.

The purpose of the study is to find out the best-practice of customer-support service in the telecom industry, from the customers' and relationship perspective, by asking customers to compare different services and compose the content of the customer-support service accordingly.

The remaining paper is outlined as follows: first, the theoretical frame sets the direction of the study; thereafter we present the empirical study and the results. Finally, the discussion and limitations are presented.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the introduction we have discussed the function of best practice in services. In the theoretical frame we take the starting point in the relationship theory by including consequences of a poor customer-support such as complaining behavior and switching behavior considering support service a dimension of customer relationships.

In the best practice customer expectations and perceptions are clearly defined, which are of importance for establishment of a formal structures for controlling, monitoring, and reporting improvement initiatives and implementation (Terziocski, et al., 1996). In another study by Longbottom and Zairi (1996), best practice is described in financial services. The idea behind the implementation of best practice in their study was the improvement in performance observed in pilot studies. In the pilot studies, not only the success stories were looked for but also the failures in expected benefits. Implementations were compared as were also best practices. In the summary it is stated that when asking customers about their best practices in different kinds of services, customers compare services, they include their experiences and expectations in a beneficial way. In our study we follow this logic and add the relationship perspective.

We can find early indications and suggestions in the literature of the perception that customer-support service should be looked at as a part of the core service; an important part, which supports and assists the main service (Berry 1983; Grönroos 1990; Edvardsson 1997). Especially the Nordic School (see e.g. Grönroos 1990; Edvardsson 1997) has emphasized the importance of not only evaluating the core service but also including the evaluation of supporting services in the entire evaluation. An example is the Augmented-Service-Offering Model (ASOM), which has been frequently referred to in later studies (Grönroos 1990).

So far we can conclude that it is not clear how non-beneficial experiences can add to the commonly used approach to best practice. In other words, what comes out of a relationship perspective on support service? An elaboration on that topic is made in the next section.

3. BEST PRACTICE IN SERVICE FROM THE RELATIONSHIP PERSPECTIVE

In 2008 Roos and Edvardsson pointed out the importance of customers' perceptions of customer-support service in telecom for the design of the function. The study implied that customers do not separate support-service from their relationships in general on the contrary; they look at support-service as being one dimension of the relationships. In our relationship perspective on the best practice of customer support we therefore include literature on the consumption process in order to position our approach. Löfgren (2005) elaborates on the consumption process by dividing it into two major parts, i.e., the first and second moments of truth. The first moment of truth includes the buying decision process in which the customer decides to buy or not to buy a good or service. If the customer decides to buy there will be a second moment of truth, which incorporates the remainder of the consumption process. Customer-support service is part of the second moment of truth, while the unsuccessful and discontinued relationship is a part of the first part. The first and second moments of truth are to be viewed as part of an iterative consumption process. The customers' experiences of the first moment of truth affect how the second moment of truth is experienced. Then, when the customer once again is facing a purchase situation, the experience from the second moment of truth in t1 will have an impact on decisions made at purchase in the first moment of truth in t2 and will affect the customers' re-evaluation of their consideration sets. This view has been described as a consumption-system approach (Mittal et al., 1998; Mittal et al., 1999; Mittal et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2006). In the case when the support is unsuccessful; new situations occur. We thus do not look closer into the consumption process but follow the idea of the consequences of the unsuccessfulness and process nature in the customer and relationship perspective applied to best practice and support service in our study. In the next chapter we therefore add complaining behavior and switching behavior to the theoretical frame.

4. COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR AS A DIMENSION OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

We continue on the concept of unsuccessfulness of the customer-support service. Johnston (2004) refers to complaining behavior in companies as "acid tests of service" meaning that the function in companies, which is designed for customer contacts, should serve its proper purpose; otherwise the risk of losing customers is very high. However, not only complaining customers contact a customer-support service but also customers needing information about technical products and services. Special knowledge of the particular context is therefore important for a purposeful design of the function.

Complaining behavior may be considered one aspect and one fragment of the customer-support service. Jacoby and Jaccard (1981) discuss complaining behavior in terms of redress and actions.

Complaining was, in other words, not connected to the relationship strength but considered a plain and detached action. Hirschman had already in (1970) divided the complaining process into three stages: exit, voice and loyalty, where complaining (voice) was considered an alternative to switching.

It follows that complaining was connected to customer relationship through the perception of the service, which by Johnston (2004) is separated into poor and excellent as follows: characteristics of poor service are, not delivering what was promised, being impersonal, not making any effort, not dealing well with problems and queries. Excellent service is: delivering the promise, providing a personal touch, going the extra mile, dealing well with problems and queries. In the present study the best practice is in focus; theoretically the category would apply to excellent service.

The outcome of a complaining situation affects the stability of the relationships (Blodgett and Grandbois 1992; Blodgett et al. 1997). The complaining situation is important in terms of the influence on co-customers. Customers who perceive a lack of distributive justice (fair settlement) and interactional justice (respect) are more likely to spread negative word-of-mouth according to the authors (ibid.), which in turn weakens the relationships. Still, the effect on customer relationship is most interesting and need to be embedded in the discussion on complaining.

For example, there is an assumed clear link between the perception of the support service and the relationships strength (Klenosky and Rethans 1988; Rust et al. 1997; Roos and Edvardsson 2008). Therefore, an additional reason for companies to find out about the best practice is to mitigate the effect of a malfunctioning customer support on customer relationships. Supplementary to the weakening effect on customer relationships also a switching-behavior effect was found related to customer support service (Keaveney 1995; Roos and Edvardsson 2008). In the following section empirical studies on that effect are looked at.

5. SWITCHING BEHAVIOR; THE OUTCOME OF MALFUNCTIONING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Keaveney (1995) reported in her study that half of the switching reasons in service firms generally are caused by core service failures. Thus Keaveney (1995) presented findings generalizable across service industries, which relates well to the purpose of the present study, where a best practice is in focus based on a comparison between services. In a retail banking study, Stewart (1996) put attention on responses to and repetition of problems as reasons why customers switch banks.

She also discusses customer switching as a process including both cognitive and affective elements. Repetitiveness of customer-support failures seems to be frequently occurring switching reasons in customer relationships (Roos and Edvardsson 2008). Many studies (ibid.; So and Tang 1996; Kessler 2003) report repeated dissatisfaction with, for example, queuing in customer-support situations. Therefore, we apply a new approach by adding the relationship consequences to this study in order to find out whether e.g. the queue problems persist also in the new approach.

The roles of affective elements in customer relationships were highlighted in a study on the role of emotions in switching processes (Roos et al. 2009) influenced also by other studies (Cohen and Areni 1991; Bolton 1998). The results of that study (Roos et al. 2009) was based on a longitudinal study where the role of emotions was considered for the stability of customer relationships.

The findings show that when emotions are connected to relationship strength, here switching, different patterns of emotions between customer categories were detected in comparison with literature on emotions (Menon and Dube´ 2004; White and Yu 2005; Dallimore et al. ,2007).

For example, stress which in the emotion literature is classified as a weak emotion did cause most switching or weakening of customer relationships; whereas strong emotions most commonly and traditionally are connected to change in behavior.

Another interesting fact when customers' actual behavior forms the basis for the approach is the categorization. Customers may be categorized into active and passive based on their switching behavior, which indicate that active customers' search for information differ from passive customers' interest for information gathering during the relationship duration (Roos and Gustafsson 2007). Differences are also connected to complaining behavior (ibid.) and may accordingly also affect the way customers use customer support in companies.

In sum, the theoretical basis for the present study has been established on best practice in customer support from a relationship perspective. In the empirical study customers are interviewed about their experiences about, and consequences of customer support in different services for relationships. In the results chapter the findings are presented.

6. EMPIRICAL STUDY

In order to find a best practice for customer-support service function in telecom we interviewed students from nine different countries in a Swedish university regarding their customer-support experiences in Sweden. Not only customer support in telecom experiences were asked for, but also other kinds of

services according to Longbottom and Zairi (1996), were included for an input and experiences from other industries. Services that were included in the empirical study were; banks, telecom, public sector, Internet-service provider, and also a category for other services.

Best-practice analysis

Consistent with the questions asked, the interviews were analyzed according to content analysis. The actual process can take several different ways, but the following description of Granheim and Lundman (2004) suggest a specific procedure for conduction content analysis including: full text, meaning bearing, themes formulation.

The full text (analysis) should be read through several times in order to get a feel for the topic and the particular text. Relevant information for the understanding of the topic in sentences should be separated from sentences including information for the context of the phenomenon.

The last action in the analysis is to formulate themes, where the latent content shows.

Downe-Wamboldt (1992) follows the same line and recommends formulating preliminary categories after a first, cursory review of the text. Holsti (1969) does not use the expression condensation but goes straight from the categorization of meaningful units for the understanding of the phenomenon. During the analysis process it seldom goes right through the process from beginning to end, but rather back and forth between steps (Granheim and Lundman 2004).

In the present analysis we do not only search for clear categories but for best practice regarding customer-support service. This means, in the light of content analysis, that a category is searched for but is strengthened with a longer expression.

Moreover, because different contexts (telecom, banks, and Internet services) are included; the comparison dimension is added. Therefore, the hierarchical relationship between categories (Granheim and Lundman 2004) is excluded. Another reason for the exclusion is the small sample, which on the other hand does not lessen the achievement of understanding.

Data-collection and interview process in search for best practice of customer support

Customers were personally interviewed and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each interview lasted between 30-45 minutes. In total the study included 16 respondents with 11 males and 5 females. Every interviewed respondent was considered a customer-support case and the 16 different cases were analyzed according to the content and summarized in one assembling suggestion for the best practice of a customer-support service by each respondent.

The first step in the condensation process of the interviews was accordingly the suggestions (themes by a Granheim and Lundman (2004)) included in Table 1. These suggestions were transferred to the next step and the categories for best practice in customer support occurred. The full text interviews were the transcripts based on the following foci stemming from the theoretical framework:

1. Overall satisfaction with the quality of the customer-support service in Sweden
2. Support service in Swedish telecom
3. Current telecom service provider
4. Dominating way of communication with the support-service (phone, written or Internet) e.g. complaining behavior
5. Overall experiences and consequences of the customer-support service e.g. complaining and switching behavior
6. Perceptions and suggestions for telecom customer-support service.

In sum, following the structure of the content analysis suggested by (Holsti 1969; (Downe-Wamboldt 1992; Granheim and Lundman 2004), we started by including foci for interviewing, which were condensed to suggestions (cases or themes) and further to categories. The results of the analysis are presented in the next chapter.

7. RESULTS

Generally, the respondents consider banks to have the best customer-support service. The banks' service raises the satisfaction from the respondents' point of view to show 11 overall satisfied customers compared to 5 overall dissatisfied customers. Banks were only included in the highest-rate category where questions about satisfaction with customer support were asked.

The primary detailed dimension of the satisfaction was technical aspects on customer-support service. On the other hand, the most dissatisfying aspect of customer-support service was waiting time in queue. Longer waiting times were accepted when customers visited customer centers (7 minutes), whereas only 3 minutes were accepted waiting time when phone calls were made.

An overview of the customers' suggestions are displayed in Table I.

Interview number	Customers' suggestions according to respective interview
1	"I am not satisfied with the telecom customer support. I do not want to wait longer than 5 minutes in queue . In case the phone call drops; the operator should call back. Support service operations in Social networks."
2	"Yes, I am satisfied with my telecom operator. Still, I do not want to wait longer than 5 minutes in the customer-support queue. Additionally, I want a 24-hours support-service and also a link with sub-links to categories of customer support."
3	"Yes, I am satisfied with my telecom operator, but I think that banks here in Sweden have the best support service . In a support center I can wait 5 minutes for support but on the phone only 3 minutes."
4	"Yes, I am satisfied with the telecom's support service. Still I consider banks to offer the best support service, especially the technical aspects. What I would like to point to for an improvement is the international viewpoint of the customer support . It is difficult to be successful in the interactions if the counterpart at the support service doesn't talk English properly. I would prefer to go to a customer-support center where own computers are provided for the tasks."
5	"I am not satisfied with customer-support service by and large in companies. Today I visit my dealer for support regarding telecom. The best support I have received, however, was in my university and I prefer people in a support center for the contacts . Support centers mostly lean to only one contact person; at least three persons should be included. A more international approach to problems is asked for; when my perspective is asked for."
6	"I accept a longer waiting time regarding support in a support center in comparison to wait in a phone line. 5 minutes for support center and 3 minutes for phone line. Generally, long waiting queues for support are definitely reasons for switching service provider to me."
7	" Customer-support is really critical for loyalty in firms. I switched to another telecom operator because the former refused to replace a poorly functioning sim card."
8	"Long waiting queues in phone support are linked to another problem as well. Often the call is broken . In such situations the operator should call back . Otherwise, you end up last in line again."
9	" Technical customer-support should only be for "24 h service" . During the day a desk support or a phone support is preferably. In a bank I received the best support ever. If they had long queues, you could leave your phone number and you were called back in 10 minutes . And it always worked!"
10	" Pro activeness in customer-support service . They should welcome silly questions. The questions may be silly for the telecom operators but not for the customer!"
11	"In my opinion the information on the support links are often insufficient. An interactive web link would solve the problem ."
12	"Banks have the best customer-support functions in general, but my best customer-support experience was as a telecom-operator customer. They replied directly with active response and the problem was solved in 28 hours. I easily switch service provider when support service in firms does not function ."
13	" Customer-support function of firms' would be present and accessible in the Social networks ."
14	"In my opinion a club membership would lead to a customized and privileged customer-support service ."
15	"When visiting customer-support centers situated in telecom shops, customers in the centres should be favoured related to customers phoning the center. In other words, customer-support in centres and support on the phone are two different functions and should be separated ."
16	"Many times you have to wait rather long in the customer-support centers. I would appreciate refreshments, magazines and coffee ."

After having formed preliminary categories (suggestions) including the experiences from different contexts amongst customers included in the sample, the large categories were condensed into “Best practice of a customer support”. Several main categories were formed and we define them each by describing the dimensions of them. Each category is illustrated by quotation inclusions. The categories of the suggested best practice are not put in order of priority because of the small sample.

8. BEST PRACTICE FOR A TELECOM CUSTOMER-SUPPORT FUNCTION

The results of the search for a best practice regarding customer-support service have five foci, (1) Identification of customers in connection to customer support, (2) Availability of Internet customer support, (3) Pro-activeness, (4) Inter-activeness for full understanding and (5) Queues, based on the interviews in this study.

Each customer-support service foci is described below and defined with different dimensions for a deeper understanding of the particular category. Customer quotations are added for each category.

The first main category of best practices for customer support handles the recognition of customers. There should be basic information available at the support by giving some kind of personal ID especially for this company.

1. *Customer identification in connection to customer support*

- Club membership should lead to a privileged customer support
- Customers' language

One customer said: “For students coming from overseas, we don't expect much good service here. But normally it should be possible to get service in English on a special page on the website. I have already used my telephone service over two years and I still have no idea about the detailed information of the service, such as price per minute, oversea call cost etc.”

The second category includes the accessibility of support. If companies give priority to this function they should allocate resources to the support function.

2. *Internet customer support availability*

- Technical support should be available 24/7.
- In telecom shops or support centers; customers coming into the support center personally should be served before customers phoning the center.

One customer said: "My best service experience was when I got a free offer from The Company for an Internet router device, but I actually needed an Internet modem device. So, I called support and asked them if I could get the modem instead of the router, and they said no problem and sent it right away to me; I got it after 2-3 days for free, no problem at all. We talked 2-3 minutes on the phone."

Another customer said: "Instead of face-to-face interaction I would recommend to make a good website with a database of possible problems and how they can be solved. A search tool could be used to find the right case."

Customer-support functions would not give the impression of "something necessary" when acting in support questions. The matter must be given priority and effort in order to communicate willingness to help.

3. *Pro-activeness*

- Customers in this sample mean that it is important that customer-support contact persons clearly respond to customers' posed questions and situations. If the phone call, for example drops, it is important to phone back from the customer support. Otherwise, the customer will end up last in line again.
- One link that suggest different sub-links, e.g., subscriptions, bills, international, technical problems or other.
- Rapid response.

One customer said: "I called in and had some problems with an invoice. I didn't have to explain they just said: "It is ok, we'll fix it. They have always responded quickly and politely".

Another customer said: "In my bank it sometimes takes to wait you're your turn when you call. They have a fantastic service – you can via the bank's website leave your telephone number and they call you up within 10 minutes. You can also digit your number when you are waiting on the line and you do not lose your place in the line; they call you when it is your turn."

Customers should not perceive customer-support service being an extended sales function. Today, there are many dimensions of social networks that may form additional support functions.

4. *Inter-activeness for full understanding*

- Telecom operators' customer-support function should connect easily to Social networks.

One customer said: "I use The Company- Internet broadband service but their motto is only sales and marketing. They never expressed all the costs involved in the service that customer experience after purchase the contract."

In most of the articles in the framework of the study queues form a dimension of reasons for disliking customer-support of companies. It is therefore urgent to address this problem in real terms in the companies.

5. Queues

- Telecom operators should design the customer-support function in order to avoid queue building. The customers frequently mentioned too long queues. Customer suggested the phone-waiting time not exceed 5 minutes and at desk not to exceed 3 minutes. Customers connected often too long queues to switching behavior

One customer said: "I've experienced a complain situation once I was the customer of The Company. I called them several time in order to cancel my card service, however, lots of call waiting time made me furious. I complained about service with quite strict words; they afterwards offered excellence service for helping to cancel my card service."

Another customer said: "There are more than three service desks in the support center, the staff smiles and wait for you. I don't have to wait for long and in addition to personal service they also offer auto machine to do the same service. The best thing is that they have it in English, so I can do it by myself. Everything is quite clear."

Another customer said: "I was the first person in queue for service when the service provider's office phone was ringing. I proposed her to take the phone call first then serve me, but she replied to me: "You are in the queue and you will be served first"."

In sum, the analysis provided an understanding of the best practice for customer-support service. Five different foci was the result of the analysis. The categories are: Customer identification, Internet customer support, Pro-activeness, Inter-activeness, and Queues. Each of the five categories was defined by applying dimension and quotations, which were added for a deeper understanding of the customers' expressions and formed the basis of the category.

9. DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of the study was: “to find out the best practice of the customer-support service in the telecom industry, from the customers’ perspective when the relationship strength was considered, and by asking customers to compare different services and compose the content of the customer-support service accordingly”. For the purpose 16 respondents were interviewed about their experiences, causes, and wishes for the function of best practice in different industries. The aim was to create a best practice regarding telecom and customer support.

Surprisingly many of the respondents told clear stories and gave clear pictures of their experiences in different companies and their wishes for the future regarding customer support, which indicate that support service is important for many customers. The results show that e.g. queuing is one reason for dissatisfaction with customer support, generally.

The first impression of the results is that the innovative approach to support service generated more detailed findings in comparison to former studies. (Grönroos 1987; Hui et. al 2001; Adria 2004; Roos and Edvardsson 2008). The reason may be that when the reference point is clear (consequence for the relationship strength), the respondents’ experiences are fewer, which makes the memory clearer and more focused (Pettigrew 2001; Van de Ven 2001).

The theoretical frame was built on the fact that literature told that customer-support service may cause instability in customer relationships and that customer support is closely linked to the image of the companies (Roos and Edvardsson 2008). Thus the theoretical part of the study includes customer support, customer relationships embedding customer support, which in turn is linked to risk through its nature as a quality dimension (Löfgren 2005) of the relationships and further the causes of the evaluation of the function leading to complaining and in/stability in relationships.

It was also mentioned in the theoretical framework that when customers are divided into active and passive; differences regarding information gathering during the relationships is detectable and this in turn affect both complaining and switching behavior. Looking at Table 1 and customers’ suggestions for improving the same phenomenon is noticeable. For example, suggestion 1, 2 and 6 forming the category 5 (Queues) in the foci for best-practice is clearly connected to this fact. Customer willingness to switch and unwillingness to wait in queues and preferences to visit customer support desks instead of phoning seem to be connected. These are all characters of passive customers (Roos and Gustafsson 2007). We assume that part of the innovative results originate from the relationship approach to customer support.

Despite the rather narrow and youngish sample size the findings indicate the same kinds of problems as shown before in the literature, the same aspect on customer support is continuously present in studies on customer support (Roos and Edvardsson 2008). The pronounced fact regarding queuing indicates unwillingness in companies to address customers' opinions and evaluations of the customer-support process. It seems, based on the results, that customer-support frequently is looked at in technical terms and the customers behind are neglected. The results of the study indicate thus that support service is not integrated fully in the management of customer relationships but assigned the technical departments of the companies as a technical solution. Taking the customers' perspective would, for example, imply a higher differentiation regarding both categorization of incoming problems conveyed by customers and a rapid handling of all incoming issues.

10. LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The contribution of the article is twofold. First, the approach to customer-support service is the relationship perspective, which was not applied before. The suggestions made for a best practice is an unstructured interview process where the interviewees are allowed to come up with aspects that are considered important for the continuation of their relationships with the typical service provider. Secondly, not only telecom companies were considered but the customer-support service is viewed from the angle where the phenomenon is compared between different kinds of industries.

11. FURTHER RESEARCH

Accordingly, for further research we suggest a more structured approach to customer-support service based on the findings of this study. For the purpose of such an approach a path-way analysis (Higgins 1992) of cause and effect in the customer-support service is one way. When applying a path-way analysis it might be beneficial to consider one service at the time. The reason is that the processes between the services most likely differ, which may cause difficulties during the analysis.

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