CRM Implementation Process: Application of the Strategic Alignment Model

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ABSTRACT

Failure of several projects to introduce ICTs within firms has often been attributed to a lack of alignment between business strategy and ICT strategy (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1989). In this paper, we try to apply the Strategic Alignment Model (SAM) on a CRM implementation project. The focus will be on strategic fit and functional integration.

Key words: CRM, Strategic Alignment Model, CRM project assessment

1. Introduction

Development of information systems has generated new issues of which Reix and Rowe (2003) mention the following:
- Integration of IT and the end user in the development of organizational systems (1982-1985);
- Re-engineering processes in 1990-1995;
- Taking into account technological progress in software implementation; software engineering workshops, reuse (1990-1995);
- Development of methodological problems driven by an increased use of outsourcing practices and the introduction of ERP systems (from 1995).

The authors point also to another change. Awareness of the organizational and strategic aspects of information systems has given rise to a significant shift to investigating strategic management issues. In this regard, the authors refer to the concepts of strategic bodies (Wiseman, 1985) and strategic alignment (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993). CRM applications market was estimated at US $ 34.8 Billion in 1999 with forecast changes in 2004 to an estimated 125 Billions of dollars according to IDC (Winner, 2001). Despite this great interest in customer relationship management, criticism to integrating CRM technological solutions continue to intensify, primarily because of the failure of several companies in their attempts to implement such applications (Day and Van Buttle, 2002). More than half of CRM projects reached disappointing results (Dignan, 2002).

Thus, the reasons for such a failure pertain to the exaggerated promises of vendors of these solutions on their functionality. In addition, some firms implement these systems without setting up ahead a customer relationship management strategy (Mac Calla et al, 2002). The main aim of this study is to understand the role of strategic alignment in assessing the successful implementation of a CRM project. Specifically, the aim is to show that strategic fit and functional integration are not sufficient elements to assess the success of CRM implementation.

After a literature review of the concepts of CRM and strategic alignment, we present a case study of a Tunisian construction company. Then, the results will be presented and discussed and some recommendations will be proposed.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1. CRM Definitions

Shaw1 defines CRM as “An interactive process whose objective is to achieve the optimum balance between investment and corporate customers’ needs satisfaction in order to generate maximum profit”. Furthermore, Amrit Tiwana (2001) describes the concept as a customer relationship management process aimed at building customer loyalty, increasing their purchases and retaining them, while selectively attracting new customers. Moreover, according to the same author, it is a strategy that integrates the sales, marketing and service components in order to build a long-term cooperative relationship with customers by means of coordinated actions.
Conceptualizing CRM, Zablah, Bellenger and Johnston (2004) examined the different definitions proposed by management and academic literature and classified them into five categories:

- CRM as a process
- CRM as a strategy
- CRM as a philosophy
- CRM as a set of skills
- CRM as a technology

Table 1 shows the characteristics of each of these categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Impact of the approach on the success of CRM</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Customer lifetime value determines the amount and type of resources to invest in a relationship.</td>
<td>Successful CRM requires that the company continuously evaluates its clients and classify them according to their profitability over time.</td>
<td>CRM provides an opportunity for companies to invest in the clients that are potentially profitable for them and minimize their investments in unprofitable customers. (Verhoef and Donkers, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Customer retention and therefore profitability are achieved through the establishment and development of relationships.</td>
<td>Successful CRM requires that the company has a culture centered on customers and the ability to understand their changing needs.</td>
<td>CRM is not a project, it’s a business philosophy to develop a culture focused on the client. (Hans, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Long-term profitable customer relationships are only possible when companies are able to individually adapt their attitude towards customers.</td>
<td>Success of CRM relates to the possession of tangible and intangible resources allowing the company to be flexible towards customer needs.</td>
<td>CRM means to be able and capable to change their attitude towards customers from what they say and what we know about them (Peppers et al, 1999).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set of Skills</td>
<td>CRM knowledge management tools and customer interactions are essential resources for businesses to create sustainable and profitable long-term relationships.</td>
<td>Success of CRM depends on the functionality of these tools and their acceptance by end users.</td>
<td>CRM is the technology used to support sales, marketing and after sales service to create partner relationships with customers (Shoemaker, 2001).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zablah, Bellenger and Johnston, 2000, pp.477.

Zablah, Bellenger and Johnston (2004) present their own definition as follows: « CRM is an ongoing process that involves the use of market data to create and maintain profitable relationships with customers ».

2.2. The Strategic Alignment Model

Since the 80s, ICT-oriented strategic thinking captured the attention of researchers and practitioners. Long before, the strategic role of ICT has been studied since 1962 when Chandler stresses the importance of coherence between the external and internal positioning arrangements in maximizing economic performance. A thought quite adapted to the field of information and communication technologies according to Keen (1991).

In 1993, Henderson and Venkatraman adopted it and named it the strategic alignment model (SAM). They define the concept as a continuous process of adaptation necessary to the firm. Specifically, alignment refers to a set of relationships, moving in both directions, between four concepts. These are firm strategy, ICT strategy, infrastructure and organizational processes and finally ICT infrastructure.
According to Jouirou and Kalika (2009), alignment refers to the ability of management to create and maintain a suitable degree of alignment between business strategy and organizational structure to help in creating this strategy. « Some studies consider that strategic alignment reflects the way by which the business strategy has been supported, encouraged and implemented via an IT strategy » (Jouirou and Kalika, 2009).

There are several disagreements in the literature about the conceptualization of strategic alignment (Ansias, Castiaux and Rousseau, 2008). First, there is an approach that considers alignment either to be the integration between the objectives and the results of planning (Benbasat and Reich, 1996) or a set of strictly defined components (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993). There is another difference between the formal elements of alignment (planning, strategy and structure) and its informal ones (actors, social, tacit and explicit knowledge) (Reich and Benbasat 2000, Chan, 2002 Luftman and Brier, 1999). The third and final difference considers alignment either a result (Reich and Benbasat 2000, Bergeron et al, 2004, Broadbent and Weill, 1993 Chan et al, 1997, Kearns and Lederer, 2000) or a process (Maes et al, 2000; Chan, 2002; Ciborra, 1997; Luftman et al, 1999; Hirshheim and Sabherwal 2001).

To achieve and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage, companies should develop ICT capabilities (in the form of an IT strategy with the corresponding ICT resources and IT skills). However, such strategy is not sufficient, as it should be in line with the corporate strategy.

There are different definitions of alignment:
- The degree to which the mission, objectives and plans of the business strategy are shared and supported by the information-disseminating strategy » (Reich and Benbasat, 1996);
- Proper alignment means that the organization applies the appropriate ICT in a given situation at a given time and that these actions are in perfect agreement with the business strategy, objectives and needs » (Luftman and Brier, 1999);
- The term strategic alignment of information systems means that the information system matches the company's strategy and provides business people the tools to support decision-making » (Volle, 2002/2).

2.3. Theoretical principles and foundations of strategic alignment

The Strategic Alignment model has its theoretical origins in the contingency approach that seems to be the most appropriate approach in the literature to determine the impact of IT on performance (Weill and Olson, 1989). It involves simultaneously the analysis of the relationships between several variables (like the study of the corporate strategy, ICT strategy and performance, Croteau et al. 2004).

There are six different types of alignment: moderation - mediation - coupling (matching) - covariation - profile deviation and gestalt (Venkatraman, 1989). « Depending on the type of alignment used, it is possible to get different results. It is therefore necessary, as proposed by Venkatraman, to choose an alignment that fits the theory that we want to test» (Croteau, Bergeron and Raymond, 2004).

The model of strategic alignment rests on two key elements namely: strategic fit and functional integration. Since the objective of this model is to achieve returns on investments in information technology, by aligning the objectives of ICT with those of the company the implementation of the strategic alignment model takes place at two levels:
- An external level (strategic fit) which consists of ensuring coherence between the strategic activities and the technology deployed. « To position itself, the firm should define the extent of ICT it has to implement, the systemic skills it needs to develop and IT governance (that is the selection and use of the appropriate mechanisms to obtain the necessary IT skills)» (Ansias, Castiaux and Rousseau, 2008).
- An internal level (functional integration) relates to coherence between organizational processes and ICT infrastructure (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993; Venkatraman, 1995). The company « must make choices for its internal arrangement concerning the definition of the selected ICT architecture, IT processes and its IT components» (Ansias, Castiaux and Rousseau, 2008). It is about integrating the strategic with the operational levels at the same time.
According to Figure 1 above, it is necessary, in addition to the business and ICT strategies, to take into account two other levels namely, the internal and external levels. Thus, business consists of internal and external components. Similarly, ICT has internal and external elements. Therefore, Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) state that «for IT to have a strategic impact on business, it is necessary to understand the critical components of the ICT strategy and its role in the reconfiguration of the company's strategic decisions. A process of change and continuous adaptation is essential».

Thus, strategic fit can be described as the link between business strategy and ICT as functional strategy. However, operational integration refers to the alignment between organizational infrastructure and ICT infrastructure. Nevertheless, business strategy consists of external elements (Missions, Skills, Governance) and internal factors (Organizational Infrastructure, Process, Skills). Similarly, ICT strategy consists of external factors (Missions and goals of IT, skills, selection or IT governance) and internal elements (System Architecture, System Process and ICT Skills).

2.4. CRM and Strategic Alignment

CRM is defined as a business strategy, which increases the use and integration of technology in all its processes to retain customers and make them loyal over time (Crosby and Johnson, 2001). A key reason for the failure of several ICT integration projects is a lack of alignment between business strategy and ICT strategy (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993). Similarly, another reason is the lack of alignment between the customer relationship strategy and ICT strategy (in terms of CRM tools).

While some information technologies are used to automate certain tasks, CRM applications are used to support a client-centered strategy and policy as well as to develop and to maintain profitable relationships with customers in the long-term. Lack of alignment between CRM strategy and strategic CRM solutions can be a starting point to examine the success or failure of CRM projects as figures about the failure to integrate these applications relate essentially to companies that have no relational strategic approach (Dignan, 2002; Sodhi, 2002; Bartholomew, 2002). Some authors would even argue that introducing CRM applications before developing the relevant strategy and rebuilding the organizational processes and performance indicators is the main reason behind the failure of most of these projects (Rigby et al, 2002).
Concerns about the effectiveness of CRM technologies that support a customer-centered strategy led us to shift to a modern version of contingency theory highlighting co-alignment (Benavent, 2003). The successful implementation of a relational approach is achieved by combining three elements: customer management strategies, the implementing organization and the information systems that define the infrastructure (Benavent, 2003). Instead of separately focusing on organizational, informational, technological and cultural failure of CRM, strategic alignment allows us to consider CRM implementation in an integrated way.

2.5. Indices measuring the success of CRM projects
As this study aims at proposing tools to implement a CRM project referring to strategic alignment, indices to measure success of CRM projects will be used in this study. These indices include CRM application use frequency and use satisfaction (De Lone and McLaen Model, 1992). Other indices designed to measure organizational components are included as well like customer retention, loyalty measurement indicators, cost of acquiring customers (Winner, 2001), sales evolution rate and cost reduction (Cadiat and Moerloose, 2001).

3. Methodology
A study was conducted to examine the implementation process of CRM by a Tunisian company operating in the construction business.

Two different techniques were used: direct observation and informal interviews with the head of the CRM project within the company and some users of the tool. Because of a lack of access to the company’s internal documents, their study and analysis were not possible. We should mention that the longitudinal nature of the study perfectly suited our research question: Is the way companies implement CRM tools the reason behind the failure of many CRM projects? The two-month case study of a Tunisian company selling thermal insulation products would help us to confirm or reject that implementation methodology is the reason behind the disappointing outcomes of several CRM projects.

3.1. Company presentation
Since its foundation in 2000, Company X has been particularly sensitive and concerned about energy conservation problems, leading them to look for innovative and efficient products that best meet the needs of the construction sector in Tunisia.

Rockwool was the miracle product that met all the required criteria. It is a thermal and an acoustic insulator efficient in all types of buildings, for roof as well as for casings. Through its spatial planning division, the company supplies and installs acoustic moveable partitions, fixed partitions, plaster-made dry partitions, adjustable raised floors and a wide range of suspended ceilings. Specialized in the fields of acoustic and thermal insulation and space planning, the company meets the needs of its customers in terms of comfort and energy savings. To this end, it provides insulation products that complement thermal insulation, improve sound insulation by placing an effective barrier to airborne noise, reduce side transmissions, and contribute to fire protection, all of these are easy to put in place.

3.2. The research protocol
Given the criticisms given to case studies especially on their reliability, Yin (2003) proposed a research protocol that would meet reliability criteria.
This protocol must contain the following:
- The central research question
- The research hypotheses
- The theoretical framework of the research
- The data collection design (including an interview guide)
- The case study report

Before presenting the interview guide used in this case study, it is necessary to specify that four interviews were conducted with two people in the firm, one in charge of communication and information systems and one working in the sales division. Each interview lasted an hour and was not recorded.

The interview guide (see Appendix I) developed in this case study includes five themes: four themes relating to the four components of strategic alignment and a fifth on the evaluation of the firm’s CRM project.

It is important to note that in this case study some questions were not addressed either because they do not suit the context of the company (Questions relating to ICT infrastructure and CRM strategy) or because of the time given by our interlocutors (the link between strategic alignment and success of the CRM project). The analysis of the semi-structured interviews was done using the heuristic grid advocated by Rispal (2002). This is an intuitive and a spontaneous analysis tool developed for each interview. The grid has three columns:
- Left column: Thematic analysis (facts, perceptions (-) (+) or (0));
- Mid column: faithful transcript of the interviewee speech (Silence, laughter…);
This tool allows us to identify the primary and secondary themes, understand how the interviewee’s speech is delivered and possibly identify new concepts. Using the heuristic grid, we were able to identify several themes and sub themes useful in our study. Below is an excerpt:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Sub-themes</th>
<th>Verbal Output</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Strategy</td>
<td>«Our Clients are contacted through fairs (such as Medibat, Carthage ....... ). Prescribers (architects, study and control bureaus, consulting engineers ), real estate entrepreneurs, government agencies such as ANME»</td>
<td><strong>Language:</strong> detailed style and description of the company's strategy for different types of customers. Passive form. <strong>Terminology:</strong> Use both terms «our business / company and we» to refer to the company, reflecting a sense of belonging. Use of the terms «we and salesmen » to refer to the company's sales force as our interlocutor was himself a salesman in the beginning of his career in the company before he supervises the sales division.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important role played by prescribers in the sales and marketing policy of the company (+)</td>
<td>«Our company organizes also seminars for architects, university students because they are our future prescribers. «Public companies are approached through tenders and especially through contractors (outsourcing) »</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct relationship between the company and customers (+)</td>
<td>«For retail clients, we use direct marketing: salesmen go to construction sites (where they distribute flyers, they meet with real estate entrepreneurs)». There is also word-of-mouth (between neighbors: a customer who recommends his neighbor to us, for example)»</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of advertising in sales evolution (-)</td>
<td>«Advertising in newspapers was used just to promote the company but not to obtain a deal »</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information on the market situation from the competitor’s side(-)</td>
<td>«Competition on some parts and activities is partial in this field (second-order construction activities) »</td>
<td>«There are no figures on the market situation, market share...). Information that the company has on the market comes mainly from product suppliers (which are often foreign) »</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information System Strategy: Absence of information system (-) The Decision- making process</td>
<td>«This source of information is the only basic reference for competitors’ sales estimates for example. Interior designers are our competitors »</td>
<td><strong>Language :</strong> General style and suspicious when the interviewee speaks of the company’s culture (concerning exchange of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The current infrastructure of the company's information system (+)
The cost of implementing the information system (+)
Revision of the implemented the information system (-)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>within the company(-)</th>
<th>«There is a centralized information at the branch.»</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The current infrastructure of the company's information system (+)</td>
<td>«The company is currently in the process (2007-2008) of setting up a stock management software and a business management software (developed by a Tunisian company and costs 1500 Tunisian dinars) »</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of implementing the information system (+)</td>
<td>«With our CRM project, we started from the top down: before CRM, we should have implemented ERP, the stock management software, the sales management software »</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of the implemented the information system (-)</td>
<td>«There was no established tender (given the circumstances of the software choice: a familiar contact with the software editor/integrator). We just established a schedule to follow»</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The semi-structured interviews provided us with the data needed for our case study. Observation was done during two half training days on the use and presentation of the technical features of the CRM software. Furthermore, the study and analysis of the company’s internal documents were not possible because of a lack of access to these documents. Internal validity is checked in this case, since the data collected during interviews helped identify the facts about strategic alignment and those that translate it. Recall that two essential elements are essential to this model namely: strategic fit and functional integration. We found at this level that these two elements exist in this company and therefore it is appropriate to talk about strategic alignment with respect to CRM implementation in this firm.

- **There is a strategic fit** between the CRM process and organizational structure. The company adopts a direct approach with prospects; there is a commercial team that manages relationships with potential customers without the need for mass advertising. In addition, there is coherence between the information system and the ICT strategy by centralizing customer data in one CRM base ensuring a better flow of information and a record of all customers and prospects.

- **There is functional integration:** work processes are supported by SFA3 while they are being implemented. The company has encouraged its salesforce to use the Funnel system (a sales forecasting system for the sales force, which consists of a seven-stage sales process). At each stage of sales, a percentage (reflecting the current state of the opportunity) is assigned to estimate the corresponding revenue. It is therefore appropriate to speak of an internal coherence between organizational design and information system design. Furthermore, there is compatibility between the company’s CRM approach and its ICT strategy. The choice of the SFA software supports the strategic choices of this firm, which are to follow and schedule the progress of its business and to adapt itself to environmental changes (at the sector and the legal levels). In this regard, there is no specific development of the tool. The French version of the software was acquired with a simple customization of reports. The choice of the
software has not therefore influenced the company's strategic decisions, thus we can conclude to the existence of functional integration in CRM implementation for this firm.

This analysis of the relational approach of the company perfectly reproduces the strategic alignment model. The component triggering changes in the company is its strategy. Its strategic orientations in terms of information system are the pillars heavily affecting the company's IT infrastructure. The alignment between the CRM strategy and IT infrastructure can be summarized in the following figure:

![Functional Integration Diagram]

### 3.3. Diagnosis of Company X's CRM Project

The study of CRM implementation by this company brings us to some important points:

- **Alignment / IT Strategy** is obvious in this company. However, coherence between the relational approach and the integrated CRM tool is not yet confirmed because the current aspect of the customer relationship strategy is not clearly visible in the company's approach.
- Particular attention was paid to alignment especially during the initiation period of the funnel trade system. Note that before the introduction of the CRM tool, the sales force would present the progress of their sales in meetings with senior management but these accounts do not provide quantitative sales estimates.
- A CRM approach requires a hierarchical decentralization, which is not the case with this company. The centralized organizational structure can be justified by the small size of the company (10 people).
- The implementation of the CRM tool without developing a tender has led to several problems including and especially handling of reports and reporting. (These kinds of training sessions are billed in addition to the purchase of the software license and sometimes they cost too much).
- We have the impression that the CRM tool is used more to automate sales force work than to support a proper relational approach. Moreover, monitoring the sales force planning and work was the stated purpose of the CRM software.
- The Use of the software could be optimal if all the users of the tool have been involved in the implementation from the start. Senior management and those in charge of communication & information management were the only people directly and entirely involved in the project. The participation of all concerned people could greatly reduce their current resistance to its use. Perception of the CRM tool as a monitoring tool by the sales force would not have had reason to be.
- The environment to set up a relational approach does exist within the company but it is not very apparent, what we see is rather a commercial process.
- The non-existence of a marketing service that makes it difficult to adopt a relational approach.

### 3.4. Recommendations

- A relational approach does not consist in implementing a CRM tool, but it should be supported by a customer relationship strategy (product customization, personalized relationship with each customer, calculating customer share, establishment of a marketing policy to retain the most profitable customers, choice of customers according to their business potential and their degree of loyalty ...).
- A marketing department will be created within the company to put in place a proper relational approach.
- The company will be careful to take the same approach by aligning strategy and IT while integrating a stock management software and a business management software (the latter will edit invoices, delivery notes ...).
A decentralized organizational structure is necessary for an effective implementation of a CRM approach.

In order to adopt a successful relational approach, it is wise to put in place a specialized sales force according to customers type (a salesman would handle large accounts and companies, another one would handle individuals, and others would handle some public companies and tenders...). The company’s website should be used as a new sales channel which would be added to the other channels. It would be illogical to lose the investment that made in the creation of this site and not to adopt it in the management of the company's customer relationship. (Internet sales at order-taking, management of the Consulting and Installation service, keep in touch with customers by sending periodic newsletters aiming to inform them about the news of the company, dedicate a forum in the website where customers share their experiences with the company's products and express their opinions, make the site a link meeting between industry professionals especially that the sector consists of several actors: public contractors, architects, consulting engineers, design and consultancy firms, public agencies).

Encourage sales force to use the CRM tool more frequently and send their feedback. They will not only be paid on the basis of the accomplished sales but also on the quality of the input and information entered into the CRM software as well as the quality of the relationship with their customers.

Think about the adaptability of the new software (business and stock management software) with the CRM tool already in place in order to ensure the interoperability of the company’s information system.

An optimization failure problem using the CRM tool by the sales force can be solved by migrating to the mobile version of the software so that members of the sales force can enter information and data on customers in real time.

After two years of implementing the software, it is time for the company to conduct an evaluation of its use and consider its impact on overall turnover, on turnover by client type and product, and on customer satisfaction rate.

3.5. Discussion of the results

The data collected in this study have not allowed us to say that a CRM implementation process, based on a strategic alignment approach, contribute to its success. Two questions are raised at this level:

- Does the problem lie in our empirical choice of a firm having introduced SFA since two years? The company has not completed assessing its CRM tool and its impact on overall turnover, on turnover according to customer and product type, and on customer satisfaction rate. Does the problem lie at the difficulty in accessing company data since the firm did not allow us to know about the contribution of strategic alignment in CRM success? Would the problem be about the nature of the use of the tool, not giving up the tool is not synonymous with successful integration?

- Is the problem theoretical and consists in our choice of a strategic alignment model with no indicator assessing the implementation process of a CRM technology. Moreover, most of strategic alignment research tries to explain, understand or prove the need to link business strategy to ICT strategy (Baile, 2001; Moody, 2003; Peak and Gynes, 2003). As stipulated by Luftman and Brier (1999): «A good alignment means that the organization applies the appropriate ICT in a given situation at a given time and that these actions are in perfect agreement with the business strategy, objectives and needs». According to this definition, it seems difficult to measure alignment or assess its consequences. Moreover, alignment received a lot of criticism on for example the problems of its implementation and its practice, which remain unresolved in the literature, or the different terms referring to the concept, increasing as a result confusion and ambiguity (Maes, Rijssenbrij, Truijens and Goedvolk, 2000).

- Is the problem both theoretical and practical? If one studies more closely the firm’s CRM project, we conclude that the knowledge management capability approach adopted by the company - and cited in the literature as one of the key success factors of CRM implementations - is a technological approach with a complete lack of knowledge sharing dimension (the primary aim of the project). The company's CRM project has accentuated centralization of its organizational structure and control over the sales force’s work. Even the solution planned by the company to resolve the problem of non-use of the SFA tool by the sales force, i.e. recruiting a person in charge of supplying the information base, added another means of control and another obstacle to the smooth flow of information within the company. Against the above, several rival or alternative programs may be considered:

- An informational approach to knowledge management (Emphasizing the importance of access to customer information and its strategic use) could allow the company to evaluate the success of the CRM project. (The SFA has been used only for sending cover letters to prospects, customer greeting cards, and conducting a massive mailing campaign to prospects (e.g. hotels).

- A cultural approach to knowledge management (to promote knowledge sharing) could have reduced the sales force’s resistance to using the CRM tool. This resistance is particularly obvious as the sales force were not involved in the project, only senior management and communication & information management have been part of it. Participation of all project users from the start could ensure an optimal use by the sales force of the software and a better perception of the CRM tool as a monitoring tool.
4. Conclusion

This case study used the strategic alignment model as a starting point to investigate a successful CRM project implementation. However, other factors should also be considered like the role of knowledge management in implementing these tools and the type of CRM to use. Moreover, to generalize the results of a single case study is not appropriate; other case studies of different sectors should be conducted to determine further the link between successful CRM projects and strategic alignment.

References


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Asma Ferchichi is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management of Sousse since 2011. Her research concerns consumer behaviour and the relationship between communication and culture. She is also interested in the use of E-learning technologies and E-government applications in the Arab Gulf countries.

### Appendix 1: Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 1:</strong> Presentation of the company, its products and its overall strategy as well as its CRM strategy</td>
<td>1) What are the company’s strategic choices? (market segmentation, type of products, type of niche markets; customer profile, geographic location) 2) What are the company’s skills? How well it is able to compete in the market to offer its products and services? What are the elements held by the company and that allow it to differentiate its services and products from the competition? For examples: pricing strategy, quality, marketing policy... 3) Governance: What alliances, partnerships and outsourcing choices made by the company? 4) Describe the company’s customer relationship management approach (Steps and objectives).</td>
<td>Identification of the company’s strategy as the first component of the strategic alignment model and to determine which alignment perspective is adopted in this company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 2:</strong> ICT strategy of the firm (information technology in general and especially CRM tools)</td>
<td>1) What is the role and purpose of ICT within the company? 2) Does the IS department have a strategic influence within the company? 3) What is the management style of the IT team? 4) Are the investments in technology integrated and complementary?</td>
<td>- Identifying objectives of the company by implementing a CRM project. - Evaluation of the company’s ICT strategy as a change trigger in the firm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 3:</strong> ICT infrastructure and process of the firm</td>
<td>1. Describe the company’s information system architecture? (All the firm’s applications and technologies) 2. What are the working processes related to the information system? 3. What are the ICT skills possessed by the firm? (Choices for the training and development of IT staff knowledge)</td>
<td>Identification of the company’s general ICT infrastructure and CRM technologies. - Identification of work processes related to CRM tools. - Identification of training choices and knowledge development on the use of CRM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 4:</strong> Organizational infrastructure of the company</td>
<td>1. Describe the company’s organizational structure? (Is it functional, divisional or matrix-based) 2. Describe the organizational work processes within the company (processes related to product development, customer service, marketing, sales...)</td>
<td>- Describe the organizational structure of the company and demonstrate how it fits a CRM approach.</td>
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<td><strong>Theme 5:</strong> The evaluation criteria of the company’s CRM project</td>
<td>1) How do you assess the success of your CRM project? 2) How has the tool been used? (Frequency and type of use, use profiles, objectives of use, type of reporting used...) 3) What are the evaluation criteria you use to determine whether your project is successful? 4) Do you think that after X years of implementing the CRM project, have the objectives initially planned been achieved? 5) To what extent do you think the strategic goals of the company (for CRM) are shared and supported by the ICT strategy (in terms of CRM technologies)? 6) To what extent do you think the company is currently using the appropriate CRM tool to perfectly meet its CRM strategy, goals and needs?</td>
<td>- Identification of the evaluation criteria for the success of the CRM project. - Establishing a link between strategic alignment and the success of the CRM implementation process.</td>
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