

Customer Intelligence and its effect on Buyer-Seller

Relationships in Business Markets

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Nyenrode Business Universiteit

Customer Intelligence and its effect on Buyer-Seller
Relationships in Business Markets

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in accordance with the Doctorate Committee.

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by

Konstantinos Rigopoulos
born on January 28, 1985
in Alexandroupolis, Greece

Examination Committee:

Supervisors

Prof. dr. H.S.J. Robben

Prof. dr. E.A.G. Groenland

Prof. dr. E. Peelen

Other members

Prof. dr. J.G Bloem

Prof. dr. J.M.D. Koster

Prof. dr. J.P.L. Schoormans

Prof. dr. M.E. Sfakianakis

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Σας ευχαριστώ μέσα από την καρδιά μου!

PREFACE

From the first years of my marketing studies back in a wealthy and consuming Greece of the Athenian Olympic Games of 2004, I was really interested in understanding how consumption works. Each customer is a unique person, with unique needs and expectations. On the other hand, from the companies' perspective, it was really costly and difficult to customize products and services that are designed to serve mass needs to become unique for meeting each customer's preferences. Even if a company decided to follow this personal approach to its customers, the deployment and the sorting of the information needed would be an overwhelmingly large task to be analyzed efficiently.

As a person, I was always the "difficult customer", and the companies I was loyal to were the ones that were treating me in a personal, specific manner. Therefore, I realized that the information stream from customers should be used as efficiently as possible from companies that are customer centric and wanted to make a difference. When customers take what they want and feel that they have a special relationship with a company, many other trivial marketing or sales inconveniences seem to matter less. This is the way people usually see their social relationships as well.

Moving to Rotterdam for studies and more specifically back in 2008 in the customer relationship management classes with my long-time professor and supervisor Ed Peelen, I realized how these contradicting questions can find answers. Especially in Business to Business contexts where the characteristics of the total product in terms of distribution, promotion, product features and prices are usually critical for the customers and the customizations of the offerings more significant and reasonable. Soon enough it became clear to me that customer intelligence in B2B was relying to a great extent on the sales representatives and the way they use customer intelligence in their everyday routines, providing the first information input to a strategy that will make the difference in terms of

customer share and customer satisfaction. Having the great opportunity to start a PhD research on this topic at Nyenrode Business Universiteit with professor Henry Robben, I focused on the motives and the business relationships when sales representatives embrace CRM software in their everyday routines, helping the organizations perform better and more strategically, but most of all helping themselves perform better. It sounds like a normal win-win effort but in reality nothing is easy and nothing is simple including the CRM implementation in B2B sales.

Finally, closing this personal introductory part, I cannot avoid mentioning what my friend Charles once wrote about journeys in life, journeys similar to this PhD thesis; “If you're going to try, go all the way. Otherwise, don't even start. This could mean losing girlfriends, wives, relatives and maybe even your mind. It could mean not sleeping for three or four days. It could mean freezing on a park bench. It could mean jail. It could mean derision. It could mean mockery- isolation. Isolation is the gift. All the others are a test of your endurance, of how much you really want to do it. And, you'll do it, despite rejection and the worst odds. And it will be better than anything else you can imagine. If you're going to try, go all the way. There is no other feeling like that. You will be alone with the gods, and the nights will flame with fire. You will ride life straight to perfect laughter. It's the only good fight there is.”

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter aims to present the context in which business to business sales are carried out nowadays. The description of the new sales reality will provide the background knowledge needed to understand how the deployment of customer intelligence combined with the appropriate sales strategy is essential for sales representatives today. The term Customer Relationship Management software- CRM software when used is utilized as a proxy, to describe selling organization's customer intelligence, since CRM sales' applications are the most common platform for implementing customer intelligence data management nowadays (Toma, 2016).

1.1 Business to business sales are changing

As with the majority of domains in business life today, sales are becoming more affiliated to big data, customer intelligence (CI) software, social (networks) CRM, and mobile applications, while sales relationships are becoming more information-driven. These developments seem to reduce the need for sales representatives, especially when the value of the goods sold is low or the transaction is insignificant for the buyer (Davie, Stephenson, & Valdivieso de Uster, 2010). On the other hand, sales representatives today are necessary, especially for serving a company's key accounts where they have to handle working contexts of great complexity. The contemporary sales landscape has many potential threats but also significant opportunities for the sales representatives and it is described below.

1.1.1. The Data Explosion

During the last fifteen years, the sales landscape has been facing an explosion in business to business data, not only in the amount and the availability of the data, but on the usages as well (Coe, 2015). This explosion has led to significant trends in the business to business sales (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014).

One of the newest terms in business to business sales is “big data” and while it applies more to consumer unstructured data than structured business to business data, it also is interpreted as meaning “lots more data”. In this sense, the term applies to business to business sales as well, since sales representatives may employ traditional sources of data combined with Internet data, Social Media data, and relationship data. Moreover, there is a proliferation of CRM software giving rise to a rapidly evolving data world (Avery, 2015).

1.1.2. Big Data

The majority of companies working in a business to business context are deploying four data sources: transactional data, sales data, marketing data, and customer service data (Coe, 2015). In other words, customer invoices and orders, buyer-seller relationship, market data, and contact history are combined to provide sales representatives with information needed to serve their customers better. These new, integrated databases contain information for current as well as prospective customers. Furthermore, sales organizations experienced in big data analysis tend to use unstructured data outside the company to find more information about organizations and markets challenging the traditional focus on research on market data retrieved by the sales representatives. Contemporary research (Ketter, Markus, Collins, & Gupta, 2016) links complicated problem solving and comprehension with the discovery and analysis of a wide variety of data at many levels of detail.

Finally, in most cases, the aforementioned databases, analyses, and results are online and accessible by the sales representatives. However, in many cases customer databases do not have full profile data or they lack critical information. As soon as the database includes all relevant information and it is homogenous, it is ready for usage, as part of CRM software. Moving forward, the integration of all the data sources of the company is needed along with the need for completion of data missing and at the end of the day the customer data has to be expanded in a way that creates homogenous and comparable customer profiles (Avery, 2015).

1.1.3. Customer Intelligence software

Once the company database is fully merged and enhanced, new opportunities for relationship marketing become available because sales representatives' visits and offers can be more tailored to customer needs. In other words, sales representatives can achieve more relevant communication, higher engagement, and response rate (Coe, 2015). This is one of the main objectives that business to business sales representatives are trying to achieve: getting customers and prospects to listen and respond to their communication efforts. CI software functions including customer profiling, targeting, and market segmentation are helping companies improve their sales operations, along with their sales communications.

CI software allows sales representatives to engage in personal communication. The definition of personal communication goes beyond knowing customers' names and reaches the recognition of their current relationship with the selling firm, including past contacts and relationships with individuals within the selling company. Accurate and complete data open up the opportunity for traditional and for more sophisticated analyses on the customers, whereas bad and incomplete data do not. Therefore, the first step for the sales managers is to determine the basic questions that need to be answered. Questions may include qualifying the

most profitable market segments, identifying the most successful selling approaches, and classifying prospective customers. These basic sales questions can be answered accurately once an integrated database is built and CI software is used.

1.1.4. Social Media Customer Intelligence

In addition to traditional CI software, there is an additional layer of information pertaining to data sourced from social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or from a variety of other similar sites offering publicly shared information freely to users. The main advantage to the selling companies through these social CI networks is that it enables them to have an interaction in a multichannel public and/or selling environment and talk to customers the way they talk to each other.

Traditional CI is relevant with gathering and administering static customer information, such as buying history, contact information, and customer demographics. This information is usually supplied from email and phone interactions, normally restricted to straight interactions between the vendor company and the customer. Social CI helps sales representatives and sales departments to acquire information regarding customer's social influence and source data from conversations happening outside of formal, direct communication (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016). Subsequently, Social CI enables sales departments to keep a full audit history of all customer public communications, regardless of the social channel they choose to use, accessible to all sales representatives. Business to business sales representatives who engage early and get ahead of the social platforms have greater opportunities to enhance and deepen the interaction with their customers (Paradis & Steiner, 2013).

1.1.5. New Sales Media- The Mobile Customer Intelligence

The increased popularity and use of mobile devices led CI software vendors to offer portable customer relationship management (CRM) applications that help sales people access customers' profiles, requests, and preferences using their smart phones and tablets. Research revealed that mobile CI applications are not only helping sales representatives improve their relationship with their customers but also help reduce the costs of acquiring new customers (Grandhi & Chugh, 2012). The ability to maintain one on one relationship with customers, low communication costs, and improved customer service is extended by mobile CI applications (Avery, 2015).

Mobility is becoming an operational and cultural norm for B2B firms. Mobile visits to sap.com, a B2B multinational software company predominantly German in origin, in 2013 underwent a massive rate of growth of 273% (Paradis & Steiner, 2013). Business to business brands can deliver value by replacing catalogs and empowering mobile device-equipped employees outside their offices with all the contents and functionality of the organization. In figure 1 the sources of the customer information available to the sales representatives today are presented.

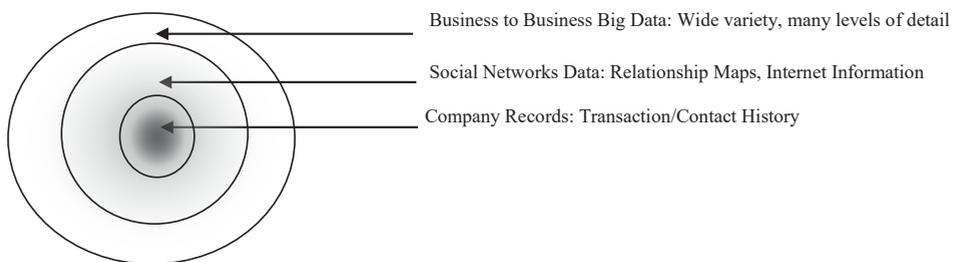


Figure 1: Sources of Customer Information available to Sales representatives today

As presented in figure 1, the sources available to the sale representative today, exceed the traditional company records, incorporate sources from the social networks and finally

reach a wide variety of market data at many levels of detail, needed for effective customer problem resolution (Ketter et al., 2016).

1.2. Information-driven sales

The trends identified above seem to support the optimum goal for every sales department, sell more- spend less. Traditional marketing and sales methods required more resources to achieve comfort and familiarity in a buyer-seller relationship. Information-driven sales can provide sales departments with more data and insights about customers, the markets and vice versa (Coe, 2015). All customer interactions that are managed through an integrated set of processes help the selling company connect better with its customers (Avery, 2015). Given the fact that there is great information availability from the customer side, selling companies have to perform sales adding value to the customers, a value that can be supported and validated from the information available (Ketter et al., 2016).

Customers are becoming much more comfortable getting the information they need from sales resources over the telephone, through the internet, or through web conferences (Steiner & Paradis, 2013). And while customers have not changed their criteria of making purchases, they have become more relaxed at basing these decisions on information derived from a mix of sources (Steiner & Paradis, 2013). Adjusting to this fragmented buyer-seller communication, by integrating and using the available information, selling companies can build an early-warning system for possible changes in existing customers, and powerful sales opportunities tools based on customized communication and propositions that lead to revenue growth (Davie et al., 2010). Consequently, information driven sales provide customers with the right information to help them with their buying decisions while assisting in making sales representatives actions more effective.

1.3. IT-Oriented Sales

In order to establish long-term sustaining relationships, sales departments need effective Information Technology (Customer Intelligence software) infrastructure (Ahearne, Rapp, Mariadoss & Ganesan, 2012). They need an infrastructure that allows customer data to be collected and analyzed with the goal of evaluating sales interactions and understanding customer interests. Moreover, sales departments have to understand which offerings appeal to customers with specific profiles, having the ability to add and manage social interactions. These goals are becoming more critical as the millennial generation, that uses social media to a great extent, takes charge of decision making, including buying organizations' executive roles. Once this CI software infrastructure is in place, effective sales campaigns and sales strategies can be applied. This should help selling companies answer questions like: who is aligned to my "ideal customer"? What is the total addressable market? What is the best sales campaign for my largest opportunity target?

1.3.1. Will Customer Intelligence make sales representatives more effective?

The research at hand addresses sales representatives and sales managers. It will explore how sales representatives and subsequently sales departments can be more effective in terms of improving the relationships' outcomes with their customers in this new era. Sophisticated sales in business to business are necessary and they are adding value to the selling company offering regardless of the information technology penetration and the fragmentation of buyer-seller contact channels (Paradis & Steiner, 2013).

1.4. Research Objectives

The present study will investigate how sales representatives use CI software in business to business markets by aligning this usage with their relationship strategy. More specifically, the main goal of the present study is to examine the relationship between CI software usage and relationship strategy, and, in particular, under which circumstances and contexts CI software (IT / digital technology applied in sales) usage can improve the quality of business to business relationships. This research will generate insights that answer the question of when and why CI software implementation fails in selling organizations. Moreover, the study will go one step further to describe under which circumstances CI software implementation fails for specific sales approaches and B2B relationships. Given the annual spending for CI/CRM software per salesman and the problems created to sales performance and customer relationships (Ahearne et al., 2012), this research is valuable for sales managers, sales representatives, and most of all, CI software vendors. Overall, this dissertation aims to:

- Establish a causal relationship between CI software usage and business to business sales results, taking into account critical incident resolution and customer reciprocity, for the first time in academic literature.
- Examine how Customer Intelligence (CRM software) usage is affected by individual sales representatives' perceptions of its usefulness.
- Examine how the organizational and managerial support drives sales representatives' use of Customer Intelligence software.
- Question whether the Customer Intelligence software (CRM software) usage affects the sales representative's way of performing sales.
- Study how the way of performing sales using Customer Intelligence software (CRM software) can resolve critical incidents in the buyer-seller relationship.

- Examine how the way of performing sales using Customer Intelligence software (CRM software) can generate feelings of gratitude to the customer.

1.5. Conclusions

Despite the fact that new communication channels are becoming popular for establishing customer-firm communications that preclude the need for sales representatives, the sales profession remains significant in business to business since many customers are demanding dedicated sales personnel for significant transactions (Davie et al., 2010). In addition to CI software implementation difficulties, evidence suggests that approximately 50% of sales representatives fail to reach their annual targets (Ahearne, Boichuk, Chapman & Steenburgh, 2013). Yet, annual quotas are just one milestone salespeople aspire to attain. "Making the numbers" is also an hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly goal for salespeople. CI software can help sales representatives become better, hence enhancing their roles. However, there are several barriers relevant to the usage of information technology in business to business sales supported in the literature and documented since the 1980s (Ginzberg, 1981; Davis, 1989; Injazz & Popovich, 2003; Boudling, Staelin, Ehret, & Johnston, 2005; Ahearne, Huges, & Shillewaert, 2007; Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014). Nevertheless, limited examples of systematic research on sales representatives' acceptance of technology can be found especially in a field setting (Sviokla, 1996; Reimann, Schilke, & Thomas, 2010). The aforementioned fact, limits the understanding of the parameters that might lead to successful technology adoption. Taking into account the technological evolution of the Customer Intelligence- Customer Relationship Management software over the years in terms of sales tasks' applications and usability, the degree of implementation failures and the unique nature of the job of each sales representative, an in-depth investigation of CRM software implementation can actually contribute to marketing,

customer relationship management and information technology theory and practice (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002).

Business to Business sales today are based on the deployment of customer information. Such information can be retrieved from the customer interaction with the selling organization, from customer's activity in the social networks and from any other data sources that are available to the selling organization. The aforementioned information when inputted to Customer Intelligence software like CRM software can improve sales results (Ahearne et al., 2007). In the next chapter, the alteration of the actual sales landscape due to this information usage will be described. Customer companies are becoming better informed from a variety of sources like the selling companies. The information channels, like the websites, the contact centers, the social networks and the sales representatives are also selling channels that have different characteristics, different levels of customer support and different costs. Therefore, the contemporary selling landscape that alters the role of sales representatives and customer intelligence will be discussed in the second chapter.

Chapter 2: The Changing Sales Landscape

This chapter will provide the theoretical overview for the various aspects of sales representatives' ways of doing business nowadays. The technological developments discussed in the previous chapter changed several characteristics of sales representatives' tasks. Firstly, customer organizations are more demanding and better informed (Jones, Brown, Zoltners, & Weitz, 2005). Secondly, selling companies' organization is becoming increasingly complex by incorporating information technology and integrated data sources that sales representatives need to further enrich and employ (Plouffe, Sridharan, & Barclay, 2010). Thirdly, the information availability for sales representatives is bigger than ever (Avery, 2015). Fourthly, the communication possibilities and channels are more elaborate than ever before and are still evolving (Steiner & Paradis, 2013). After describing the aforementioned features, the four basic pillars of business to business sales are going to be studied as presented in the figure 2 below.

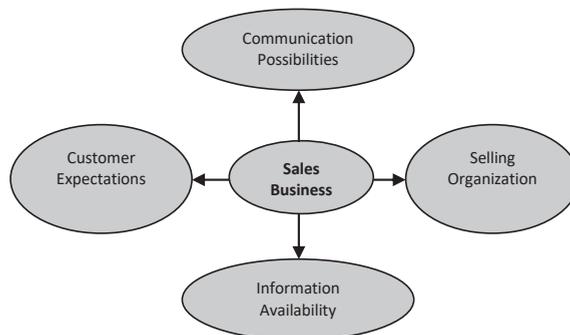


Figure 2: The four pillars that defy sales profession today

Figure 2 presents the four pillars of the sales profession that will be described in the context of the contemporary selling landscape. A landscape that is characterized by the explosion of

data, the deployment of business intelligence software both from buyers and sellers, the increased usage of social networks and uninterrupted data sources connectivity.

2.1. Customer Expectations

The development of several buyer-seller channels puts a strain on the resources and the capabilities of sales organizations. The majority of small business to business transactions relies on low-cost sales channels such as online and telesales, whereas key accounts are managed through high cost channels such as personal, face-to-face channels (Davie et al., 2010). For instance, fast moving consumer goods do not require sales people at the point of sale to complete the transaction. However, the purchase of large mining equipment worth millions of dollars requires a sales person to manage the sales process, particularly when competition is strong (Jonshon & Selnes, 2004). Moreover, for services and goods that have significant value for customers, there are more demanding product expectations. This increased challenge can be attributed to the fact that customer companies have better information regarding the competition, product characteristics, and the after sales service (Jones, Brown, Zoltners, & Weitz, 2005) than ever before. In other words, buying organizations today are looking for products and services that offer greater value, and they have developed processes that make all purchases more rational and they are very well informed about product and selling company characteristics (Tuli, Kohli, & Bharadwaj, 2007).

These developments in buying organizations created the need for selling companies' adjustments on three fronts. First, they need to develop flexible multichannel models that can flawlessly handle each type of transaction cost effectively (Davie et al., 2010). One major logistics and transportation provider, for example, is investing heavily in its online transactional capabilities to provide more responsive service for simple sales at lower cost,

while, at the same time, providing time for its sales representatives to focus on high-value sales (Davie et al., 2010).

Second, the contracts of high-value transactions are becoming increasingly complex, often including risk-sharing and service level agreements as customers demand that their vendors will stay committed to providing real value (Davie et al., 2010). Moreover, these developments are posing challenges for the back office, and also require sales representatives to develop new skills to create deal structures that maximize their company's profit while minimizing its risk exposure (Davie et al., 2010).

Third, nowadays a single sales representative cannot offer all products to all buyers, since buying companies are pressuring their suppliers to perform their sales having full expertise. As a result, business to business selling companies must decide between having a number of sales representatives to sell various products or adding sales specialists who can assist their colleagues in the front line. In many cases, the general sales representative will not help since what a customer needs is technical expertise to design the right solution (Davie et al., 2010).

Even though the increasing complexity of the customer expectations is a phenomenon that sales managers cannot easily control, they can help sales representatives be better prepared to confront such complexity. For example, sales managers could identify the steps needed to manage decisions in complex buying centers develop information systems for buying center analysis, train sales representatives on how to customize product configurations, and install back office support to increase customer-facing time. Additionally, sales managers could focus on developing a customer centric organization with cross-functional teams supporting the sales representatives in technical, logistical, legal and commercial issues when facing complex customer requests (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014).

2.2. The selling organization complexity

The basic conditions of selling and sales management in business-to-business markets have changed during the past decade (Toma, 2016). Sales organizations face a more complex work environment influenced by several internal and external parameters. The market is driven by increasing customer expectations, as mentioned before, dynamic changes in products, increasingly complex buying situations, and a high diversity in the customer base (Davie et al., 2010). Selling companies today have strong incentives to be innovative, especially in new-product development (Gottfredson & Aspinall, 2005). Introducing distinctive offerings is often the easiest way to compete, protect company's market share, and repel attacks of the competitors (Gottfredson & Aspinall, 2005). Buying situations are becoming more complex due to the usage of many different channels for the same purchase, for instance, it is common for a buyer to check a product at the corporate website, ask the call center for additional information, and complete the sale, meeting or exchanging emails with a sales representative (Paradis & Steiner, 2013). Finally, the diversity in the customer databases, as described in the first chapter, needs to be integrated to provide effective aggregated customer information.

Additional elements that increase the complexity of selling organization include the often scarce internal resources due to cost reduction, high variety in the product and brand portfolio, high number of new IT-systems as well as a greater extent of outcome responsibility that puts more pressure on account managers (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014). Fortunately, the challenge to deal with increasing complexity is not new for the sales function since sales departments always had to progressively explore, integrate, and coordinate a company's internal resources, usually dealing with unclear internal responsibilities, inconsistent structure, inefficient information flows, and diverse goals and processes (Plouffe, Sridharan, & Barclay, 2010). Subsequently, sales representatives, as the frontier of the

company, face both the complexity of their customer's requirements and the demands of their internal organization (Jaramillo, Mulki & Solomon, 2006).

Consequently, sales representatives confront diverse expectations from multiple stakeholders (Coelho, Augusto & Lages, 2011). These stakeholders include their coworkers in different business units, support staff, and management. This diversity creates multiple heterogeneous expectations of sales representatives, increasing their role conflict (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014). Sales representatives are confronted with many internal roles experiencing incompatible expectations, finding it difficult to satisfy all those expectations. Moreover, selling organizations usually have diverse internal requirements that may result in sales representatives' perception that these demands are incompatible with customer expectations (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014). The aforementioned context eventually leads to greater workload since it is becoming increasingly difficult for sales representatives to meet their roles and expectations at a particular time; this difficulty is particularly true for key account managers, who have to deliver results, often cooperating with a company's technical, logistical, legal, and commercial departments in order to fulfill customers' demands (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014).

2.3. The information and channel infrastructure

In the previous sections the pressure on business to business sales was outlined. It was described how customers are using digital channels and information technology to a greater extent, along with the use of traditional channels. These new trends are establishing new sales profession norms where sales representatives have to be increasingly digitally native, mobile device powered, and socially connected (Paradis & Steiner, 2013). These new customer expectations cannot be ignored by sales managers since putting the customer in the center of their business is the only way of achieving better sales results (Davie, et al., 2010).

The buyer-seller relationship is becoming more transparent and all the relevant information regardless of its volume is documented and deployed from both sales and buying organizations (Davie et al., 2010). From the sales organizations' point of view, all the external information has to be documented efficiently along with the internal relevant information, for every customer including purchased product features, competition's product features, buying department's employees, buying company's partners, buying company's financial situation, and strategies. Subsequently as Davie et al. (2010) explained, business to business sales organizations have to support their sales representatives with the necessary information in order to provide real value to their customers and help them with more valuable support to achieve better service and more efficient problem resolution.

2.3.1. Customer Intelligence/ Customer Relationship Management software

The term Customer Relationship Management software- CRM software is used as proxy, to describe selling organization's customer intelligence, since CRM sales' applications correspond to the most common platform for implementing customer intelligence data management nowadays (Toma, 2016). CRM software for business to business sales has become increasingly popular over the last twenty years (Ahearne et al., 2012). The software consists of the devices, technologies and methodology with which to command, refine and enable sales support and related business interaction between both existing and potential customers and associates through all levels of the business establishment (Peelen & Beltman, 2013). CRM software implemented in sales becomes dynamic and flexible to adjust to the aforementioned customer needs. Subsequently, simple sales force automation applications have become a part of integrated CRM software, helping sales representatives provide customer solutions, enhancing customer centric business strategies (Buehrer & Mueller, 2002). Sales representatives today are using some type of CRM software but the results of

software implementation vary considerably in the same way that CRM software differs significantly across different industries (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002). An accurate analysis of the business environment, competition, customers and sales department's structure is the prerequisite of successful CRM software usage from the sales force (Goldenberg, 2008).

In practice, CRM software and CRM data when related to social media interactions can strengthen the relationship of companies with their customers, reduce the costs associated with a particular business, as well as create the opportunity of new fragmentation of audiences (Reinhold & Alt, 2012). Currently CRM software is supported by web technologies, allowing companies to create improved internal and external strategies, related to their employees, products or interaction with customers (Sarner et al., 2011). CRM software in that way becomes a flow of information, facilitating the communication between companies with thousands of prospective customers (Seebacher, 2002).

2.3.2. Social Connectivity

One of the elements that contribute the most to the abundance of available information for contemporary sales representatives is social connectivity (Agnihotri et al., 2016). Internet penetration, along with great connectivity capabilities, created a dynamic, open and convenient context for social exchanges and business opportunities, where sales representatives can interact with their customers and prospects, acquiring information about their networks, social life, education, personal characteristics and vice-versa (Toma, 2016). The fact that social connectivity eliminated time and space barriers for social interactions consequently affected sales communications (Grandhi & Chugh, 2012). The most common way for sales departments to exploit social connectivity is through Customer Relationship Management online applications (Agnihotri et al., 2016). Subsequently, sales representatives today have the ability to combine information from social media and CRM software online.

The ability to learn from and interact with customers is the beneficial result from using social CRM via social media (Grandhi & Chugh, 2012). Since the public, especially younger people, is increasing in its use of social networks, companies use these networks to draw attention to their products, services and brands, with the aim of building up customer relationships to increase demand (Grandhi & Chugh, 2012). Social CRM creates opportunity to selling companies to listen to their target audiences and then present their product offerings (Grandhi & Chugh, 2012). It is common practice to monitor and communicate with customers through social media sites such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook used in connection with some CRM systems. In this way users of such sites freely give their point of view and experiences as customers of a particular company's services and as users of its products (Grandhi & Chugh, 2012).

Social CRM is enhancing customer profiling and market information whereas the integrated nature of CRM software, enhanced by social connectivity information, increases the functionalities and the convergence within the task areas of sales representatives (Koch, Richter, & Schlosser 2007; Rappaport, 2010). This integration of traditional and social information has significantly increased from 2010 onwards (Hofer-Shall, Vittal, Rankland, & Smith 2012; Kasper et al., 2010; Sarnier et al., 2011).

2.3.3. Fragmented buying processes: "The necessary Information Integration"

Buying processes today involve customers using several channels in a way that requires selling organizations being able to connect each individual customer to a total buying process (Paradis & Steiner, 2013). The business-to-business sales profession in a 24/7 world is incorporating new tools —mobile, social, and connectivity tools— for partners, customers, and the sales force alike. Selling companies are investigating these opportunities

using leading-edge technology (Paradis & Steiner, 2013). Digital and physical channels are blurring, companies have to help customers connect the dots by investing in connecting together physical assets —catalogues, offices, trade shows, and mobile teams— with digital extensions. This is the case both within owned contact channels and within the larger information ecosystem (Davie et al., 2010).

Customer database and social CRM integration is a fundamental challenge for businesses and data scientists as is the creation of a data infrastructure that will allow sales representatives to manage this volume of information, its complexity, and the velocity of change (Avery, 2015). Big data is data gathered by a combination of predictive analytics, user behavior analytics, or certain other advanced data analytics methods that eventually help extract most value from the data. Better big data and better social communication mean better relationships with customers, better relationships with consultants, and –indirectly– better relationships with shareholders (Avery, 2015). The deployment of CRM software allows the aggregation of feedback relevant to such integration. Given the likely increase in channels and modes of interaction that will take place and the increase in new touch-points and modes of experience, companies are building CRM software as a platform. In doing so, managers are leveraging CRM software services and interfaces to achieve cooperation with new technologies and new partners in the easiest way possible (Paradis & Steiner, 2013).

The final significant element necessary for the selling organizations to manage this fragmented sales process that evolves through several channels, is the flawless input of the relevant customer information into the corporate databases by the personnel that interacts with the customers. In the case of correct and comprehensive customer input to the database, the corporate knowledge could lead sales representatives to make informed suggestions to their customers based on similar cases, hence achieving better results (Avery, 2015).

2.4. Communication possibilities

In the complex sales reality described by several channels, fragmented buying processes, loads of interconnected information sources and, based on the clear need for database integration and usage of several communication channels, it is important to identify the optimum range of channels that a selling organization should provide to its customers (Agnihotri et al., 2016). At the peak of the dotcom hype it was thought that the online world was competing with the offline environment (Peelen & Beltman, 2013). Now there is a more realistic perspective that they are complementary and it is wise to offer a mixed approach. The result is that costs may increase when investing in channels that are overlapping or add marginal convenience to the customer. On the other hand, accessibility and customer experience have increased as well. The fact that mixed propositions are more common does not mean that single channel propositions are no longer viable. The biggest internet company for 2016, Amazon.com, is also proving that single channel approaches can reach a large part of the market (Peelen & Beltman, 2013).

2.4.1. The online environment

The Internet is becoming more commercial since corporate websites serve as platforms on which the company can more effectively manage the way it is presented and the way it wants to interact with the customers. Corporate websites can increase customer retention in business to business sales by adjusting selling organization presence to its customers through social networks (Agnihotri et al., 2016). Moreover, the comparison with competition becomes easier through corporate websites, helping companies to adjust their positioning to achieve differentiation from their competitors. The design and the usability of a website can be further increased in case there is an option for login and personalization for

the customer. In such a case, the selling organization has the opportunity to use customer information integration to create one to one website content and product offerings (Peelen & Beltman, 2013).

Business to business customers today are completing more than 50% of their purchase decision making process before having any direct contact with a supplier's representative (Paradis & Steiner, 2013). These customers are feeling sufficiently capable to identify and analyze their own particular business difficulties and formulate their own ideas about possible actions to resolve them. Therefore, selling organizations should use an online environment to enhance and add value to the relationship between the sales representatives and the customer. In this effort selling, organizations are rethinking how to improve their web content to extend and fortify decisions made by existing and potential customers whilst maintaining emphasis by their sales personnel, on the most lucrative conversations (Paradis & Steiner, 2013).

2.4.2. Contact centers

Contact centers started out as the place where all telephone contacts were dealt with (Peelen & Beltman, 2013). Nowadays, these call centers have turned out to be a hub where all the contacts between a selling organization and its customers are managed across all communication channels. Internet and telephone have merged to facilitate phone calls and electronic messages. The contact center has become something similar to a flight control center, directing messages communicating and maintaining contacts and building relationships. The quality of the contact center corresponds to its accessibility and responsiveness. Professional capacity management will take care of the right availability of employees to handle the traffic flows between different times. Forecasting is also an important aspect, as is having fall back scenarios in case of emergencies. Call centers personnel in business to business sales today can add value to the customer having the right

communication skills and access to the right knowledge when being empowered to solve customer problems (Agnihotri, Gabler, Itani, Jaramillo, & Krush, 2017)

2.4.3. Personal Selling

The significance of personal sales for each customer differs contingent on the situation (Bunn, 1993). Usually the literature refers to Kraljic's (1983) categorization which classifies a purchasing situation by using two variables:

1. The importance of the supplier and its products; and
2. The availability of alternatives.

In the cases where the product or the supplier is important and there are not too many substitutes available the customer will be more likely to engage in a mutual relationship (Peelen & Beltman, 2013). The purchasing partner will try hard to develop a good relationship and secure this critical supply. If, on the other hand, the product is expensive or the purchase is continuous, and there are plenty of other competitors available, the buyer will have a variety of suppliers without spending all his money exclusively on one of them (Peelen & Beltman, 2013). Sales representatives always try to differentiate their offerings escaping this commodity trap where price is the only differentiator among the available offerings.

Relationships between buyers and sales representatives are evolving mainly through the personal selling channel and they play a significant role since customers tend to engage in behaviors that respond to the way they are treated from the sales representative (Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff, & Kardes, 2009). Besides, increased trust to the customer's sales representative increases the possibility of a long term sustainable relationship (Palmatier et al., 2009).

According to Rackham and DeVincetis (1998), there are three personal sales approaches. The first approach is the transactional sales approach, where sales representatives want to complete the sale quickly and the customer attaches value only to the product or service purchased without any further connection to the sales representative of the selling company. The second approach is the consultative sales approach, where the sales representative adds more value to the product or service purchased acting also as a consultant to the customer. And the third sales approach is the strategic sales approach, which is usually the goal for most business to business selling organizations, where the customer sees the seller as a way to lift its organization to a higher level. In this case the supplier is used to achieve higher organizational performance levels and is considered as a partner that should be involved in many aspects of the business. Personal selling will be analyzed more in the following chapters since it is an essential element of the present research.

Figure 3 presents the degree to which buyers and sellers are committed and investing in a business relationship, determining the way personal selling should be performed. Transactional sales can be performed with the lowest costs possible while consultative and enterprise (strategic) sales require more assets from the selling company to meet customer needs. The cases of over and under investing in a customer usually end up in changes of sales approach and/or customer attrition. Personal selling is the most expensive customer communication channel that creates extraordinary value (Davie et al., 2010). The online environment and the social networks helped deploying virtual interaction solutions in sectors as diverse as healthcare, higher education and manufacturing where the vendor companies use “virtual specialists” to support the communication with their customers. Many times customers find the specialist more accessible while the sales representatives can spend more time on high-value face-to-face selling activities, such as complex interactions and problem resolution of existing customers and efforts to find new ones (Davie et al., 2010).

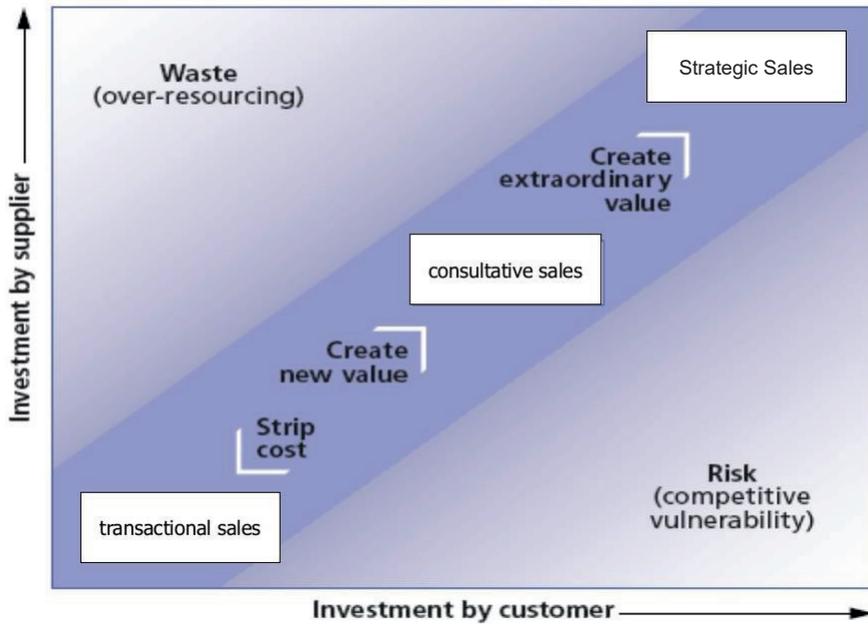


Figure 3: Purchasing situations and sales approach, Source: (Rackham and DeVicentis 1998)

On the other hand, to succeed in personal selling sales representatives need to be more information driven, while making the most of all available data to meet the more demanding customers, to deal with the ambiguity, to deal with their stakeholders and to facilitate the communication among all the channels (Ahearne et al., 2007).

2.5. Definitions

In the following sections it will be described how the basic concepts of the study have been defined. Moreover, the reasons why the main definitions for the research at hand were chosen will be explained too.

2.5.1. Customer Intelligence and Customer Relationship Management

Customer intelligence is the process of gathering and analyzing information regarding customers, and their details and activities, to build deeper and more effective customer relationships and improve decision-making by vendors (Shaw & Reed, 1999). Valuable customer insights derive apart from market research, from operational data acquired from various channels and customer touch points. Such insights created by analytic processes can greatly improve future operations. Businesses are collecting vast amount of customer data from various transactions. The challenge however is to transform these mountains of data into useful customer insights that can be leveraged to improve customer operations making customer operations and customer intelligence creation effective (Chan, 2005).

As mentioned before, the term Customer Relationship Management software- CRM software is used as a proxy, to describe selling organization's customer intelligence software, since CRM sales' applications correspond to the most common platform for implementing customer intelligence data management nowadays (Toma, 2016). Despite the fact that customer relationship management has been "trendy" for business over the last twenty years and it is considered to be a part of marketing's new dominant logic, there has been significant uncertainty about how customer relationship management is defined. Zablah, Bellenger, and Johnston (2004) identify almost 45 definitions of CRM due to the wide area of perceptions viewing CRM as a process, a strategy, a philosophy, a capability, or even as a technological tool when the term is confused with CRM software. Researchers usually perceive CRM as a technological element deployed to implement a customer relationship strategy (Kumar, Sunder, & Ramaseshan, 2011; Reinartz, Kraft, & Hoyer, 2004). On the other hand, many researchers have started to view CRM as an organizational strategy implemented through the use of different technologies such as sales force automations CRM software (Reimann et al., 2010).

Customer relationship management has been so invasive that it has progressed as a business philosophy, as an organizational dimension, and as technology at the same time (Johnston & Marshall, 2006). Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey (1999) view CRM as a business philosophy, as one of the three macro-level business processes and define it as “all aspects of identifying customers, creating customer knowledge, building customer relationships, and shaping their perspectives of the organization and its products.” On the other hand, Zoltners, Sinha, and Zoltners (2001) refer to CRM as the “use of technology to manage interactions and transactions”, a definition that explicitly recognizes the importance of information technology to CRM software processes. Besides the overall definition conflict, CRM software vendors have created a multibillion dollar industry (Sarner et al., 2011). However, it is widely accepted that technologies alone cannot perform the business processes that Srivastava et al. (1999) describe (Hunter & Perreault, 2007).

Needless to say, such processes require skills that only people have and that technology will never replace (Ahearne et al., 2013). These people, usually the sales representatives of the companies, often use technological tools to implement CRM business processes, and sales based CRM software tools that are designed in a way that helps selling organizations meet their objectives (Ahearne et al., 2012). Especially when it comes to key accounts, despite the improvements in e-commerce, the majority of vendors still dedicates sales people to treating these customers as efficiently as possible, spending more time on high value face-to-face selling activities (Davie et al. 2010). Moreover, many CRM software vendors are offering tools that are assisting the aforementioned sales people to make the administrative tasks easier. The idea behind this is simple: any sales representative completing his or her routine tasks faster, easier, or better can reallocate the time gains to additional “face time” with customers (Hunter & Perreault, 2007).

The definition chosen for this thesis is the following: Customer relationship management (CRM) can be defined as an approach to manage a company's interaction with current and potential future customers (Rigby, Reinheld, & Schefter, 2002). This definition was selected since it is the most popular in the literature with more than a thousand academic citations and being used by Wikipedia too. Moreover, it is one of the most general definitions, including the essence of what CRM is without focusing on parts of customer relationship management that may be more relevant for specific markets or business functions and irrelevant for others.

In a more detailed- less general definition to CRM and CRM software, Customer Relationship Management approach tries to analyze data about customers' history within a company, to improve business relationships with customers, specifically focusing on customer retention, and ultimately drive sales growth. Therefore, customer relationship management software for business to business as well as for business to consumer sales, includes, data management platforms opportunity management, marketing campaigns measurements, integrated customer contact history (Ahearne et al., 2012; Ascarza, Ebbes, Netzer, & Danielson, 2016).

2.5.2. Customer Relationship Management Software

CRM software for business to business sales is defined as all the tools, technologies, and procedures to manage, improve, or facilitate sales, and support related interactions with customers, prospects and business partners throughout the enterprise (Rigby et al., 2002).

For the optimum level of CRM operation in a BSB scenario to be maintained; the software needs to be individually tailored and administered personally (Henderson, 2013). There are fewer sales propositions in business-to-business, but in some cases, they cost much

more than business-to-consumer items (Paradis & Steiner, 2013). Furthermore, links and personal associations in a business to business situation are established and cemented with the passing of time. Business to business CRM needs to have the possibility to be implemented with ease to be compatible with other company's products (Paradis & Steiner, 2013). Such integration enables, for example, the creation of forecasts about customer behavior based on their buying history, bills, and business success. Nowadays, applications for business-to-business companies have functions that connect contacts, processes, and deals among the customers' segment preparing a complete customer profile. Automation of sales processes is also an important requirement for business-to-business products. This automation should effectively manage the deal and progress through all the phases of a sales contact, towards signing an agreement. As a final point, a critical ingredient is personalization. It assists the business to business company in creating and prolonging sound links and associations with the customer which will endure (Paradis & Steiner, 2013).

Finally, CRM software in business to business sales has evolved beyond sales administrative tasks; CRM software helps sales representatives perform more sophisticated sales. The contact management part of the CRM software helps selling personnel track down all communications with customers, schedule follow-ups and planning new tasks (Hunter & Perreault, 2007).

2.6. Conclusions

The previous sections described the basic elements of the sales profession today. Software, data, mobile technology, and data explosion are making the sales more information driven. Moreover, the general objectives of the present study as well as the study's motivation were described. By moving from the bigger picture to the everyday life of

business to business sales representatives, the way the customers have changed along with the selling companies was outlined. This change was, among others, the outcome of the information availability for buying and selling organizations along with broader communication possibilities that usually make the sales process more difficult to follow as it is fragmented among several communication channels. Finally, the definitions of CRM and CRM software were given, in an effort to bring the concept of customer intelligence closer to the contemporary sales reality.

The increasing complexity of the sales landscape leaves sales representatives no other alternative than to become more data driven, to follow their customers and customer needs more efficiently. Sales have to operate in a turbulent environment with more professional buyers, markets where the customers can easily share information, an environment of transparency. It is an environment where personal sales will become obsolete unless they add true value to the customer learning by adopting digital technology to their needs. Sales representatives have to achieve that by assuming active roles: They have to co-architect the technological infrastructure of the selling organizations in order to acquire customer insights using data from all relevant sources. Sales representatives have to create solutions out of the data, finding more ways to communicate with customers, social influencers, instantly and customized with focus on the effects and outcomes. In other words, sales representatives have great potential to improve their performance by using CRM software in an effective way. In the following chapter, the sales representatives' adjustment to this new sales landscape through the deployment of information technology and the subsequent barriers will be described.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Model

Knowing how companies can become more profitable from their relationships with their customers is highly important for both sales practitioners and academics (Boulding, Staelin, Ehret, & Johnston, 2005; Payne & Frow, 2005). Previous research has categorized customer relationship management as fundamentally reshaping the marketing field and progressing as a part of marketing's new logic (Day, 2004). Furthermore, there is empirical evidence that leveraging associations with customers is significant for having a sustainable competitive advantage (Mithas, Krishnan, & Fornell, 2005). The importance of customer intelligence is well established in marketing literature and practice. More specifically, empirical studies demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between CRM practices and firm performance (Boulding et al., 2005). CRM software and philosophy can help sales to improve in terms of customer satisfaction, performance and efficiency but its implementation cannot be taken for granted because it is up to the sales force to make proper use of CRM capabilities (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002).

Ahearne et al. (2007) focus on the sales performance outcomes that derive from information technology usage from a sales force perspective. In their research it becomes clear that sales representatives can enhance their performance through the usage of information technology tools. The acceptance of CRM software tools by a sales force can improve sales outcomes and at the same time it can make the firm more customer-oriented and effective in handling customer requests. Moreover, a sales organization's ability and willingness to use IT tools are critical to the total success or failure of CRM initiatives (Van Bruggen & Wierenga, 2005).

Salespeople also should implement a firm's marketing strategy (Cui, Wong, & Wan 2012). Marketing strategies that look promising may face difficulties on a sales level when implemented due to the wrong perception that salespeople will cooperate even if this

cooperation means a brand new way of performing tasks and communicating information (Dewsnap & Jobber, 1999). The successful implementation of customer relationship management requires skills that a successful salesman did not use to have (Hunter & Perreault, 2007). Nevertheless, it is becoming clear that especially in business markets customers welcome CRM software implementation and information sharing within a firm when this results in a better treatment from their supplier (Reinartz & Kumar, 2003).

Interviewing senior sales executives who are collectively responsible for more than \$150 billion in sales, Davie, et al. (2010) underline that the deployment of customer data is significant not only for B2C sellers like Amazon.com but for selling organizations in B2B too. The quick implementation of data techniques has enhanced the volume and the quality of sales leading to improved conversion rates (Davie et al., 2010). Customer data are becoming significant for small and bigger customers as well. The connection between a complete client profile and a better business to business relationship management is obvious (Avery, 2015). Moreover, the use of CI software allows the aggregation of the feedback from the customer. Sales managers can start making informed suggestions to their sales representatives and indirectly to their customers providing helpful insights, helping the sales organization learn from its customers and enhance its most powerful features (Avery, 2015). Despite the aforementioned benefits that sales representatives can have from the deployment of CRM software, it is common for selling organizations to face implementation barriers along with problems of alignment between transition to more data driven sales and sales strategy (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002). In the next sections sales representatives' opportunities and bottlenecks for information driven sales adaption will be presented.

3.1. Relationship marketing and sales orientation: Where should sales representatives head on to?

In order to implement successfully CRM software in business to business commerce, the first step is to assure that sales representatives will adjust their routines to this strategy, starting with using Customer Relationship Management efficiently (Ahearne et al., 2007). However, there are some parameters like market evolution, business culture, and affordance, irrelevant within the actual CRM strategy and software that make it difficult to estimate what the true added value from the CRM is (Finnegan & Currie, 2010).

There are dominant elements of the buyer-seller relationship that should be taken into consideration when sales representatives are asked about how CRM software differentiates their performance. These elements, based on the literature are:

1. The relationship dynamics (Netzer, Lattin, & Srinivasan, 2008);
2. The critical incidents or transformational events during a buyer-seller relationship (Harmeling, Palmatier, Houston, Arnold, & Samaha, 2015; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2008);
3. The significant role of reciprocal behaviors (Palmatier et al., 2009); and
4. Selling organization mistakes when implementing CRM (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002; Zoltners et al., 2012).

Before linking CRM software usage with selling performance outcomes (the thesis, main research question), it is crucial to understand under which circumstances sales representatives actually use the system. Are they using the CRM software more for a short-term or for a long-term strategy? Is the sales representatives' goal a mutually beneficial relationship with their customer? What is the outcome of their selling approach apart from selling more? Do they instigate gratitude in their customers aiming for better results in the long run? Are they becoming more efficient in customer problem solving? These questions

will be answered by the thesis at hand taking into account specific relationship dynamics that make the fitting sales strategies relevant in each case. The results of such sales strategies are producing apart from better numbers, qualitative improvements in sales, both in short-term and long-term (Reimann et al., 2010).

3.2. The Prospects of Information Driven Sales Representatives

Software tools for sales representatives vary in terms of complexity and integration with the existing organization infrastructure (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002). There is no research evidence suggesting that complicated software implementations are more likely to fail; likewise, there is no evidence that simple software tools will provide insufficient value to the organization, the salesperson, or to the customer and are therefore failures. For sales representatives it is important to implement and integrate the appropriate software tools to support their tasks and their company's targets. A suitable customer orientation and technology fit and a successful implementation process will result in enhanced decision making and productivity (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002).

CRM software helps sales people process information and allows them to update their understanding of important business relationships. Sales representatives are also improving their technical knowledge and ability to compare and analyze their product's standing against competitive products (Ahearne et al., 2007). Greater market knowledge leads to better grasp of the potential customer base and sales representatives can focus their efforts accordingly and target customers that are more likely to fit the sales organization's offerings (Ahearne et al., 2007). Finally, when sales representatives have greater insight into their markets and products, they are more effective when communicating their value proposition and thus can make more persuasive sales presentations to succeed favorable reactions from buyers (Ahearne et al., 2007). Even though sales representatives can have the aforementioned gains

from CRM software usage there are plenty of parameters that hinder this usage and they are presented in the section 3.7.

3.3. Sales representatives resolving issues

Critical for business to business relationships' lifetime duration and value is the way the two parts are overcoming critical incidents or, in other words, events that could transform the relationship (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2008). In case of such events occurring, relationship management has great significance, since in business markets the link between satisfaction and loyalty is weak or even absent (Narayandas, 2005). Mature, ongoing buyer-seller relationships are usually characterized by inertia that causes parties to conduct business as usual and maintain the status quo (Roos, 2002). Usually, long-term relationships can wane, especially when negative critical incidents occur. As mentioned before, negative critical incidents can be defined as out of the ordinary events during the interaction between buyer and seller that buyers tend to perceive or recall them as unusually negative (Roos, 2002).

A disappointing event in a customer relationship reduces customers' satisfaction and changes, sometimes permanently, their buying behavior (Bitner, 1990). Usually research dedicates attention to the process of satisfaction creation; more recent research though, tries to connect satisfaction and loyalty (Coil, Keiningham, Aksoy, & Hsu, 2007). Many studies also incorporate a longitudinal design to measure carryover effects in the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Van Doorn and Verhoef (2008) underline that move forward, suggesting that the type of a pleasant surprise to a customer, e.g. product vs. relational, also influences its effects. Interpersonal research suggests that some relationship stages become unattainable without a positive event, without overcoming a negative event, or both (Baxter & Bullis, 1986).

Harmeling et al. (2015) offer a foundation for identifying effective design elements for positive critical incidents, such as personalization, which could help guide sense making and positive self-transformation. The unique personal narratives that are triggered through critical incidents can justify investments on trips and dinners rather than product discounts, when it comes to customers with strong relationships (Harmeling et al., 2015). Interestingly, another remarkable part of the buyer-seller relationship is its dark side. Strong relationships increase partners' vulnerability to opportunistic behavior because on their reliance on trust (Seggie, Griffith, & Jap, 2013), decreasing competitiveness due to greater fulfillment or increase the cost of serving entitled customers (Wetzel, Hammerschmidt, & Zablah, 2014). Finally, there is another dark part in the strong relationships: the risk of a negative critical incident, which is high because the stage is set for betrayal and retaliation (Harmeling et al., 2015).

Buyer-seller relationships are typically evolving through several separate levels from discrete transactions to relational exchange (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). More specifically, relationships are developing as a result of the changes in the relationship's context and the interactions between the relationship's partners (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004). Furthermore, a distinct change in the relationship occurs when the aggregate satisfaction from a consequence of critical incidents is strong enough to move the customer away from loyalty (Oliver, 1997). Subsequently, the changes between the relationship stages are probably triggered by discrete encounters between the relationship parties (Netzer, Lattin, & Srinivasan, 2008). To give an example from the business to consumer relationships, in case an airline gives a traveler an upgrade to first class, this experience in case of passing a certain threshold of customer satisfaction, may have a long-term impact on the traveler's relationship with the airline. A sequence of discrete encounters between a customer and a company constructs a relationship (Flanagan, 1954). Similar incidents are including transactions,

service encounters, exposure and response to marketing stimuli initiated by the selling organization. Subsequently, experiences created by the sales representatives to business customers in the occurrence of critical incidents are constructing their relationship (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2008).

3.3.1. H1, Sales representatives that resolve critical incidents efficiently achieve improved customer relationship outcomes.

Based on Bolton and Lemon (1999), a critical incident is resolved efficiently when after the resolution, there is an increase in customer profitability and/or customer purchases and/or customer positive references to the selling company. However, it takes only a single event in a buyer-seller relationship to define its future (Harmeling et al., 2015). Evidence of the gravity of a single event comes from interpersonal research on turning points, marketing research on expectancy disconfirmation and relational norms (Harmeling et al., 2015). On the other hand, if a critical incident during the buyer seller relationship turns out to be a pleasant surprise to the customer, this positive confirmation of customer expectations can upgrade the relationship to an even better and stronger state (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). In cases where an out-of-the-ordinary event occurs, the inertia that is a common characteristic of buyer-seller business to business relationship stops. A critical incident and its subsequent resolution can be a threat or an opportunity for a business to business relationship.

In the research at hand, after documenting the way sales representatives resolve a critical incident, the actual relationship outcome will be measured. This documentation is in line with Van Doorn and Verhoef (2008) who support that if and only if a critical incident occurs, customer share is significantly affected by service and price satisfaction. Moreover, critical incidents can have a positive effect on customer share among satisfied customers who have maintained a high share with the supplier in the past.

3.3.2. H4, Sales representatives that focus on long term results (consultative and strategic), are resolving critical incidents efficiently.

Considering the existing focus on the relationship dynamics, all hypotheses are tested for each type of sales approach, for the cases of a good and a bad customer. The customers are classified into different relationship states assessing the dynamic effect of the transition between relationship states and consequent buying behaviour (Netzer, Lattin, & Srinivasan, 2008). Van Doorn and Verhoef (2008), support that critical incidents affect customer relationships by triggering stronger updates, which move customers from a business-as-usual mind-set to a deeper reconsideration of the relationship. Therefore, sales representatives have to pay special attention to customers who recently experienced a critical incident resolving it as efficiently as possible, in order to increase customer satisfaction which may transform into customer loyalty. The figure 4 portrays the first part of the thesis conceptual model with the inclusion of the sales approach effect on critical incident resolution.

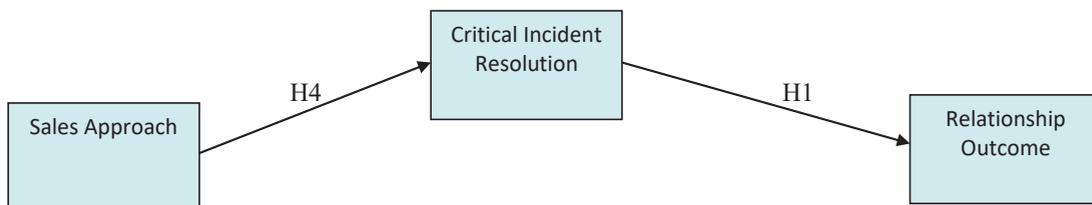


Figure 4: First part of thesis conceptual model (sales approach on critical incident resolution inclusion)

The effect of sales representatives' decisions as it is portrayed through the traits of their sales approach, results in customers' incident resolution. Subsequently, as supported by the literature (Hameling et al., 2015; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2008) customer critical incident resolution results in improved relationships between buyers and sellers.

3.4. Sales Representatives Creating Gratitude

The second chapter explained how CRM software, utilizing customer data can answer questions needed for sales representatives to approach their customers more effectively, when customer relationship management by definition, aims at the creation of mutually beneficial, long-term relationships where the customer and the selling organization feel grateful for the cooperation (Palmatier et al., 2009). One of the most significant elements of the buyer-seller relationship that dominates the behaviors of the parts of it is the generation of reciprocal behaviors through the existence of gratitude for each part's efforts (Palmatier et al., 2009).

Many researchers and managers claim that one of the major goals of marketing is to build efficient and strong customer relationships (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroeder, & Iacobucci, 2001). Gratitude and emotional appreciation for benefits received along with a desire to reciprocate form an important construct for understanding customer relationship management effectiveness (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). When sales representatives try more, providing small favors or considerations, including meals, gifts, and personalized notes, they generate feelings of gratitude in a customer which lead to gratitude-based reciprocal behaviors that result in an improved selling performance (Palmatier et al., 2009). Although marketing research on gratitude is limited (Morales, 2005), many researchers note the importance of the principle of reciprocity for relationship marketing (Bagozzi, 1995).

Palmatier et al. (2009) support that gratitude can be increased when customer perceptions of sales representatives' benevolence is increased, providing managers with ideas and tools they can use to leverage their marketing-customer relationship management investments. More specifically, sellers should leverage investments that improve supplier-customer relationships, designing programs that increase perceptions of the seller's free will and benevolence when a relationship benefit is provided. These relationship benefits are usually the responses to a customer request and are sometimes given in response to a

competitor's offer. Selling organizations could also increase gratitude by allowing sales representatives to be more discrete when providing relationship benefits, such as giving them the right to customize policies or even change the rules when they need to resolve a customer's problem (Palmatier et al., 2009).

The ability to generate gratitude (Palmatier et al., 2009) and the ability to resolve a critical incident (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2008) comprise causal relationships with the subsequent customer response. On the other hand, such actions from sales representatives are documented and supported by CRM software that helps them improve their behaviors and treat their customers more accurately and efficiently (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014; Ahearne et al., 2007; Ahearne et al., 2012).

3.4.1. H2, Sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude in their customers improve customer relationship outcome.

Affective and behavioural aspects of gratitude are important mechanisms that explain how the relationships of sales representatives with their customer influence their performance. Feelings of gratitude in the customer trigger a reciprocal behaviour, a need for the customer to return the favour, to give back to the sales representative. This need is a significant driver of the customers' actions that could result in taking decisions in favour of the sales representative and subsequently in favour of the selling organization.

A meta-analysis based on more than 38,000 relationships, testing a commitment-trust mediated model, reveals that customer relationship management investments have a direct effect on seller performance outcomes (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006). Subsequently, another longitudinal study on relationship performance reveals that selling organization investments have a direct effect on sales performance, unmediated by customer

trust, commitment or relational norms, suggesting that future research on relationship performance should investigate other possible mediating mechanisms as reciprocity, exchange effectiveness, and gratitude (Palmatier, Dant, & Grewal, 2007).

3.4.2. H3, Sales representatives that focus on long term results (consultative and strategic), are generating feelings of gratitude in their customers.

Various marketing researchers have made conceptual arguments in support of the key role of the process of reciprocation or principle of reciprocity (Bagozzi, 1995; De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci, 2001). The significance of generating feelings of gratitude in the customer is well established in the marketing literature. Customers are usually feeling the need to reciprocate, taking decisions that are in favour of the sales representative and the selling organization. The sales representative that generates feelings of gratitude is the one that is perceived by the customer as benevolent and acting freely upon his or her customer's best interest (Palmatier et al., 2009). Such sales representatives have a long term focus on their customers, providing a personal approach, knowing their products very well, treating their customers as associates. Moreover, based on the mutuality that significant business to business relationships must have, sales representatives following a long term approach, are more systematic in their attempts to generate feelings of gratitude in their customers. Customer gratitude is a feeling that can be increased in cases where the customer believes that the sales representative is generous. Therefore, sales managers provide their sales force with tools that help them give relationship benefits to their customers, especially when dealing with a specific customer problem (Palmatier et al., 2009).

The construct of customer gratitude should be measured twice, one time for the good customer and one for the bad customer. There is a possibility that gratitude is less relevant in a problematic buyer seller relationship compared to a good buyer- seller relationship. When

one of the two counterparts of the relationship has a clear short term view, it makes little sense to invest in it, hoping for a change. In any case, gratitude in business to business relationships is not an instant feeling that creates immediate results but requires time and consistency (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci, 2001). Figure 5 portrays the first part of our conceptual model with the inclusion of the sales approach effect on customer gratitude.

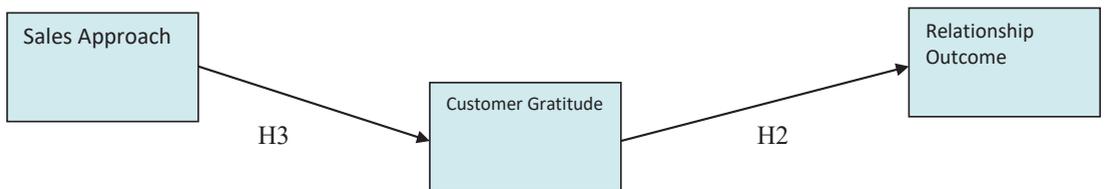


Figure 5: First part of thesis conceptual model (sales approach on gratitude inclusion)

Sales approach will be classified as transactional, consultative and strategic (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1998) and it should be measured based on sales representatives' decisions in resolving customer problems.

3.5. Long-term and short-term customer relationships

Sales representatives have to decide based on rational criteria whether they want a long-term relationship with their customers in order to allocate their resources more efficiently and in alignment with their goals (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1998). Sales representatives who are dedicated to serving large customers may spend too many resources on customers that want great performance with little spending. These customers do not want and will not pay for an expensive investment in selling time. Sales representatives can waste assets and time by focusing on long-term strategies for such customers (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1998).

On the other hand, there are customers who are looking forward to a strategic partnership and expect a heavy investment in selling effort (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1998). Such an investment could be lost with sales representatives who see themselves as value communicators when the customer is looking for a value creator. The selling effort that aims at long-term relationships should focus on customer understanding and bringing new insights to the customer by diagnosing problems and needs (Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff, & Kardes, 2009). The best way for segmenting customers according to the expected relationship duration is not their size or significance, but the way the customers are perceiving selling organization's value. Sales representatives then have to adjust their strategies to meet customers' value perceptions (Rackam & DeVincentis, 1998).

Unfortunately, selling companies sometimes encourage inappropriate sales force behaviors too, including an organizationally unproductive short-term focus among salespeople. Since the earliest days of professional selling, the companies that employed travelling sales representatives to distribute products to local shops observed that working solely on commission made the representatives call on the sure bets and were less likely to invade into new territories (Friedman, 2004). The same sales representatives also neglected writing reports and perform any promotional tasks since they tried to overstock their customers to collect a bigger bonus.

3.5.1. H5, High levels of CRM software usage facilitate long term sales approaches.

Research supports, that sales representatives who integrate CRM software into sales activities, can significantly improve their performance and achieve underlying efficiency gains and information-based benefits (Ahearne et al., 2007). There are also several studies supporting that an IT-savvy sales force can build stronger customer relationships, provide better service to their customers, resolve problems easier, manage customer files efficiently

and perform better communication (Colombo, 1994; Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Keillor, Bashaw, & Pettijohn, 1997; Moncrief, Lamb, & Mackay, 1991). Since the sales tasks that are currently performed using software are increasing, the magnitude and the depth of this usage, from simple tasks to complicated sales strategy execution, can be a good predictor of the actual way sales representatives are performing sales. Therefore, high level of CRM software usage, facilitates long-term sales approach for a sales representative to follow which is a new element in the literature. Similarly, the skills that define a transactional, a consultative or a strategic sales representative include the way of building relationships, providing customer support, resolving problems, managing customer data and communicating with existing customers and prospects (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1998). Additionally, when CRM software is used by the sales force, the main prerequisite is the fit between sales tasks and sales technology (Ahearne et al., 2007). Consequently, it can be supported that high levels of CRM software usage facilitate consultative and strategic sales approaches (see Figure 6). Needless to say, a long-term sales approach requires unanimous commitment and orientation both from sales representatives and customers (i.e., selling organization and buying organization).

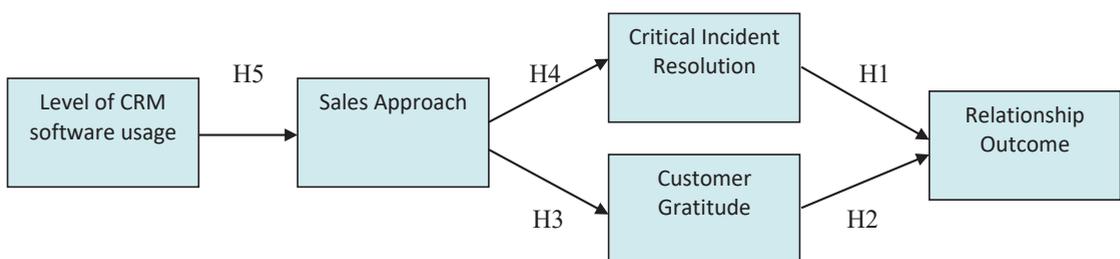


Figure 6: Integrated conceptual model (Level of usage inclusion)

3.6. Relationship Marketing Implementation

Customer Intelligence (IT/ digital technology applied in sales) is frequently implemented to facilitate customer relationship management processes as a part of a total relationship marketing philosophy (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002). The improvements of the total information flows among sales representatives, customers, and organizations are supporting the sales processes. Despite the initial enthusiasm for customer relationship management, it has had mixed success due to the fact that selling companies lack strategic sales orientation and fit between their efforts and customer needs (Shannahan, Shannahan, & Alexandrov, 2010). Shannahan et al., (2010) quote industry evidence that the majority of CRM projects have as an outcome, either a reduction in or no discernible bottom-line enhancement in company results. Thus, selling companies have a motivation for selecting CRM interventions more effectively having a better focus on the customer requests and better alignment between their strategic orientation and the orientation of their customers (Shannahan et al., 2010). Different markets or segments may need different ways of tracking down loyal customers and different evaluations of loyalty. Moreover, within any given company, the monthly cost of maintaining a relationship with an individual customer-not just for the actual transactions but also for communications through mailings, telephone, and so forth-vary (Reinartz & Kumar, 2002). Indeed, some research suggests that up to 70% of CRM initiatives result in either losses or no improvement in company performance, largely as a result of deficiencies in implementation (Reinartz, Krafft, & Hoyer, 2004).

3.7. Barriers to information-driven sales

CRM software deployment requires skills that only people have and that technology will never replace. These people, the sales representatives of the companies, often use

technological tools to implement CRM software business processes, and sales-based CRM software tools that are designed in a way that helps selling organizations to meet their objectives (Ahearne et al., 2012). Especially when it comes to key accounts, despite the improvements in e-commerce, the majority of vendors still dedicate sales people to treat these customers as efficiently as possible, spending more time on high-value face-to-face selling activities (Davie et al., 2010).

Speier and Venkatesh (2002) highlight several challenges related to integrating CRM software into boundary-spanning relationships between a salesperson and a customer. Data from six-month longitudinal field studies demonstrated that sales representatives reacted positively to CRM software implementation immediately after training. However, this initial response turned negative after the usage of the CRM software for six months. The main reasons for this failure include the lack of fit between sales tasks and software, negative perceptions of CRM (perceived as supervision tool), and lack of compatibility between sales representatives' objectives and CRM software (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002). Prior research has recommended that people can outline either realistic or unrealistic expectations for a new system (Venkatesh, 2000). It seems that sales representatives can outline precise assessments about their own future interaction with the system but cannot fully anticipate how the system will change their jobs. Therefore, technology implementation failures have far-reaching implications for IT in general and CRM software in particular.

3.8. Incentives

Probably the factor that most hinders positive selling results when customer relationship management software is used are incentives, consisting of misleading selling organizations objectives and rewards that are against a long term selling strategy (Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer, 2006). Many times incentives are encouraging inappropriate selling

behaviors, including an unproductive short-term focus among salespeople (Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer, 2012). When incentives are a large percentage of overall sales force pay, sales representatives and sales managers are becoming obsessed with achieving monthly and quarterly numbers, spending little time developing future selling skills or building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships (Zoltners et al., 2012), which is the ultimate goal of a CRM strategy.

Sales managers tend to rely on incentives as a way to overcome complicated management challenges, undervaluing other sales force tactics and strategies, including programs, CRM software implementation, and sales processes (Zoltners et al., 2012). Selling organizations tend to change their sales force incentives plans constantly, with nearly 80% of the U.S. companies making meaningful alternations to sales force incentive programs every two years or less; nearly two thirds of the companies made revisions in 2009 (World at Work, 2009). Among a variety of selling organizations, the incentive mix is mainly focused on direct selling propositions to new accounts with a slightly less aggressive pay mix for positions that include responsibility for existing accounts only (Culpepper & Associates, 2009). In any case, the majority of sales incentives have a short-term sales performance focus (Zoltners et al., 2006). Having a large variable component of pay is not in and of itself an ineffective strategy. Many sales executives receive stock options as part of their compensation in order to try to make the company stronger, more competitive and more prosperous in the long run (World at Work, 2009). The troubling element about variable sales force pay, however, is that it is tied to short-term, individualistic, results-focused metrics (Zoltners et al., 2012). It is becoming clear that such incentives are in contrast with long-term, mutually beneficial buyer-seller relationships and CRM software investments, as a part of the total CRM business strategy.

3.9. Customer short- term focus

In business to business markets customers, even the satisfied ones, are not strongly loyal to their suppliers (Narayandas, 2005). Moreover, customers are used to maintain relationships with suppliers due to inertia, contacting business as usual without reassessments of the selling organization total offering. However, when a critical incident occurs the satisfaction they receive from the incident resolution is a relevant determinant of the customer share of purchases. In addition, a critical incident resolution failure can disrupt a business to business relationship and have significant financial consequences. Finally, leaving a firm in response to a critical incident may represent a drastic step, though decreasing business with a supplier happens far more easily (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2008).

Rackham and DeVincentis (1998) described cases of customers who are strictly focused on the product or the service of the selling organization, without any further motivation to engage in a relationship with the sales representatives of their supplier. In such cases, efforts to perform strategic integration or even consultative sales with the customer are a waste of resources. Previous sections described the abundance of information for customers and subsequently, their potential for finding new suppliers and new products. When selling organizations miscalculate customer strategic orientation and customer engagement, they end up investing in a long-term relationship when the actual customer inclination and the subsequent relationship result is short-term cooperation (Shannahan et al., 2010).

3.10. Information abuse by sales managers

Sales representatives may perceive CRM software as a skill-destroying process since sometimes it truly replaces functions provided by the salesperson. In this case, the selling organization could choose not to implement the CRM software due to the threat of alienating

successful sales representatives. Despite the fact that such a decision in the short term makes sense, it creates a long-term competitive disadvantage resulting in higher selling costs and ineffective sales processes (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002). Therefore, selling organizations need to proactively examine how CRM software could change the sales representatives' role and identify the sales force skills that are most appropriate.

Sales representatives are usually concerned regarding the company's motives when implementing CRM software and are particularly cognizant about being discriminated against (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002). In addition, many sales representatives believe that their role is threatened as sales managers would have access to all the information they have about a customer (Sviokla, 1996). Moreover, sales managers can quickly and easily access information about the frequency and duration of sales calls which results in increasing monitoring and, in turn, increasing power differential between manager and sales representative in favor of the manager. Selling organizations should evaluate these sales representatives' perceptions to make effective technology implementation decisions (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002).

3.10.1. H6, Increased firm commitment to CRM software usage has a positive effect on sales representative usage of this software.

CRM software implementation, like any other business decision that has to be well defined and supported before implemented, cannot be seen as a standalone endeavour, since in such cases the motives for the sales representatives to adopt CRM are vague or even absent (Rigopoulos, Peelen, & Van Bruggen, 2013). Some traits of the selling organization can have significant effect on the successful implementation of technology affecting CRM software acceptance (Petersen, 1997). The management support is one of the most significant traits, enhancing involvement and participation for the sales organization (Igbaria, Parasuraman, &

Baroudi, 1996). The selling organization cannot implement CRM software separately; sometimes the organization itself has to be transformed in several aspects to make this implementation feasible. A significant organizational difficulty for the implementation problems of CRM software is the lack of organizational support to its usage or the contradicting management the sales representatives have. For instance, Zoltners et al. (2012), in their study describe the negative impact that incentives have for sales departments' long term decisions such as the CRM software implementation.

The level of the organizational commitment to CRM software implementation construct is taken from Igbaria et al. (1996) labelled as supervisory support on technology implementation. The construct includes items measuring the incentives, supervisor's support, peer support and training for software usage (see figure 7). Furthermore, the level of system usage construct (Ahearne et al., 2007) includes items describing specific questions that reveal the degree on which the sales representatives integrate CRM software into their daily tasks.

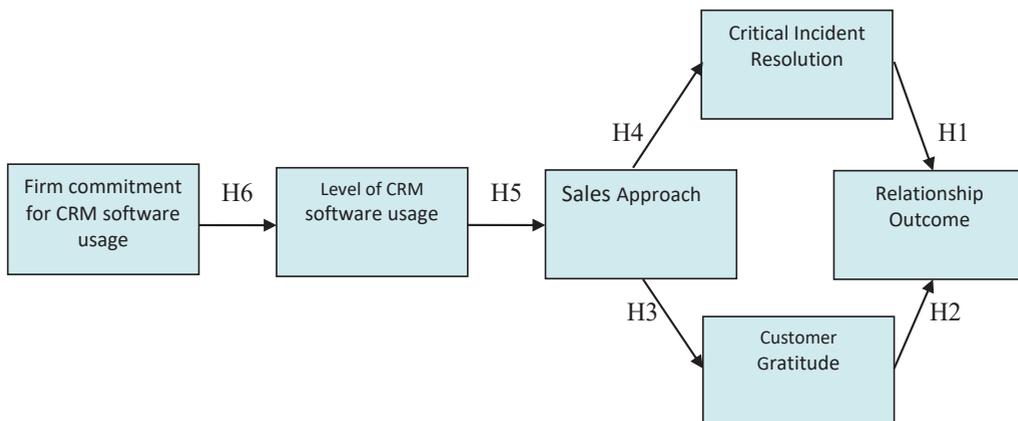


Figure 7: Integrated conceptual model (Level of usage- Firm commitment to CRM software usage inclusion)

The organizational support to the CRM software usage could possibly affect the total CRM implementation circle and lead to apart from the software misuse to negative and/or unpredictable buyer-seller relationship outcomes (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002).

3.11. Perceived usefulness of Information Technology in sales

When CRM software is perceived as useful, sales representatives use technology more in their daily work routines (Sundaram, Schwarz, Jones, & Chin, 2007). For several reasons CRM software may not be used to its greater potential. Thus, management should deploy all resources needed to demonstrate to the sales force how this technology can be used as effectively and as efficiently as possible. Effective IT training is needed for the sales force when the goal is optimal CRM software deployment (Sundaram et al., 2007). Sales representatives who integrate IT tools into their sales activities can significantly improve their performance and achieve underlying efficiency gains and information-based benefits, sales skills, and behaviours (Ahearne et al., 2007).

Despite the evidence that CRM software implementation is improving sales performance, there is an ongoing debate within sales organizations regarding the marginal gains in productivity caused by this implementation (Reimann, Schilke, & Thomas, 2010). Sales representatives may not perceive the CRM software as helpful in improving their performance. A possible explanation may be that sales results are usually measured with a short-term focus, where CRM software implementation improves buyer-seller relationship and produces tangible sales profitability improvements in the long run (Reimann et al., 2010).

Supporting the focus on sales representatives, putting the user first offers better perspectives for increased perceived usefulness of sales CRM software (Rigopoulos et al., 2013). By focusing on functionalities that match the sales activities and that improve the

attitude towards the technology, the chances of adoption are increased and information sharing between sales agents and sales management will improve (Rigopoulos et al., 2013). In other words, functions that match sales activities will be used more often. For instance, contact history or planning tools provide better insights in customer segments and allow consultation in the long run, when complaint management is difficult to integrate as a function since it requires extensive feedback to evaluate an approach. In contrast, some features that are perceived as strict monitoring hold back the adoption and promote negative beliefs about the usefulness of the CRM software. In such cases sales representatives tend to refuse to share information with the system, or keeping separate databases for themselves (Rigopoulos et al., 2013).

The findings above are in agreement with Sundaram et al. (2007) supporting that managing the acceptance process for CRM systems requires different strategies for each period of deployment (before deploying the technology, during the initial usage, during the normal usage). Before deploying the technology, management should concentrate on factors that influence initial usage. In any case, differences in attitude towards technology occur between organizations, markets and sales people. The differences between transactional, consultative and strategic sales representatives are still dominant as well as the system usage they perform (Rigopoulos et al. 2013).

3.11.1. H7, Increased CRM software perceived usefulness has a positive impact on sales representative usage of this software.

Research demonstrates that a specific technology like CRM software can be perceived as competence enhancing or competence destroying, contingent on the user's socially constructed meaning (Burkhardt & Brass, 1990). A technology is perceived as competence

enhancing when it preserves and enhances the value of existing skills, relationships and knowledge. In contrast, competence destroying technologies hold back existing skills, relationships and knowledge, thus creating perceptions of deskilling (Burkhardt & Brass, 1990) and resulting in negative perceptions of the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). These perceptions of deskilling may result in sales representatives believing that they are losing important competencies relative to the marketplace, leading to technology rejection (Braveman, 1974). Finally, CRM software often automates many of the sales job routines relevant to the sales process through showing the way to less interaction with customers and co-workers (Hill & Swenson, 1994). A competence enhancing socially constructed perception will result in favourable outcomes; in contrast, deskilling and routinization will result in negative perceptions of person-technology fit that lead to negative outcomes.

The perceived usefulness of the system may be lower when the selling organization emphasizes the monitoring and the supervision parts of the system without linking the inputs from the sales representatives with the overall selling and marketing strategy of the company (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002). In the perceived usefulness scale by Davis (1989) both administrative and selling position tasks were addressed, giving a total view about how sales representatives perceive the system. Moreover, the level of usage scale (Ahearne et al., 2007) incorporates specific sales tasks that reveal the degree to which a sales representative integrates CRM software into his or her daily tasks.

Subsequently, the complete conceptual model (see figure 8), is containing the overall Customer Intelligence implementation effort, from the acceptance of the software and the company support to the sales representatives, to the examination of the degree in which sales approaches that incorporate customer intelligence reach the sales goals of creating customer gratitude, resolving critical incidents and in the end, improve the buyer-seller relationship outcome.

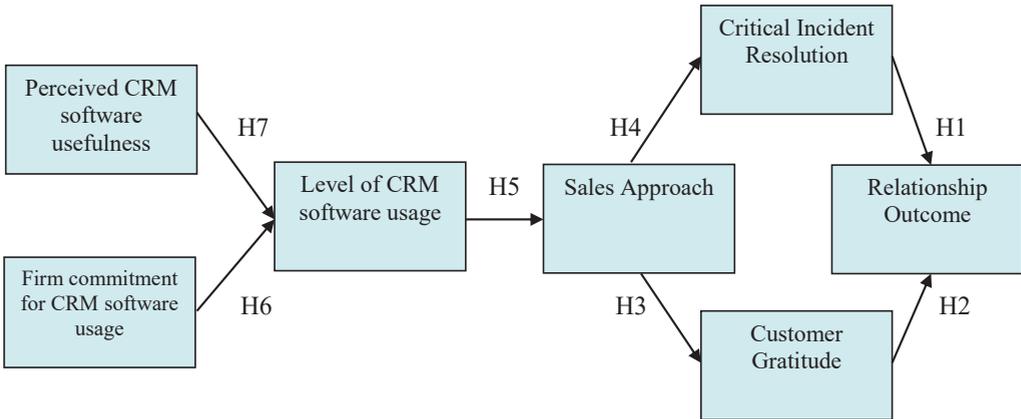


Figure 8: Full conceptual model (Perceived CRF software usefulness inclusion)

3.12. Literature Gaps

Despite the fact that relationship marketing investments in business-to-business (B2B) interactions have been studied (Rodriguez & Honeycutt, 2011; Ryals, 2005), there is no research to explain how to leverage these selling organizations' investments for specific clients. This is unexpected given the academic and managerial interests in measuring marketing productivity and customer-level effects (Bolton, 1998; Bolton, Lemon, & Verhoef, 2004; Gupta & Lehmann, 2005; Johnson & Selnes, 2004; Cui et al., 2012). In addition, two aspects perplex the investigation of customer-specific payoffs of CRM in sales. First, different relationship marketing programs (financial, social, and strategic) may build different types of relational bonds and norms that generate varying levels of return (Cannon, Achrol, & Gundlac, 2000). Secondly, returns from customer relationship management programs may vary according to factors associated with any of the relational participants (customer, salesperson, selling firm), but the factors for each participant influence a different set of relational bonds (Reinartz & Kumar, 2000; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). Customer factors affect returns from customer relationship management investments only for that

customer, whereas salesperson factors influence the efficacy of relationship investments for all customers handled by that salesperson, and selling-firm factors leverage investments across all the customers of a selling firm.

Among the aforementioned challenges regarding customer relationship management value, there is little guidance about how management should implement a successful CRM strategy to build and sustain a profit-maximizing portfolio of customer relationships (Zablah, Bellenger, & Johnston, 2004). Value creation through CRM implementation varies and depends on specific business circumstances (Ahearne et al., 2012). Paradoxically, despite the fact that the CRM literature is huge, there is limited research about how specific situational factors may interact with CRM to influence financial outcomes (Reimann et al., 2010).

Harmeling et al. (2015) suggest that their research on critical incidents in business to business markets has to be performed having sellers as participants. Moreover, they suggest that not only negative incidents should be explored, but also positive ones. Hunter and Perreault (2007) underline that many key decisions about what technologies to develop have been guided primarily by IT specialists rather than the sales force. Sales representatives are the ones who have to play an active role in the design about which sales force automations are needed. Therefore, research is needed to guide these decisions. Previous research on CRM has either perceived the concept as an information technology (digital application) solution that extends separate databases to improve targeting efforts (Chen & Popovich, 2003) or as a tool designed for one-to-one customer communications (Peppers & Rogers, 1999). Ahearne et al. (2012) propose that future research data collection efforts should include the three outcome levels: salesperson, customer, and firm.

Francis et al. (2006) support that the dominant theoretical models that have been used in sales force automations research fail to make the connection to performance and new theoretical models have to be tested to analyze this link. Finally, Ahearne et al. (2007) in their

research that connects sales performance with IT acceptance, suggest that longitudinal research using a field experimental approach could counter the limitation imposed by cross-sectional designs with respect to drawing causal inferences. The research at hand responds to the aforementioned literature gaps examining the relationship between CRM software implementation and buyer-seller relationship outcomes, taking into account different buyer-seller relationship statuses, diverse sales approaches as well as positive and negative critical incidents.

3.13. Thesis Hypotheses

The research hypotheses of this study cannot be seen separately from one another. The research objective is to explain why CRM software succeeds or fails to improve relationship outcomes taking into account the relationship dynamics. A simple connection between for example, CRM software perceived usefulness and CRM software usage, isolated from the relationship outcome or from the sales approach adds nothing new to the sales strategy literature and practice since similar research has already been performed (indicatively, Ahearne et al., 2007, Speier & Venkatesh, 2002). In conclusion, the hypotheses will be summarized presenting some possible structures of the conceptual model that will add a new perspective into the body of knowledge.

The first objective of the research at hand is to understand the differences of the three sales approaches. From that point on, it will be investigated whether the application of CRM software helps the sales representatives to choose the most successful approach to see, in other words, whether CRM software contributes to improved sales results, checking the factors that influence CRM software adaptation. In any case, the research also takes into account the duration and the sequence of relationship events in a buyer-seller relationship,

this element though will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter. In Table 1 the thesis hypotheses are presented in brief:

Table 1: Hypotheses

H1:	Sales representatives that efficiently resolve customers' critical incidents achieve improved customer relationship outcomes.
H2:	Sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude to their customers achieve improved customer relationship outcomes.
H3:	Sales representatives that focus on long term results (consultative and strategic), are generating feelings of gratitude in their customers.
H4:	Sales representatives that focus on long term results (consultative and strategic), are resolving critical incidents efficiently.
H5:	High levels of CRM software usage are enabling long term sales approaches.
H6:	Increased firm commitment for CRM software usage has a positive effect on sales representative usage of this software.
H7:	Increased CRM software perceived usefulness has a positive impact on sales representative usage of this software.

Based on the difference in the logic between the CRM software usage and acceptance process and the sales approach combined with relationship dynamics, the conceptual model can be divided into two parts (see figure 9) while all the constructs are causally connected too:

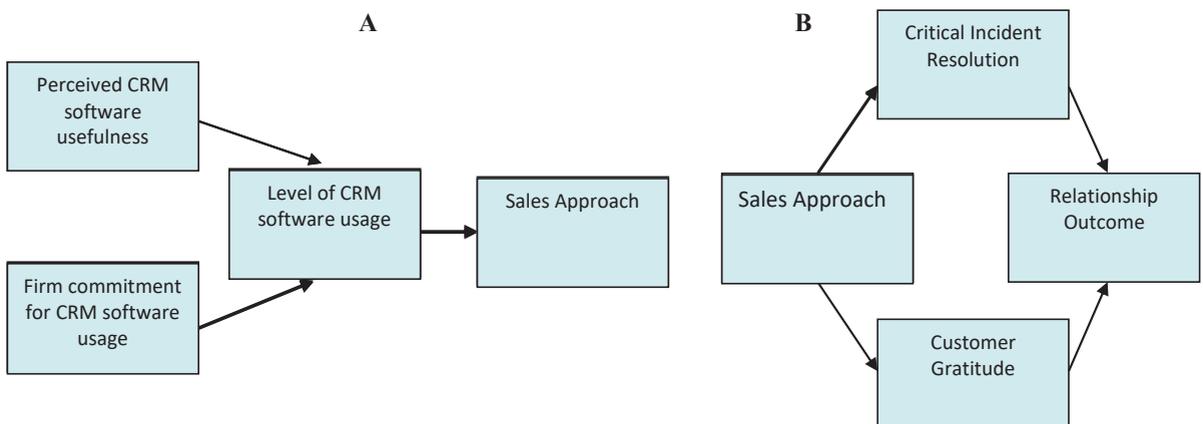


Figure 9: Conceptual model divided

The first part is easy to explain and has specific positive outcomes, in case perceived CRM software usefulness or firm and CRM software commitment does not affect CRM software usage the hypotheses H5-H6-H7 will be rejected. (**H7**: Increased CRM software perceived usefulness has a positive impact on sales representative usage of this software, **H6**: Increased firm commitment for CRM software usage has a positive effect on sales representative usage of this software, **H5**: High levels of CRM software usage are enabling long term sales approaches

The relationship between the level of usage and the sales approach is tested for the first time in the literature since sales approach is a new construct that was developed for the purpose of this research. However, this relationship is supported by earlier research and also has an insightful application. A sales representative that uses the system in a complete way integrating all CRM software features into the sales process, does so in order to sell more by targeting better, understanding the customer needs better and going deep into the relationship with the customer. The level of usage construct is not measuring the usage in terms of time spent on it, but in terms of CRM software integration into all the aspects of the sales profession.

The second part of the research is more complicated. It looks like one model but there are actually six possible interpretations based on contextual factors, testing separately good and bad relationships with customers, following transactional, consultative and strategic approaches. In an effort to simplify this part of the model customer and sales representative sides will be described in a simple way following long or short term approaches to the business relationship. Subsequently, a bad customer is not looking for mutuality or a long-term relationship. The same approach may be followed by a transactional sales representative who is looking for short-term profit without investing in the relationship for achieving long term results.

In general, when customer and sales representative are aiming for a mutually beneficial long term relationship, the overall model is supported (H1d, H1f, H2d, H2f, H3d, H3f, H4d, H64f, H5d, H5f) whereas, when there is a mutual short term focus (H1a, H2a, H3a, H4a, H5a), the overall model is not supported. Finally it will be really insightful to identify how the model works in terms of customer short-term focus (bad customer) and sales representative long-term focus (consultative and strategic sales approach) and vice-versa, is the customer the dominant part that defines the applicability of the conceptual model or the sales representative? In such cases, despite the absence of mutuality in the buyer-seller relationship, the sophisticated practices of a consultative or a strategic sales approach, may lead to improved relationship outcomes no matter the short term focus by the customer side. On the other hand, the good traits of a customer that seems trustworthy and has the willingness to engage in long- term cooperation with a selling company may enhance the initial transactional sales approach, to a more cooperating level, aiming for long term relationship (H1b, H2b, H3b, H4b, and H5b).

3.14. Conclusions

In the present chapter the relationship marketing implementation and the orientation sales representatives should have was analyzed. Despite the popular sales approach that suggests long-term and mutually beneficial relationships at least with the key accounts (i.e., the significant customers for a company), and focusing on integration and strategic partnership between buying and selling organization, there are many potential barriers. The business environment is changing; the Internet, smart phones and software applications have transformed markets into a more transparent and more professional shape. Today, buyers have the intention to make the relationship with the seller more contactless by replacing sales representatives' roles (e.g., product information and after sales support) with information

technology (Toma, 2016). Relationship marketing, though, remains profitable when firms are focusing on such programs for their good customers. Nevertheless, many applications of information technology in sales fail. Therefore, the challenge is to have the technology support sales representatives in order to develop mutually profitable relationships with their customers.

In many cases the incentives for sales personnel have a short-term focus, when the customers from their side, choose a short-term relationship focus as well, focusing solely on the product purchased and its price. Furthermore, information technology in the form of the CRM software that gives to the sales representatives the information needed to resolve problems with their customers and create feelings of gratitude in them, is received by them with distrust since sales managers may use it mainly as a tool for strict supervision. Finally, there are many examples from research and practice where useful CRM software makes sales representatives more productive and improves buyer-seller relationship in the long run.

There are several literature gaps that should be addressed in this context. Sales managers have to find ways to leverage CRM software investments for different types of customers. Likewise, different sales approaches generate varying returns from customers. Consequently, the research at hand will take into account relational factors for different customers and different selling approaches.

There is a research gap for the specific business circumstances leading to significant value creation from CRM software. Subsequently, critical incidents in a buyer-seller relationship, when resolved using CRM could produce differentiated sales results. These situations include positive and negative incidents between sales representative and customers, taking into account the sales representative's approach, the customers' approach and the selling firm's approach on improving sales results. Finally, there is a need for research to investigate the causal relationship between CRM software and relationship outcomes in a

longitudinal, process-like experimental approach to reveal the real drivers behind the relationship outcome. In other words, the research at hand is needed to examine how CRM software, when used, would help sales representatives make the optimal decisions in ongoing relationships with their customers when faced with different critical incidents.

The present thesis will contribute to the sales strategy literature by investigating the empirical gaps outlined above. This chapter presented and discussed the conceptual framework of the research and formulate the hypotheses. After the complete presentation of the theory that developed the research hypotheses, the presentation of the full conceptual model followed.

The research starts by defining CRM software perceived usefulness (sales representatives' attitude toward using CRM software) and the selling organization's commitment to its implementation. These two constructs influence the level of CRM software usage by the sales representatives. Accordingly, the level of the CRM software usage is related to the type of sales approach salespeople follow. The type of sales approach, transactional, consultative and strategic, predicts the degree to which sales representatives resolve critical incidents and generate feelings of gratitude in their customers. Finally, critical incident resolution and gratitude are predictors of the relationship outcome (dependent variable).

The present research examines the total implementation endeavor, from sales representatives and selling organization to the final relationship outcomes, trying to explore this process efficiently. Tracing CRM software usage, sales performance, and sales behavior from the outset of CRM software implementation would demonstrate how the acceptance process unfolds and when and how performance benefits are generated for specific types of sales approaches. For simplicity reasons and to avoid making the hypotheses lengthier, describing the pre-existing relationship context with the customer, the trustworthy (good) and

mutually beneficial relationships with a customer are described as “relationships with a good customer,” while the problematic relationships with a customer are described as “relationships with a bad customer”.

The ultimate goal of sales departments is to improve the performance of their sales force. Based on the literature review, there were indications that CRM software positively influences sales performance. A CRM-facilitated long-term approach on sales by sales representatives helps them focus better on the customer and subsequently improves sales performance. Especially when both the customer and the seller are looking for a long-term, mutually profitable relationship the CRM-based performance outcomes can further improve. The conceptual model was formed by integrating a literature review with multiple qualitative research information gatherings, including in-depth interviews with sales managers, sales representatives and sales organizations, such as the Greek Sales Institute, to develop a model relevant to the contemporary sales’ practice. The model development took into account sales managers’ main concern regarding the relationship outcome construct formulation. After critical incidents occurring during a customer’s lifetime, indicators like profitability, customer share, volume of sales, and total product offering should improve in order to support the theory that investments on the relationship from the selling organization improved the relationship outcome.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

The previous chapters described the theoretical background of this research, reviewing the literature related to this study and providing the conceptual model as well as the research hypotheses that will be investigated. This chapter will justify the quantitative nature of this study and outline the research methodology. It will propose research methods to answer the research hypotheses presented in the previous chapter and outline the research strategy. Moreover, it will introduce the research instruments that were developed for this investigation.

4.1. Study structure explanation

In the first chapter the wide context of today's business world where business to business sales are performed, is described. The second chapter describes how the technological and more specifically the information technology evolution affected business to business sales, changing the way sales representatives perform their tasks. The literature review that covers these business world' and sales' advances, eventually has some gaps and includes contradicting studies that lead to the third chapter where the hypotheses are developed based on the contemporary literature, linking customer intelligence usage with sales performance outcomes. The thesis hypotheses are the foundation of the conceptual model that will be examined in the research at hand. This chapter describes thesis research methodology, starting with the definition of the thesis constructs, to the description of the research design, the experimental design, the questionnaire, the scale construction, and the data collection. Following the aforementioned sections, the results of the study will be presented deploying confirmatory factor analysis and multi-group structural equation

modeling. Finally, the academic and managerial implications will be demonstrated along with recommendations for sales managers and sales representatives.

4.1.1. Research Design Description

In the following sections the set of methods and procedures used in collecting and analysing measures of the variables specified in the research problem are going to be described. The design of the study at hand defines its experimental type and its pseudo-longitudinal sub-type. Moreover, the data collection method and the statistical analysis plan will be described as well, to draw the framework created to find answers to the research questions.

The pseudo-longitudinal research design of the thesis at hand is reached by measuring repeatedly a sample of population elements over a limited period of time (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). The sample consisted of sales representatives and sales managers who responded to three consecutive questionnaires with a time interval of one week in between. This interval was needed since the questionnaires were measuring the way the respondent would react to three distinctive critical incidents that occurred with two pre-described significant customers-key accounts. The observations of the respondents were made independently. The participants of the research included sales representatives and managers in order to boost the external validity of it. An experimental design was used in which attitudes were assessed both before and after an experimental treatment. More, specifically, the experimental treatment included the narration of three incidents, one per round, that occurred during a buyer-seller relationship in a given, pre-industry. This design allowed the examination on the level of the sales representative of the evolution of certain research constructs, such as the critical incident resolution, the customer gratitude, as well as the consistency of the sales approaches.

The number of the rounds was determined based on three criteria. First of all, in order to achieve risk aversion regarding responses that include personal investments, it is better to measure responses in aggregated way and overtime (Gneezy & Potters, 1997). Secondly, Hamerling et al. (2015) proposed that both positive and negative critical incidents should be researched when examining business relationships. Subsequently, in the research at hand the incidents include one positive, one negative, and finally an incident of dealing with a competitive offer. Thirdly, taking into account the sales representative anxiety and role complexity (Schmitz & Ganesan, 2014) combined with the learning process effects that are similar with real-life business relationships; the research should be performed including time intervals, at least two distinct buyer- seller events and not lengthy processes to achieve sufficient response rates. Therefore, the number of the rounds was determined to be three.

The hypotheses have to be tested as well as the comparisons between sales representatives' responses for the cases of a good and a bad customer. The aforementioned three critical incidents described include threats and opportunities for the sales representatives that could transform their sales approach and treatment. Moreover, a construct e.g. the sales approach, was measured in all three critical incidents but in a different context. For instance, it can be easier for a sales representative to approach the customer with a strategic and long-term focus when the customer is good and provides additional opportunities. But what happens when the customer has a short-term view and creates additional work burden to the sales representative without obvious chances for sales growth? Concluding, asking a sales representative the same question for three different sales occasions and for two different customers equals asking six different questions and subsequently results to a 2 times 3 experimental design.

The experimental process as described in figure 10 isolates several parameters that could influence the research results (e.g. sales context-market changes, short term alterations

in sales tactics, and incentive systems with short term focus). Since pseudo-longitudinal research is the suitable process towards the examination of how the relationships between causes and effects change in different time periods (George & Jones, 2000) in this research, such an approach is adequate for revealing how specific incidents are treated in different time periods from the sales representatives. Moreover, through the experimental setting, problems a natural sales setting would create are avoided, including difficulties on recalling the research (interval between sales visits for key accounts always exceeds one week) and lack of comparability among various incidents (George & Jones, 2000).

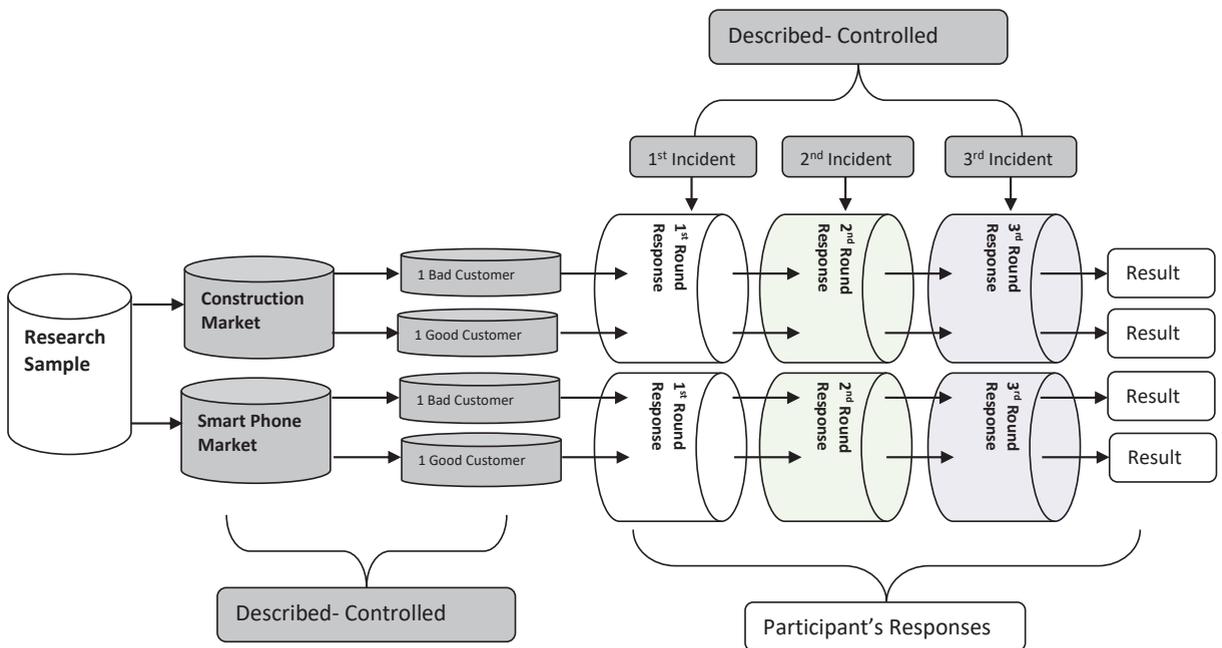


Figure 10: The experimental process

Based on the described market characteristics research respondents were assigned to two different fictitious markets groups. It became clear from the qualitative research, which will be further analyzed in the next section, that the respondents are replying reflecting the fictitious market in their everyday routines. No matter what the initial market description was, the sales representatives were describing their actual everyday routine giving identical answers to both fictitious market descriptions. Therefore, the questionnaires were assigned to

them according to their actual position, the ones that were working in a research and development competitive market received the smart phone market questionnaires, and the ones that were working in less competitive markets that were facing recession received the construction material market.

4.1.2. Factors Controlled

Zoltners et al. (2012) supported that all the constructs that are relevant to the sales representative activities are dominated by the sales incentives, the reward system and the bonuses, in such a way that usually leads sales representatives to short-term goals and alienates them from long-term strategic orientation. Therefore, in order to explore the causality between CRM software usage and the sales performance factors like the sales goals and the sales reward system were clearly described in the context of the experiment in all three rounds.

Furthermore, Ahearne et al. (2007), supported that CRM software characteristics may affect the CRM software implementation. In addition Ahearne et al. (2012) argued that specific customers may require a different sales approach in order to give back to the selling company the optimal returns. Therefore, the CRM software characteristics were described as well as the size and the type of the customers. The inclusion of the factors controlled was based on a comprehensive literature review, interviews with sales representatives and research design presentation feedback (EMAC doctoral colloquium, Valencia 2014).

In the first case the respondents should imagine themselves as sales representatives in a construction wholesaler, where there is low technological development, low technological turbulence, low market-customer turbulence and market recession. In the second case (different group of research participants), the respondents should imagine themselves as sales representatives in a smart phone manufacturer, where there is high technological

development, high technological turbulence, high market- customer turbulence and market growth. Subsequently, the parameter of the market was controlled, aiming to examine at the same time the differences amongst the two different fictitious markets. Finally, in the introductory part of the questionnaire of all the three rounds, the strength of the company, the size of the two customers of the study (key accounts), the sales strategy of the company (focus on key accounts, CRM software usage), incentives system and CRM software characteristics were described as well (see Table 2).

Table 2: Factors Controlled

Factor Controlled	Description of the factor	Round of the description
Market's Technological Turbulence	Low for the Construction Material Market, High for the Smart Phone Market	1-2-3
Market's Competition	Low for the Construction Material Market, High for the Smart Phone Market	1-2-3
Product Technological Development	Low for the Construction Material Market, High for the Smart Phone Market	1-2-3
Market Life Cycle Stage	Recession for the Construction Material Market, Growth for the Smart Phone Market	1-2-3
Company's Customer Base (the same for both markets)	Strong customer base for both markets	1-2-3
Size and type of Customers (the same for both markets)	Both customers are Key Accounts with a trustworthy and a problematic pre- existing relationship with the selling company	1-2-3
Sales Goals (the same for both markets)	Focus on Key Accounts to improve position in the buying organization and beat the competitors	1-2-3
Sales Reward System (the same for both markets)	80% customer profitability goals, 20% customer- market data documentation	1-2-3
CRM software characteristics (the same for both markets)	The CRM software for the experiment enables; customer profiling, customer segmentation, customer complaint history, product segmentation, customer contact history, appointment schedule, new customer allocation	1-2-3
Examples of Customers in the aforementioned markets	Examples of big smart phone retailers and construction companies	1-2-3
1st Incident in the buyer- seller relationship (Customer A- Bad Customer)	The customer receives a delivery of damaged products	1
1st Incident in the buyer- seller relationship (Customer B- Good Customer)	Opportunity for the sales representative to cross- sell, up- sell more of his/her company's products	1
2nd Incident in the buyer- seller relationship (Customer A- Bad Customer)	The customer accidentally destroys a delivery of products and needs sales representative's help	2
2nd Incident in the buyer- seller relationship (Customer B- Good Customer)	Request from the customer to split the cost of an advertising campaign	2
3rd Incident in the buyer- seller relationship (Customer A- Bad Customer)	Customer receives a competitive cooperation proposal from a rival company	3

The aforementioned parameters were controlled for reasons deriving from the contemporary literature that examines ways to optimize sales performance. Harmeling et al., (2015) are proposing that critical incidents must be further explored in the way they affect the sellers in specific industries. Additionally, they suggest that only critical incidents like product failures that cause significant negative consequences to the buyers can transform a relationship. Therefore, it is described as clearly and comprehensively as possible in the questionnaire, for the two markets that have significant differences. Moreover, positive incidents for the buyer and the seller are included as well.

The choice of the technological turbulence, market competition, product technological development, market life cycle and company's customer base was based on industrial market segmentation (Bonoma & Shapiro, 1983). By deploying this approach, the aim is not to make comparisons between the two fictitious markets (some elements like the customer base are the same) but to describe them efficiently for the respondents isolating irrelevant parameters that could affect their judgement and responses. On the other hand, the two different markets approach proved to be effective for assigning respondents to the fictitious market that is closer to their everyday routines.

The following texts were what the participants read:

“Imagine that you work as a sales representative in a smart phone manufacturing company. A company like this is striving to have state of the art products, uses all kinds of advertising possible, and has sales representatives that face really tough competition from the limited, yet extremely powerful competitors. The technological turbulence is high since new technologies are introduced every year, changing the product significantly and creating

competitive advantages. In agreement with the previous, technological development is high too, and companies are spending great resources on research and development. The market turbulence of an industry like this is high too, despite the fact that there are only a limited number of companies that can have the technology needed to create such complicated and developed devices; more and more competitors from the overall market of electronic goods make their efforts to enter the market. Ten years before the market did not exist and “Apple” was a computer company, today the reality is unpredictable and still evolving. Needless to say, this market is facing growth since a lot of consumers are keeping up with technology evolution and electronic stores are trying to be the first to sell any new model available.”

“Imagine that you work as a sales representative in a construction wholesaler. A company like this is selling laminated wood, ceramic floor tiles, wall tiles, carpet floor tiles and granites to building manufacturers that undertake projects ranging from airports and hospitals to summer resorts and normal buildings for domestic usage. The technological turbulence of this market is low. The basic material for covering floors are staying the same over time and decoration trends and interior design innovations are the only reason to propose something new and provocative. The market turbulence of such industry is low too; construction companies usually share their vision of creating buildings with the seller of the floor material and the companies co- create the ideas of filling the empty spaces of a new building. New companies are difficult to enter as competitors since they need a good investment on designing software, showrooms, warehouses and good contracts with a sufficient number of floor producers that provides them with the variety of products and prices to fulfil buyer needs. The success of such companies is mainly based on a certain number of good projects that they can serve on an annual basis. The technological development is driven by interior design needs and usually for a limited number of expensive projects that have the ambition to be characterized as architectural innovations. All in all

technological development is rather low. Taking into account the current economic downturn in Europe where real estate faces really tough times and at the same time the countries are developed enough to have significant infrastructure projects, like hospitals, schools or airports, this market is facing recession.”

Apart from the market descriptions, the characteristics of the two customers and the three incidents are the same for both groups. In the next section these descriptions of customers and incidents are going to be presented in detail.

4.2. Construct Definitions

In the next section and before proceeding further, presenting the research methodology, the definitions of the thesis constructs as well as the reasoning for choosing these definitions will be explained. Additionally, the decomposition of the thesis hypotheses based on the research design will follow.

4.2.1. The Relationship Outcome construct operationalization

The dependent variable in the present study is the relationship outcome. Taking into account the insights acquired from the literature review, a new construct has been created and operationalized to measure the relationship outcome for the good and the bad customer. The construct “Job performance” for industrial sales persons that is based on Behrman and Perreault (1982) and is frequently used in the literature, is not suitable for the current research since it contains items that are relevant to the way the sales representative performs in terms of answering customer questions, demonstrating product value etc. Additionally, the relationship outcome that this thesis aims to present is not covered by Zoltners et al. (2012) “Sales Results” construct either. This scale includes a part of goal achievement that is

irrelevant to the customer response and seems to be more important for the sales organization. Therefore, a better solution was to create a construct that will include outcomes like increased volume of sales, increased market share, increased profitability and improvements in the total product offering. Given the fact that the relationship context with the customer was pre-described, the relationship outcome included the evaluation of the respondents for the success or failure of their efforts during the three rounds.

The relationship outcome in the current research is affected by “Critical Incident Resolution” and “Customer Gratitude”. Reimann et al. 2010, propose that further research should examine variables that also play a significant role in the CRM-performance link like the relational trust as CRM may enhance the customers’ trust in a given firm which in turn lessens their propensity to switch (Saparito, Chen, & Sapienza, 2010). Having as a basic construct of the research design, the role of gratitude and the confirmations of trust that occur once a critical incident occurs; the way relationship outcome is affected by its characteristics is examined in detail. The way the construct relationship outcome is described, gives tangible confirmation regarding the effects customer gratitude and critical incident resolution have on aspects of the relationship that interest the selling organization the most.

4.2.2. Customer Gratitude construct operationalization

The Customer Gratitude construct is basically Customers’ Gratitude-Based Reciprocal Behaviors adapted from McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002). Customer Gratitude (positive reciprocal behavior) can be defined as the act of giving in return, which helps to create a cycle of reciprocity between giving and counter giving and contributes to the ongoing construction of a relationship (Emmons & McCullough, 2004).

This construct is widely used in the literature by all the researchers that measure the effects of gratitude in social relationships. More specifically, for the sales and relationship

marketing this construct has been used in many significant studies (e.g. Palmatier et al., 2006; Palmatier et al., 2007; Palmatier et al., 2009; Huang, 2015).

Researchers across many disciplines have recognized that after receiving a benefit people feel an ingrained psychological pressure to reciprocate, such that the act of reciprocating can generate pleasure, whereas the failure to repay obligations can lead to guilt (Becker, 2014). In the research at hand, the sales representatives' behaviour characteristics are operationalized through their decisions for their customers under specific circumstances. Given the fact that an experimental design is used for this research, where traits of the customer, the selling organization, the CRM software and the market characteristics are described to the respondents, the effect of the sales representatives' decisions on customers' gratitude can be isolated and measured for various relational situations among sales representatives and customers.

4.2.3. Critical Incident Resolution construct operationalization

The construct of critical incident resolution derived from Bolton and Lemon (1999) and was used in Van Doorn and Verhoef (2008) study and was labelled "payment equity", describes possible outcomes from a negative or a positive incident in a business relationship. Critical incidents can be defined as out-of-the-ordinary events during an interaction that customers perceive or recall as unusually negative (Roos, 2002). More specifically, this construct measures whether certain means were used to resolve the problem (in our case the mean is CRM software), whether customer profitability increased after the resolution, whether the customer spread positive word of mouth about the company after the resolution and whether the company's market share was increased. Alternatively, a reliable scale that could be used in this case could be the "relational sense making" scale developed by Weik

(1995) that measures how a business relationship can work after a critical incident. However, this scale is focused more on how the relationship was redefined after the incident, if it was reconsidered and if it was changed, without a tangible description of customer wallet share, customer profitability and improved selling company reputation. Another remarkable scale for the resolution of critical incidents was recently developed by Hamerling et al. (2015). This scale is mainly focused on whether an above-described transformational event (critical incident) was expected from the customer. Subsequently, if the relationship was trustworthy and the event was positive the customer confirms this relationship. Similar to the present research, when the event is negative for the relationship and the relationship is trustworthy there is a disconfirmation of it etc. For the research at hand the 'payment equity' scale was operationalized since it focuses more on substantial results, like profitability and market share increase, rather than psychological aspects of the relationship. Needless to say, these aspects are also significant but in the end they affect again volume of sales, profitability, market share, and seller reputation. Therefore, the efficient critical incident resolution from the sales representative is the one that is based on actual customer needs, creating at the same time positive effect on customer profitability, word of mouth and market share.

In the current research the construct that affects the way a critical incident is resolved is the sales approach. After the description of a critical incident occurred in a relationship with a given customer, the respondents reply on how they will treat this incident according to a sales approach.

4.2.4. Sales Approach Construct operationalization

There are many criteria under which business to business sales representatives are classified. One possible classification that can describe the way sales representatives are treating their customers and accomplish their goals is market orientation (Kohli et al., 1990).

This classification includes elements like customer focus, coordinated marketing and profitability, outlining sufficiently the way sales representatives are approaching their customers. Additionally, Barrick, Mount, and Strauss (1993) found that the effects of conscientiousness on sales performance were partially mediated by goals and goal commitment. In their study significant determinants of sales representative's success like volume of sales and performance ratings were related to sales representative personality traits, like conscientiousness, extraversion, cognitive ability and goal commitment.

In the research at hand sales representatives are classified in a way that is more relevant to specific actions and behaviors that can be easily recognized by sales practitioners. This classification avoids using constructs deriving from items that contain complicated terminology (e.g. conscientiousness, cognitive ability etc.) that are also very subjective to become issues of self-evaluation. DeVincentis and Rackham (1998) have created an understandable classification of sales approaches that is closer to the modern sales reality. More specifically, they identify three types of sales based on the investment from the seller side and the investment by the customer side. This study's classification is by far the most compatible with the present research since it is taking into account the issue of mutuality in business relationships, describing in detail how transactional, consultative and strategic sales are performed. Therefore, based on the accurate terminology and descriptions of this publication (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1998), the creation of the "Sales Approach" scale includes descriptions of investments on the customer, descriptions of the short-term and long-term focus, and descriptions of sales tactics that deal with selling targets as well as customer requests. 'Transactional sales approach' is the one that provides value by closing the deal. Its success depends to a great extent on sales representative ability to gain access often using tactics that equate to the traditional 'Foot in the door' (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1998). 'Consultative sales approach' is the one that includes a personal approach to the

customer, having as a prerequisite good knowledge of the needs and the wants of the customer as well as the product usage criteria. In this approach, the consulting itself sometimes may become more valuable to the customer than the product or service sold (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1998). ‘Strategic sales approach’ is the one that requires the biggest investment from both sides and focuses on the strategic collaboration between two companies that usually entails top management commitment too (Rackham & DeVincentis, 1998). These three sales approaches are going to be measured distinctively for customers in various relationship situations with the selling organization.

4.2.5. Level of CRM software usage construct operationalization

The level of CRM software usage describes the degree to which a salesperson integrates IT tools into his or her sales activities. More specifically, this concept pertains to the frequency of technology usage, the full usage of the applications' capabilities, and the level of integrated and complementary use of different tools, and the usage of technology for analysis purposes (Ahearne et al., 2007). This definition and the scale used in the current research was a result of the unification of the “Technology and Internet adoption” scale, developed by Schillewaert, Ahearne, Frambach, and Moenaert, (2005) and the “Job Fit” scale based on Thompson, Higgins, and Howell (1991) also used in Speier and Venkatesh (2002). For measuring the CRM software usage for the sales representatives, the “Technology and Internet adoption” scale could have been used. However, this scale measures the level of software usage based on more general characteristics of how a respondent deploys information technology to everyday routines. Additionally, the “Job Fit” scale includes items that measure specific results of software usage and not how much the system is used. Speier and Venkatesh (2002) performed their research on CRM software adoption by sales representatives and therefore this scale is more relevant to the present research. The final

reason for choosing this scale is the wide adoption of it in the marketing literature by many critical studies on the field of sales software implementation (Jones et al., 2005; Jaramillo et al., 2006, Hunter & Perreault, 2007; Ahearne et al., 2007).

4.2.6. Selling organization commitment to CRM software usage construct operationalization

In the research at hand, the commitment of the selling firm to the CRM software usage is defined as the extent to which sales representatives' supervisors explicitly encourage their subordinates to use the CRM software (Igbaria, Parasuraman, & Baroudi, 1996). The construct in the aforementioned study was named 'Organizational Support'. Another construct that could be used as an alternative and that is equally acknowledged in the sales literature is 'Management Support' by Leonard-Barton & Deschamps (1988). Unfortunately this construct includes items solely relevant to the approach of the immediate supervisor on the software usage without taking into account elements of the overall organizational support, like the training provided for the system usage, the role of the subordinates and the role of the peers. Additionally, the organizational commitment to CRM software usage can be measured by the construct of 'Visibility' (Moore & Benbasat, 1991) to a sufficient degree. However, this construct does not present the actual commitment from the sales organization, but the effect of the unanimous selling firm usage of the software on the sales representative. In other words, 'Visibility' ignores the aforementioned part of the explicit management support on the system usage. Therefore, the 'Organizational support' (Igbaria, Parasuraman, & Baroudi, 1996) construct is the most suitable scale for the research at hand.

4.2.7. Perceived CRM software usefulness construct operationalization

Perceived CRM software usefulness is defined as the degree to which a sales representative believes that using CRM software would enhance his or her job performance (Davis, 1989). This construct covers the most significant expectations a sales representative could have from a given customer intelligence software. More specifically, this construct's items cover how quickly the sales position tasks will be performed, possible productivity increase, enhanced effectiveness, tasks' facilitation and overall software usefulness. There are many similar scales in the literature; User Participation (Hartwick & Barki, 1994) also measures the perceptions of the end user regarding the software but includes the element of the user participation on the software applications design. This element is irrelevant to our research objectives; therefore this scale was not deployed. Alternatively, the construct of 'Professional Fit' (Thompson, Higgins, & Howell, 1991) could have been used instead of 'Perceived Usefulness.' Conversely, this scale includes items that measure respondents' perceptions about future career plans, an element that again is not relevant to the current research objectives.

4.2.8. Hypotheses decomposition

The research at hand follows a two on three (2*3) experimental design where the constructs of the relationship outcome, the critical incident resolution and the customer gratitude are measured for a good and for a bad customer (problematic and trustworthy customer relationship), and the three different sales approaches of the transactional, consultative and strategic sales representative. In other words, the factors and the positions on these factors that are taken into account are the type of the sales approach respondents follow (transactional, consultative, and strategic) for two types of customer (good and bad).

Therefore, some of the hypotheses presented before have to decompose to sub- hypotheses in order to allow a better explanation of the statistical analyses and the structural equation models.

H1, Sales representatives that resolve efficiently critical incidents achieve better customer relationship outcomes.

The six sub- hypotheses derived from H1, based on the (two on three) experimental design are:

H1a: Transactional sales representatives that resolve efficiently bad customers' critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.

H1b: Transactional sales representatives that resolve efficiently good customers' critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.

H1c: Consultative sales representatives that resolve efficiently bad customers' critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.

H1d: Consultative sales representatives that resolve efficiently good customers' critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.

H1e: Strategic sales representatives that resolve efficiently bad customers' critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.

H1f: Strategic sales representatives that resolve efficiently good customers' critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.

All the aforementioned sub-hypotheses are expected to be confirmed. Regardless of the actual relationship with the sales organization or the sales representative, there is not a single customer who would not welcome a resolution on an incident that is considered to be critical. However, in the case of a good buyer-seller relationship the critical incident resolution is expected to be more strongly related to a good relationship outcome.

H2, Sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude to their customers, achieve improved relationship outcomes.

In the second hypothesis it is examined whether customer gratitude improves the relationship outcomes separately for good and for bad customers. Therefore the following six sub-hypotheses have been created;

H2a: Transactional sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their bad customers

H2b: Transactional sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their good customers

H2c: Consultative sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their bad customers

H2d: Consultative sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their good customers

H2e: Strategic sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their bad customers

H2f: Strategic sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their good customers.

Similar to Harmeling et al. (2015), the valence of the critical incident as well as the valence of the gratitude from the customer side is manipulated. This context, consent to the examination of the changes in the effectiveness of the sales approach on given buyer-seller relationships over time, in terms of critical incident resolution and customer gratitude.

H3, Sales representatives that focus on long term results (consultative and strategic), are generating feelings of gratitude in their customers.

In an effort to make clear the way customer gratitude works for the research at hand, the third research hypothesis was decomposed to six sub-hypotheses examining the different combinations of sales approaches and customer valence:

H3a: Transactional sales representatives are generating feelings of gratitude in their bad customers.

H3b: Transactional sales representatives are generating feelings of gratitude in their good customers.

H3c: Consultative sales representatives are generating feelings of gratitude in their bad customers.

H3d: Consultative sales representatives are generating feelings of gratitude in their good customers.

H3e: Strategic sales representatives generating feelings of gratitude in their bad customers.

H3f: Strategic sales representatives generating feelings of gratitude in their good customers.

It is expected that H3f and H3d are likely to be confirmed since both customer and sales representative have a long term relationship approach that gives them the motivation to treat each other in a way that exceeds the typical business relationship routines and creates mutual profit. On the other hand, H3a and H3c are likely to be rejected since the customer has a short term approach in both cases and it is difficult to leave space for gratitude and reciprocity. Finally, all the possible hypotheses outcomes (acceptance or rejection) for the cases of long term sales approach from the customer and short term sales approach from the sales representative (H3b) and the opposite (H3e) are possible. In the case of a transactional sales representative that generates feelings of gratitude, maybe what matters the most for the

customer is how quick the sale could be performed and this element may lead to satisfaction. On the other hand, when the sales representatives treat short-term customers like long-term ones, they will probably create feelings of gratitude. The dissimilarity of the approaches from the two sides may also lead to H3b and H3e rejection, meaning that in order to create reciprocity, the sales representatives have to adjust to the type of the relationship the customers have chosen.

H4, Sales representatives that focus on long term results (consultative and strategic), are resolving critical incidents more efficiently.

Both the customer representative and the sales representative should see their business relationship similarly in order to make similar investments. This implicit agreement on the scope and the strength of the relationship is helpful to explain the following sub-hypotheses that are derived from H4:

H4a: Transactional sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their bad customers efficiently.

H4b: Transactional sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their good customers efficiently.

H4c: Consultative sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their bad customers efficiently.

H4d: Consultative sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their good customers efficiently.

H4e: Strategic sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their bad customers efficiently.

H4f: Strategic sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their good customers efficiently.

Based on DeVincentis and Rackham (1998) for having a relationship that is viable the main prerequisite is mutuality. Therefore, hypothesis H4a will likely be rejected since there is no mutuality in such a relationship. Moreover, it is expected that all of the remaining hypotheses will be confirmed. However, it is expected to find stronger empirical support for hypotheses H4f and H4d where there is long term focus from the buyer and the seller. In other words, in cases where the focus of the sales representatives is short-term but the customer relationship is good, probably, sales representatives will try to resolve a problem that arose in the relationship. Similarly, in cases where the customers focus is short-term but the sales representatives want to improve the relationship having a long-term focus, again they will resolve a critical incident that occurred. Finally, when both sides have a long-term focus, the resolution of a critical incident is an opportunity that re-validates their cooperation.

H5, High levels of CRM software usage facilitate long term sales approaches.

Finally, hypothesis five can be decomposed to six sub-hypotheses that correspond to the constructs and the characteristics of the research at hand;

H5a: High level of CRM software usage is related to transactional sales approach for a bad customer.

H5b High level of CRM software usage is related to transactional sales approach for a good customer.

H5c: High level of CRM software usage is related to consultative sales approach for a bad customer.

H5d: High level of CRM software usage is related to consultative sales approach for a good customer.

H5e: High level of CRM software usage is related to the strategic sales approach for a bad customer.

H5f: High level of CRM software usage is related to the strategic sales approach for a good customer.

The present research examines the way CRM software usage affects sales performance in a dynamic setting where the type of the pre-existing relationship with the customer is pre-described and the sales approach is measured for the respondents.

With the exception of H5a, all the other five sub-hypotheses are expected to be confirmed. In case H5a is confirmed as well, CRM software is not a predictor of the sales approach. However, based on the literature review, when CRM software is used a lot, the good customers are served better and feel more committed, while the sales representatives who are aiming for a long term relationship approach even with their bad customers, are enhancing the effectiveness of their approach by using CRM software. Subsequently, it is expected that the actual usage for strategic sales representatives will be higher than the usage of the consultative sales representatives. Finally, based on the fact that sales investments make more sense in cases of mutually beneficial relationships, higher CRM software usage in the cases of consultative and strategic approaches on good customers (H5d and H5f) is anticipated.

4.3. Experimental Design Justification

The main driver for this experimental design to be chosen is to explore the causal relationship between CRM software usage and buyer-seller relationship outcomes. However, many other significant parameters were taken into account having as a result this atypical and complex research design.

First of all, the imitation of real life sales conditions, where sales representatives have to resolve various problems that arise in-between their sales visits or customer contacts. Additionally, the examination of the consistency and progress of their sales approaches to

their customers as their relationship evolved under different critical incidents. For instance, sales representatives that aim for a long-term relationship with a customer and face the opposite behaviour from the customer side, how would they react? Will they adopt a consistent sales strategy, no matter the customer and/or the incident occurred or will there be an adjustment of their sales approach to the new circumstances?

Secondly, the relationships examined with the two customers include one trustworthy and healthy relationship (good customer) and one that is more harmful to the sales representative's interests (bad customer), whereas the critical incidents that occur include both threats and opportunities for the relationships. Therefore, the way the respondents treats each case of customer overtime provides significant insights into how much a sales representative invests in a relationship with a customer based on customer's difficulty in terms of sales growth and profitability.

Using the structure of an experimental design into the present research had as a direct advantage that significant sales representatives behavior motivators, like sales incentives were controlled, as well as peculiarities of the various markets. Additionally, the fact that a two times three research design was created, based on the two buyer-seller relationships and to the three sales approaches, creates six different combinations of customer and sales representative approach. The comparisons of these combinations, controlling at the same time factors that affect the evolution of sales relationships, will give clear insights into the strength of the relationship between CRM software implementation efforts and sales performance. In other words, the research at hand based on this experimental design, does not limit itself to proving a causal relationship between CRM software usage and sales performance but it will also describe the relational context under which this causal relationship could become stronger.

4.3.1. Extraneous variables control justification

A major goal in research design is to decrease or control the influence of extraneous variables as much as possible (Thompson, Tonge, & Zionts, 1966). The various industries in which the respondents were working have distinctive characteristics that eventually result in differences in CRM software usage and short or long term buyer-seller relationship approaches. The technological turbulence and developments for the products in the market is one factor that may result in more CRM software usage for sales representatives in an effort to stay more informed about the industry trends, the customer needs and the market opportunities. Additionally, changes in market size, with markets that expand or shrink (market growth or recession) may also affect the need of CRM software usage or the actual need for long term relationships since in the case of an expanding market one good customer can be replaced with one bigger and more promising one, while in a shrinking market sales representatives have to safeguard the market share focusing on their most stable customers (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002).

The type of the relationship with a customer is another factor that influences the willingness of the sales representatives to engage in a long-term relationship with a customer (Harmeling et al., 2015) and to use CRM software more (Ahenarne et al., 2007). Sales representatives tend to share less information with the system in the cases where there are problematic relationships with their customers (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002) and subsequently, when these relationships are deteriorating they have less motivation to engage. In our research this variable was controlled as well. Consequently, the respondents had to reply to the same questions about customer treatment for two cases, one where the relationship with the customer was trustworthy and mutually beneficial, and another where the relationship with the customer was untrustworthy, changeable and not equally beneficial. This way, the type of the relationship was controlled as well.

Finally, as Van Doorn and Verhoef (2008) supported, there are different relationship outcomes when the two parts of the relationship encounter a positive or negative incident. Therefore, in the three rounds of the experiment, three incidents were described giving to the respondents the chance to express their approaches in such cases. More specifically in the case of the trustworthy relationship- good customer in the first round there is the opportunity for the sales representative to cross-sell more products;

“You request from a customer of yours (B), that has benefited the most from his cooperation with your company to add more products (cross selling- up selling products) of your firm to his next order, note that your additional products will be similar in type and quality with products that your customer currently buys, products like these have already helped him to be successful in his/her market” (good for the selling organization), in the second round the opportunity for the sales representative to undertake the costs of a shared promotional campaign; *“The customer B of yours that has benefited the most from his cooperation with your company is asking from you to split the cost of his commercial campaign, as mentioned above he/she is one of your key accounts and in case you deny probably this joint advertisement is going to be proposed to a competitor of yours. You decide to help him despite the additional cost, making decisions that exceed this commercial campaign, having as a goal to maintain a good relationship with this customer”* (good for the buying organization) and in the third round the case where the customer had a recent, better offer from a competitor; *“The benefited customer B has a cheaper offer from a competitor of yours. You meet him and you remind him of all your efforts to help both firms to cooperate and be mutually benefited increasing the dual commercial, he seems persuaded to keep up with you at least for the next season”* (challenge for the relationship). In the case of the untrustworthy relationship, in the first round the customer receives problematic products that cannot be sold;

“A problematic group of your products is delivered to a customer A of yours causing to his firm lost revenues since these products couldn’t be used or sold (products with technical problems). This incident has to be resolved by you” (bad for the selling organization), in the second round the customer accidentally destroys new products that have to be replaced; *“The problematic customer A of yours accidentally destroys a load of your products resulting in lost resources for yours and his firm too. You try to resolve this problem effectively and quickly but you diminished your profitability too”* (bad for the buying organization) and in the third round the case where the customer had a recent, better offer from a competitor; *“The problematic A customer has a cheaper offer from a competitor of yours for similar products. You meet him and you remind him of all the solutions you provided to him, trying to persuade him to keep up with you at least for the next season”* (challenge for the relationship).

Examining the CRM software usage and the sales approach under the prism of the different incidents, it is interesting to see how the relationship evolution affects the way sales representatives are performing sales. Will they rely on CRM software usage to resolve the critical incidents? Will they focus on their personal sale approach for achieving better results? Will they be consistent with their initial strategy? All possible answers to these questions are providing insights into the way a business to business sales relationship with CRM software usage functions.

4.4. Sampling and Descriptive Statistics

To meet the objectives of this research, the main prerequisite was the acquisition of information from sales representatives, a process that required cooperation with a company’s management to support sales representatives’ participation in the research and subsequently to guarantee an adequate response rate. The fact that in the research a fictitious working

position with specific reward system and competition was pre-described, allowed approaching sales organizations from diverse industries. More specifically though, the research focused on sales organizations where salespeople conducted typical internal and external business to business tasks without selling to the final consumers. These sales representatives are the ones who usually participate in sophisticated seminars about sales, CRM, information technology and management, as well as Greek Sales Institute's competitions like 'Salesman of the year', annual sales department awards and so forth. Another prerequisite of approaching sales organizations was the established usage of customer intelligence software and managerial interest to the research outcomes that subsequently gave us access to sales representatives' email addresses. In conclusion, the population of this research were sales representatives conducting typical business to business sales tasks using some sort of sales software to partially or totally support these tasks.

On the basis of the aforementioned criteria, the Greek Sales Institute general manager was approached. The Greek Sales Institute (GSI) is a non-profit organization, founded in 2007 by sales executives from various sectors, whose mission is to promote, highlight and develop the science of sales. The Greek Sales Institute is the only active body and the biggest organization for sales professionals in Greece providing support and up-to-date information regarding a variety of sales profession related issues. The two other Greek sales associations have limited activities and very few active members, due to the financial downturn at the moment. The objectives of the Greek Sales Institute are to promote the profession of sales, share information on current sales issues, and focus on the sales technology and software systems providing certification of knowledge and sales skills (<https://www.ipe.org.gr/>).

Apart from the Greek sales institute five more companies were approached; one pharmaceutical company, one FMCG company, one software services company, and two companies from the construction material sector. These approaches were also proposed by

the Greek Sales Institute management as representative of the overall population of sales representatives in Greece. It has to be underlined that the sales departments in Greece are usually responsible for Cyprus, Balkans and in limited cases Turkey; therefore, the results are not relevant only for the Greek Market. To increase the response rate, the Greek sales institute secretariat came in touch with the members of the institute that fit the research criteria along with each company's top sales executive, sending to each sales representative a pre-notification letter that encouraged the participation along with the questionnaire cover letter. The questionnaire cover letter guaranteed the anonymity of each sales representative, giving the researcher's mobile phone number, in case the representatives wanted to be informed about the data collection process (see Appendix 1). To emphasize that all data would be treated anonymously, the links for the online questionnaires were provided by Kapa Research, a Greek Market research company that runs similar researches, in most cases for social and political issues.

Before the launching of the research, sales managers were approached to participate personally. A sufficient number of them seemed to be interested in the research questions and agreed to cooperate. However, they requested confidentiality of the results, executive summary of the research outcomes and, if possible, presentation of the results to their management. The literature interest regarding the success or failure of CRM implementation is also vivid in the marketing literature. Marketing Science Institute (2016) for instance set as a research priority the return on investment from various digital efforts.

The final research sample was representative of the population of Greek sales representatives who work for big companies, meaning companies that have sales forces of more than fifteen sales representatives according to Greek Sales Institute records. However, there was no straight access to these records by the researcher and also there is limited

representation of small companies in the sample since it was difficult for the researcher to approach many companies with sales personnel of less than five sales representatives.

After the direct contact with the sales departments that agreed to participate, the result was 520 email addresses while the sales institute forwarded the questionnaire to 450 sales representatives. In total 970 salesmen received the questionnaire. The response rate was slightly below 20%. In total 190 unique respondents completed all three rounds. The sample included 116 males (61.05%) and 74 females (38.95 %). The average age was 36.6 years with ages ranging from 22 to 60 (see Table 3) with sales experience ranged from new hires to 30 years. Respondents' education varied from secondary education to PhD (2 participants, 1.1 %). Some essential descriptive statistics are presented below in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics

Age	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Total
Respondents	43	94	45	8	190
Education	Master-PhD	University Degree	High School	Other	Total
Respondents	8	81	70	31	190
Position	Sales Managers	Key Account Managers	Sales Representatives	Other Sales Functions	Total
Respondents	36	32	78	44	190

In a week of forty working hours the sales representatives of the sample spent 5 hours and 30 minutes on customers, 6 hours on conducting customer data analysis, 5 hours in company meetings, 4 hours and 30 minutes travelling (typical for the difficult Greek geography), and 4 hours inputting information to the CRM software. This finding suggests that the sample on average had great familiarity with CRM software. Finally, these descriptive statistics outline a sample with similar characteristics and time allocation with the sample of Hunter and Perreault (2007). This similarity with the aforementioned significant

research performed in the United States, is important since the research at hand aims to be relevant for developed economies and markets when the research sample is mainly populated by respondents coming from a state with a deficient economy (Greece), while the research was performed during the most difficult period of the Greek financial crisis.

4.4.1. Data Collection

From the very beginning it became clear that it was very difficult to populate a sample with sales representatives to end up with a number of completed questionnaires adequate for SEM analyses. The optimum sample size for the research at hand was 200 respondents, with a minimum threshold of 120 respondents according to Westland (2010). This means that for three rounds 600 completed questionnaire's parts had to be gathered. The research started on 20th of June 2015. The political instability in Greece back then, with the referendum about staying in the euro-zone and the capital controls of the summer of 2015, made the response rate poor and the communication with the sales representatives difficult. Moreover, some respondents sent emails with anonymity concerns. Therefore, 12 of them were assigned with a new email to complete the research (a new email account was created for each one of them solely for participating in the research).

In September 2015 the research ran again for respondents who did not participate during the summer (a new introductory message was sent to people that did not respond during the summer). Finally by the end of November 2015, 177 questionnaires were completed (online) and 13 on paper. The paper and pen option with the researcher calling the participant and completing the questionnaire during 3 telephone interviews, was proposed to sales representatives who replied to the introductory email that they have the willingness but they do not have the time needed to complete it online or for the ones that claimed that it was difficult for them to understand parts of it.

The respondents received an email before the beginning of the research explaining the research objectives and describing the process to follow. It was made clear from the beginning that in order for their responses to be included in the data to be analyzed, all three rounds had to be completed. After filling the first part of the questionnaire that was relevant to CRM software perceived usefulness, firm commitment and levels of usage, participants were asked about conditions in which they had to react in three sequential incidents with a good and a bad customer. The research participants had to read the descriptions of the industry, the job and the incidents before filling in the questionnaire for each round. Finally, they estimated the relationship outcome for each customer, by the end of the research.

After the completion of each round, respondents had to fill in their email address in order to receive the next round questionnaires. To the sales representatives the overall process appeared to be fully computerized to avoid the feeling of being personally treated and raising anonymity concerns. However, it was a manual process for the researcher to receive the data files and to track down which respondents needed a research reminder and which of them should receive the next round questionnaire. This process was cross-checked thoroughly to avoid omissions or biases. In conclusion, 190 questionnaires were used for the statistical analyses. The questionnaire upload in Kapa Research platform was performed in a way that resulted in fully completed questionnaires. More specifically, the questionnaire submission was impossible in cases where there were unanswered questions or missing respondent's data.

4.5. The Measurement Instrument

A questionnaire that had two different fictitious market introductions has been developed (see section 4.1.2). The items, the constructs and the sales representative's job

description were identical for the two groups of respondents; the market description was different dividing the questionnaires sent and subsequently the sample in two groups. One group received questionnaires that described a position in a construction material wholesaler company, and the other described a position in a smart phone manufacturer. Both cases were positioned in B2B markets. In the sample a percentage more than 40% of the respondents were working in industries (construction material wholesalers and smart phone manufacturers) that were identical with the questionnaire. This process was helpful for the sales representatives to express concerns and opinions against their management and their company's practice, without feeling that they were replying for their actual company. In any case the only aspects that were differentiating the two questionnaires were the market description about the technological turbulence of the market, the market maturity and the market turbulence. These two industries (smart phone manufacturers, construction material wholesalers) were chosen to be presented as substantially different examples of industries. The industry descriptions could fit many respondents' industries and were adequate for the experiment based on the classification of the business markets from Bonoma and Shapiro (1983).

For the questionnaire design, several development principles were taken into account, so as to produce a reliable, valid, and effective measurement instrument (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002; Parasuraman et al., 2004). First of all, the questionnaire had to be short and focused, minimizing the number of descriptive or irrelevant with the scales questions. The questionnaire length reduction offered significant advantages; firstly, it reduced the completion time and increased the response rate. Secondly, the fact that the questionnaire was focused on scenarios (see section 4.3.1.) that were really close to the real life, made it interesting to the sales representatives reducing the non-response bias, since the busiest

respondents would have not complete all three rounds in case they found it irrelevant or uninteresting.

Moreover, complex or ambiguous phrases were avoided and also the order of items pertaining to the same construct was randomized in order to reduce concerns of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Finally, when applicable, existing measurement scales were employed since their validity and reliability has been previously justified (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002). The validity of the new constructs was assessed by means of confirmatory factor analyses before using the new scales for further analyses as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988).

With limited exceptions in the cases of demographics, questions checking reading comprehension and personal statistics, all the questions were measured based on a 5-point Likert scale. The possible answers were varied from strongly agree to strongly disagree or very likely to occur to very unlikely to occur. The scales employed were using verbal response descriptors where respondents select the appropriate one to denote their level of agreement.

The total research questionnaire included 132 items related to the impact of CRM software usage on a buyer-seller relationship. This questionnaire was divided into three parts-rounds replicating three sales representative's visits to two customers. In the description of each round, a new incident arose; a new issue had to be resolved by the sales representative. The questionnaire included 56 questions for the first round (perceived CRM software usefulness, company commitment to the system, level of system usage, and two incidents), 30 questions for the second round (two incidents) and 46 questions for the final round (two incidents, relationship outcome, demographics). An average respondent needed approximately 45 minutes to complete all three rounds, 20 minutes for the first round, 10 minutes for the second round and 15 minutes for the third round.

4.5.1. The qualitative research

To make the questionnaire valid and relevant before launching the main study, a qualitative research was performed with sales representatives and sales managers. Participants were first presented with the conceptual model of the study. After this presentation a brief discussion took place regarding the relevance of the research for each participant and their familiarity with the topic. Additionally, the practical interest that the research had for sales practitioners and also the feasibility of the research were investigated. Topics such as anonymity, questionnaire length and the three rounds approach were mainly discussed, since the sales representatives are considered to be very busy, especially in Greece where in most cases sales personnel reduction has led to work overload for the remaining sales executives.

Following this discussion about the relevance of the research with each respondent, the research objectives were discussed and the main constructs were included. The qualitative research included twelve in-depth interviews; with the general manager of the Greek Sales Institute (1), the general manager of a market research company (2) to discuss mainly the feasibility of the research, the sales manager of one of the biggest pharmaceutical companies in Canada (3), the sales manager of a mining company (4), four sales representatives of smart phone manufacturing companies (8), the general manager (former sales manager) of a construction wholesaler in Greece (9), a sales manager from a construction material wholesaler in Greece (10), and two sales representatives that work for pharmaceutical companies (12). This diversity of the qualitative research participants was significant a prerequisite, since the cooperation with the Greek Sales Institute resulted to a diverse research sample. Therefore, the research had to make sense and to be interesting for sales representatives coming from a great variety of markets and sectors.

The qualitative research was insightful in terms of understanding the feelings, the values and the perceptions that affect sales representatives' behaviours. The fact that they have underlined the significance of the reward system, the CRM software implementation barriers, and the prerequisite of anonymity was in line with the research design. Additionally, they have made suggestions that improved the research design and the questionnaire. Firstly, they proposed to reduce the size, focusing only on the constructs of the conceptual model and also remove questions that belong to different constructs but for them they had the exact same meaning. Secondly, they helped creating the introductory messages and the descriptions of the variables controlled in a way that was less academic but closer to their everyday vocabulary and style. Thirdly, the qualitative research resulted in the removal of the "sale skill" construct measuring the salesmanship of the respondents, since the interviewees agreed that when it comes to self-evaluation, sales representatives at all times tend to exaggerate about their achievements. Finally, the respondents have made specific proposals on the questions' wording in an effort to make them more realistic and more objective avoiding easy answers that will result in positive self-evaluations.

4.5.2. Questionnaire Construction

In order to measure the constructs in the conceptual model, existing scales have mainly been deployed and adopted due to their high reliability and also due to their relevance to the research at hand. Moreover, the five existing constructs used (perceived CRM usefulness, software usage, firm commitment to software usage, level of CRM software usage, critical incident resolution and customer reciprocal behaviours), were also deployed several times in the literature having been used in several significant studies in the field of sales, CRM software usage, customer reciprocity and critical incident resolution.

In addition to the pre-existing scales, two new scales have been developed for this research, one for the sales approach when using the CRM software, and the other about the relationship outcome after using the CRM software. The first stage of the scale development and validation process was relevant with the definition of the conceptual domain of the constructs. As noted by Spector (1992), this stage of the scale development requires, apart from the identification of what the construct is intended to conceptually represent, a discussion of how the construct differs from other related constructs. A cross-disciplinary literature review of previous theoretical and empirical research on the existing constructs was our initial point for construct definition and item selection (see section 4.2.).

4.5.3 The New Scales - Sales Approach

Despite the fact that the three types of sales approaches, transactional, consultative and strategic (DeVincentis & Rackham, 1998), were used and described several times in the sales strategy literature, there have been no constructs used that combine the salesman type with expected usage of the CRM software. This connection was easy since a transactional salesman will use a short-term focus on the customer relationship using CRM software accordingly; the consultative salesman will focus on the relationship, using the system to improve the interpersonal part of the relationship and the strategic one will use the CRM software with a detailed long-termed focus. The seven items included were chosen based on sales representatives' and sales managers' views, from a pool of 12 possible research questions after the questionnaire pre-tests. This scale is measuring the sales tactics a sales representative uses and includes items that measure CRM software usage, since this usage is a significant part of the sales' tactics today. The questions excluded were relevant to the degree of the transactional, consultative, and strategic approach. These five questions measuring respondents' intention to close the sale as quickly as possible for the transactional

approach, the willingness of the sales representatives to create apart from business, personal and friendly relationships with their customers for the consultative sales approach and the degree the strategic integration between companies should be developed, in terms of co-branding and tailored packaging for the strategic approach. However, traits measured through these questions are measured in fewer details with the remaining seven questions.

4.5.4. The New Scales- Relationship Outcome

As far as the relationship outcome is concerned, and since CRM software had to be taken into account along with a mutually beneficial long-term relationship, the focus was easier, since Hunter and Perreault (2007) developed the scales “Aspects of sales performance” with eight items and “Relationship Forging Tasks” with seven items that were really close to the intended measurement for the research at hand. After the questionnaire pre-tests which are described in section 4.5.6, a four-item construct measuring the sales representatives’ performance was developed. The four items included sales growth, customer and market share, profitability, product improvement. The remainder of the questions were excluded since they had a high degree of subjective evaluations of relationship outcome similar to customer satisfaction (e.g., I integrate my customer’s goals with my company’s needs).

4.5.5. The Existing Scales

The constructs along with their definitions, for the existing scales are derived in most of the cases from the same literature source.

Perceived CRM software usefulness:

The degree to which a sale representative believes that using CRM software would enhance his or her job performance (Davis 1989). This is exactly the construct “Perceived Usefulness” (Davis, 1989) or “Extrinsic Motivation” (Davis et al., 1992) that is operationalized using the same items as perceived usefulness (see Table 4).

Level of CRM software usage:

The degree to which a salesperson integrates IT tools into his or her sales activities. More specifically, this concept pertains to the frequency of technology usage, the full usage of the applications' capabilities, and the level of integrated and complementary use of different tools, and the usage of technology for analysis purposes. This item (see Table 4) is exactly the item “Information Technology Acceptance” taken from Ahearne et al. (2007).

Firm commitment for CRM software usage:

The term is defined as the extent to which sales representatives' supervisors explicitly encourage their subordinates to use the CRM software (Igbaria, Parasuraman, and Baroudi 1996). This item (see Table 4) was first used as supervisory support on technology, or “Organizational Support” (Igbaria et al., 1996).

Critical Incidents Resolution:

Based on the construct critical incident definition as used in Van Doorn and Verhoef (2008), the term may be defined as the resolution of out of the ordinary events during an interaction that customers perceive or recall as unusually negative (Roos, 2002). The construct measured here is “payment equity” from Bolton and Lemon (1999).

Customer Reciprocal Behaviour:

The term is defined as, the act of giving in return, which helps create a cycle of reciprocity between giving and counter giving and contributes to the ongoing construction of a relationship (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). The construct used (see Table 4) is

“Customers’ Gratitude-Based Reciprocal Behaviours”, adapted from McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002).

Table 4: Thesis Scales

Construct	Source	Cronbach’s α in other researches	Cronbach’s α in current research (CFA)	Number of Items
Perceived CRM usefulness	Davis 1989;	0.83 in Igarbia et al. 1996 (CFA)	0.89	6
Firm commitment for CRM software usage	Igarbia, Parasuraman, & Baroudi, 1996	0.97 in source (EFA)	0.73	5
Level of CRM software usage	Ahearne et al. 2007	0.88 in Becker, et al., 2009 (CFA)	0.85	5
Transactional Sales Approach (Bad Customer)	New Scale	0.86 in Becker, et al., 2009 (CFA)	0.61	5
Consultative Sales Approach (Bad Customer)	New Scale	-	0.70	4
Strategic Sales Approach (Bad Customer)	New Scale	-	0.70	4
Transactional Sales Approach (Good Customer)	New Scale	-	0.71	5
Consultative Sales Approach (Good Customer)	New Scale	-	0.72	4
Strategic Sales Approach (Good Customer)	New Scale	-	0.75	4
Critical Incident Resolution (Bad Customer)	Bolton and Lemon 1999	0.88 Verhoef 2003 (CFA)	0.80	6
Critical Incident Resolution (Good Customer)	Bolton and Lemon 1999	0.88 Verhoef 2003 (CFA)	0.84	7
Customer Reciprocal Behaviour (Bad Customer)	McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang 2002.	0.87 in source (EFA)	0.86	8
Customer Reciprocal Behaviour (Good Customer)	McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang 2002.	0.87 in source (EFA)	0.85	6
Relationship Outcome (Bad Customer)	New Scale	-	0.75	4
Relationship Outcome (Good Customer)	New Scale	-	0.74	4

The choice of the aforementioned definitions and scales came after a thorough literature review, taking into account present researches’ objectives (see section 4.2). Nonetheless, in Table 4 the alpha coefficient from the confirmatory factor analyses of the research at hand is compared with the alpha coefficient of other studies used. This comparison reveals that the constructs of the present study are equally internally consistent with previous studies.

As far as the new scales are concerned, the sales approach has been measured by thirteen questions describing the degree each respondent is following a transactional, a consultative or a strategic approach. More specifically, five questions are measuring the transactional approach, four the consultative and four the strategic approach. Needless to say, the sales approach on a good customer and the sales approach on a bad customer are different constructs (see Table 4). Finally, the critical incident resolution, the customer gratitude and the relationship outcome are in essence two different variables for the cases of good and for bad customer.

4.5.6. Pilot Testing

After finalizing the questionnaire including items for each construct twelve pilot tests were performed to present the total questionnaire with all the descriptions and constructs. The questionnaire was pre-tested for clarity and completeness with four sales managers, two from pharmaceuticals (Bayer-Chiesi), one from a market research firm (Kapa Research), and one from a mining firm (EldoradoGold). In addition the questionnaire was pre-tested with eight sales representatives from the construction sector (Berling, Kerakol), IT sector (HTC), oil and lubricants sector (Aegean Oil), and the FMCG sector (Mars). In the pilot test some participants were included apart from the ones that participated in the non-structured qualitative research (such as the sales managers from the two pharmaceutical companies and the sales manager from mining and metals industry). Some minor wording alterations and also the sequence of the questions were slightly changed based on the feedback received, in a final effort to make the questionnaire completion process as easy and relevant as possible for sales representatives from various sectors. These changes were particularly relevant for the new scales developed.

Despite the diversity of countries, industries, years of experience and sales positions, the questionnaire was considered to be relevant to the sales routines of all participants. Subsequently, the main driver for sales representatives and sales managers to participate in the qualitative research and the pre-tests was the interest for the research results.

4.5.7. Analysis structure justification

Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling are the most adequate statistical techniques for the data analysis of the research at hand. In this section the reasons why these two techniques were chosen along with a comparison of alternative statistical techniques will be presented.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a theory driven technique (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006). Consequently, the initial structuring of the analysis is orchestrated by relationships in theory between the observed and the unobserved variables. When CFA is utilized the researcher puts into play a hypothetical model to approximate a population of covariance matrix that is then analogized with the observed covariance matrix. Within the mechanics of this observation, the researcher strives to keep the differences between the estimated and the observed matrices to a minimum (Schreiber et al., 2006).

Structural equation modeling can be designed as a synergy of confirmatory factor analysis and multiple regression (Schreiber et al., 2006). Structural equation modelling (SEM) in comparison with CFA, extends the possibility of relationships among amidst the latent variables and involves a measurement model (essentially the CFA) and a structural model. The measurement model of SEM is the CFA and shows the sequence of observed variables for those latent constructs in the hypothesized model. A principal element of a CFA is the examination of the dependability of the variables observed. Furthermore, researchers

also use the measurement model to look into the degree of correlation and covariation among the latent constructs. One function of the procedure is to estimate factor loadings, unique variances, and modification indices so as to uncover the best indicators of latent variables, before testing a structural model (Schreiber et al., 2006). The structural displays the interrelations amongst latent constructs and variables which can be observed in the proposed model displayed as a sequence of structural equations similar to a succession of several regression equations.

In spite of the fact that the focal point of structural equation modeling is on calculating relationships among hypothesized latent constructs, experimental data can be used where a single or several variables have been manipulated (Schreiber et al., 2006). Structural Equation Modeling gives researchers the opportunity to test conceptual theories with regard to how constructs are hypothetically linked and the directionality of significant relationships. For example, in the research at hand, the construct of ‘sales approach’ is both a dependent and an independent variable. According to Hair et al. (2006), structural equation modelling is the most suitable technique to test this kind of theoretical relationships.

Although the validity of path analysis focus on being able to break down to the relationships among variables and to test how credible a theoretical model actually is, using such a statistical procedure, is predetermined on the assumption that are extremely confined in nature. Three of those assumptions include the presumption that variables used in testing a causal model via path analysis ought to be measured without error, the assumption that residuals are not intercorrelated, and the assumption that the variables within the model have one direction. These conditions are highly desirable but in reality these assumptions are rarely found in settings where experimental research is more appropriate (Schreiber et al., 2006).

4.5.8. *Confirmatory factor analysis*

In this section the properties of the scales deployed and the statistical analyses to test the aforementioned scales will be presented. This section includes the psychometric properties of the measurement scales. More specifically, three criteria are assessed, scale unidimensionality, scale reliability and scale validity (Hair et al., 2006). Unidimensional measures can be defined as a set of measured variables (indicators) with only one underlying latent construct (Hair et al., 2006).

Hair et al. (2006), define construct validity as the extent to which the measured variables actually represent the theoretical latent construct they are designed to measure. Moreover, they define reliability as the measure of the extent to which the indicators of a latent construct is centrally stable in their measurements. The indicators of highly reliable constructs are highly interrelated indicating that they all seem to measure the same thing. Individual item reliability can be computed as 1.0 minus the measurement error. Note that high reliability does not guarantee that a construct is representing what it is supposed to represent. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for validity (Hair et al., 2006).

Reliability tests focus on minimizing random error and bias (Yin, 1994). In other words, validity relates to what should be measured, while reliability relates to how it is measured (Hair et al., 2006). The literature so far proposes that the prominent method of assessing construct reliability is internal consistency, which reflects to the coherence or the redundancy of the components of a scale and test-retesting (Zikmund, 2003). In the current research, adopting the argumentation of Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), it is supported that the alpha coefficient usually provides a good estimate of the reliability because sampling of content is usually the main source of measurement error for static constructs (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994). The alpha coefficient takes values from 0 to 1, and values of 0.60 to 0.70 are deemed the lower limit of acceptability (Hair et al., 2006). In the current study all the values

were exceeding the limit of 0.60 (see Table 5) and therefore are considered to be reliable (Nunnally, 1978).

Additionally, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was executed for all the scales of the conceptual model as Cronbach's alpha cannot effectively measure each construct's unidimensionality (Hair et al., 2006). Confirmatory factor analysis examines the covariance structure of an items' set for each construct and provides a clarification of the relationship among those variables, called factors (Byrne, 2012), supporting the measurement's reliability. On the other hand, confirmatory factor analysis is powerful because it provides explicit hypothesis testing for factor analytic problems (Gorsuch, 1983). Unfortunately, confirmatory factor analysis cannot estimate construct unidimensionality unless the scale examined has three or more indicators (Byrne, 2006). Fortunately, for the research at hand, all scales have three or more indicators.

The degree to which the survey measures only what it is supposed to be measured is called validity. Construct validity epitomizes the correspondence between the conceptual definition of a construct and the utilization of this construct (Hair et al., 2006) and includes construct, convergent and discriminant validity of the construct. Convergent Validity is a sub-type of construct validity. Construct validity means that a test designed to measure a particular construct is actually measuring that construct. Convergent validity takes two measures that are supposed to be measuring the same construct and shows that they are related. Conversely, discriminant validity shows that two measures that are not supposed to be related are in fact, unrelated. Both types of validity are a requirement for excellent construct validity (Hair et al., 2006). Measures of the same construct should display a large common variance. Moreover, discriminant validity represents the degree to which measures of separate concepts differ (Bagozzi and Phillips, 1982). In other words, measures of different constructs should share little variance. Discriminant validity analysis may help to reinforce

issues of content validity when it is suspected that some measures actually correspond to one or another concept (Hair et al., 2006).

This analysis of discriminant validity helps to strengthen issues of content validity when there is a possibility that some measures actually correspond to another concept. Based on the literature review, it is quite unexpected to have problems of discriminant validity in the research at hand but the tests are going to be performed to support this in any case. The importance of calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) and construct reliability (C.R.), for estimating construct, convergent and discriminant validity was underlined by Fornell and Lacker (1981). In the present study the convergent validity was estimated by the Average Variance Extracted and the construct reliability per factor (Holmes-Smith et al., 2004). The values when the convergent validity was accepted were greater than 0.5 for AVE and greater for 0, 7 for CR (see Table 5) per factor (Hair et al. 2006).

Content validity is a qualitative type of validity where the domain of a concept is limited by its theoretical definition, which should reflect the meanings associated with the concept and make its traits clear (Bollen, 1989). Content validity is critical for this study since several new scales (sales approaches, relationship outcomes) are introduced and the correspondences of the variables included in the new scales have to be assessed taking into account their conceptual definition. The individual items and the concepts were assessed by experts through in-depth interviews to ensure that these items take into account theoretical and practical considerations (Hair et al. 2006).

The unidimensionality of all measures used as well as their psychometric properties were estimated using confirmatory factor analysis. For performing the CFAs for this study, the Maximum Likelihood Estimation method was selected since it is considered to be the most appropriate for large samples (Hair et al., 2006) and remains the most commonly used within the marketing domain (Crosby et al., 1990). Various goodness of fit indices were

taken into consideration to estimate the models' overall fit (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1989). The chi-square statistic tests the hypothesis that the model is consistent with the pattern of covariation among the observed variables. In the case of the chi-square statistic, smaller rather than larger values indicate a good fit. The chi-square statistic is sensitive to the size of the sample and it is difficult to understand if the statistical significance of the chi-square is caused from poor model fit or from small sample size (Stevens, 1996). Despite the fact that chi-square statistic poses the best inferential test for the overall model fit, its significance is undermined since it has been found to be related to model complexity, sample size and non-normality (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Subsequently, it is necessary to rely on other goodness of fit indices in order to evaluate the extent to which the hypothesized relationships in the measurement model are consistent with the data from the sample.

The fit indices that are mainly used are the confirmatory fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (Tucker & Lewis, 1973). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is an incremental fit index that is an improved version of the normed fit index. The CFI is normed so that values range between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating a better fit. Because CFI has many desirable properties including its relative insensitivity to model complexity, it is among the most widely used indices (Hair et al., 2006). CFI values less than 0.90 are not usually associated with a model that fits well (Hair et al., 2006). Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) predates the CFI and is conceptually similar since it also involves a mathematical comparison of a specified theoretical measurement model and a baseline null model. TLI is not normed and thus its values can fall below 0 and above 1. Typically though, models with good fit have values that approach 1 (Hair et al., 2006). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), avoids issues of sample size by analyzing the discrepancy between the hypothesized model with optimally chosen parameter estimates and the population covariance matrix. The

RMSEA ranges from 0 to 1, with smaller values indicating better model fit. The acceptable value for RMSEA is debatable, but values that are below 0.10 are acceptable for most models (Hair et al., 2006). Table 5 presents the construct fit indices of the confirmatory factor analyses.

Table 5: Construct Fit Indices

Construct	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	X²	Df	AVE	CR	Cronbach's a
1. Attitude for CRM software	0.99	0.99	0.03	10,47	9	0.59	0.90	0.89
2. Firm commitment to CRM software usage	0.97	0.93	0.08	8,84	4	0.64	0.87	0.73
3. Level of system usage	0.99	0.97	0.05	0,40	5	0.55	0.85	0.85
4. Transactional sales approach on a bad customer	0.98	0.96	0.05	6,88	5	0.31	0.68	0.61
5. Consultative sales approach on a bad customer	1.00	1.03	0.01	0,01	2	0.47	0.75	0.70
6. Strategic sales approach on a bad customer	0.98	0.93	0.08	4,48	2	0.50	0.82	0.70
7. Transactional sales approach on a good customer	0.99	0.99	0.01	2,98	4	0.69	0.90	0.71
8. Consultative sales approach on a good customer	0.99	0.97	0.05	1,02	2	0.61	0.74	0.72
9. Strategic sales approach on a good customer	0.97	0.93	0.08	6,07	2	0.52	0.75	0.75
10. Critical Incident Resolution Bad Customer	0.98	0.95	0.08	14,73	7	0.53	0.77	0.80
11. Critical Incident Resolution Good Customer	0.99	0.97	0.05	18,91	12	0.56	0.83	0.84
12. Generation of reciprocal behaviours on a bad customer	0.92	0.87	0.12	69,40	18	0.48	0.86	0.86
13. Generation of reciprocal behaviours on a good customer	0.99	0.99	0.04	9,86	8	0.51	0.85	0.85
14. Good conclusion on a bad relationship	0.99	0.96	0.07	1,92	1	0.53	0.76	0.75
15. Good conclusion on a good relationship	0.99	0.97	0.05	0,67	1	0.51	0.86	0.74

The assessment for the table 5 was performed by using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and the estimation of relative fit and reliability indices. The test of the hypotheses included in the conceptual model was performed using PASW Statistics 18 (Former SPSS) (Arbuckle, 2010) and AMOS 18 (Kinnear & Gray, 2011) so as to confirm or reject the proposed hypotheses. The elements of table 5 are going to be discussed in the following sections.

4.5.8.1. Perceived CRM software usefulness

Regarding the perceived usefulness of the CRM software usage, CFA fit indices are well within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. Confirmatory factor analysis results also indicate that the average variance extracted is over the limit of 0.5 and composite reliability is over 0.7. In terms of the internal consistency Cronbach's α coefficient remains higher than the suggested threshold of 0.7 (CFI=0.99, TLI=0.99, RMSEA=0.03, AVE=0.59, CR=0.90, Cronbach's α = 0.89). Therefore, this evidence indicates that the scale is considered reliable and can be used for further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). All six items that were included in the questionnaire are significantly associated with the perceived usefulness construct (see Table 6).

Table 6: Perceived CRM software usefulness construct items and estimates

Construct 1	Item	Estimate	P
Attitude for CRM software	1 I expect using the system in my job would enable me to accomplish tasks more quickly.	1.061	***
	2 I expect using the system would improve my job performance.	1.280	***
	3 I expect using the system in my job would increase my productivity (quantity of sales).	0.971	***
	4 I expect using the system would enhance my effectiveness on the job (quality of sales).	0.884	***
	5 I expect using the system would make it easier to do my job	1.006	***
	6 I expect I would find the system useful in my job.	1.000	***

*** $P < 0.001$

4.5.8.2. Firm commitment to CRM software usage

The construct firm-CRM software usage commitment was measured based on the scale ‘supervisory support on technology’ retrieved from Igbaria et al. (1996). For this construct the fit indices are well within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. In terms of internal consistency Cronbach’s α remains higher than the suggested threshold of 0.7 (CFI=0.97, TLI= 0.93, RMSEA=0.08, AVE=0.64, CR=0.87, Cronbach’s alpha= 0.73). The confirmatory factor analysis results also indicate that the average variance extracted is over the limit of 0.50 and the composite reliability is higher than 0.7. This scale is also reliable and can be used for further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). This construct was measured by nine items on the questionnaire, however, only five of them were found to be significantly associated with firm commitment to CRM software construct (see Table 7). For each item, the null hypothesis that the real value of the coefficient is zero is rejected at the 0.001 level of significance (see Table 7). All measures have the correct positive signs.

Table 7: Firm commitment to CRM software usage construct items and estimates

Construct 2	Item	Estimate	P
Firm commitment to CRM software usage	1 Sales Managers will take into account my customer information inputs in customer relationship management system to evaluate positively my performance.	0.542	***
	2 Taking into account that the management has provided you the necessary training and help, you were encouraged to use Customer Relationship Management system quickly.	0.486	***
	3 The encouragement and the support from your immediate supervisor will be stimulating for you to use Customer Relationship Management system in your job.	0.809	***
	4 I am convinced that my immediate supervisor is sure as to what benefits can be achieved with the use of Customer Relationship Management system.	1.000	***
	5 My immediate supervisor is always using the Customer Relationship Management system to perform their tasks.	1.001	***

*** $P < 0.001$

4.5.8.3. Level of system usage

The level of usage construct was retrieved from Ahearne et al., (2007) where the scale was named ‘IT acceptance’. The values of CFI and TLI exceed 0.90 and hence the model is considered to have a good fit. The Root Mean Square Error of approximation that is analyzing the discrepancy between the hypothesized model, with optimally chosen parameter estimates, and the population covariance matrix was found within the acceptable thresholds indicating a very good model fit. In terms of the internal consistency the Cronbach’s α coefficient is higher than the suggested threshold of 0.7. Finally, all observed variables are significantly associated with level of system usage construct. Composite reliability exceeds the minimum threshold of 0.70 while the average variance extracted is higher than the minimum threshold of 0.5 (CFI=0.99, TLI= 0.97, RMSEA=0.05, AVE=0.55, CR=0.85, Cronbach’s alpha= 0.85). From the results, an overall assessment is that the model is considered to be satisfactory.

All items linked to the construct are statistically significant. For each item, the null hypothesis that the real value of the coefficient is zero is rejected at the 0.001 level of significance (see Table 8). All measures have the correct positive signs.

Table 8: Level of system usage construct items and estimates

Construct 3	Item	Estimate	P
Level of system usage	1 I will fully use the capabilities of my organization’s Customer Relationship Management system.	1.175	***
	2 I will use Customer Relationship Management system applications (such as smart phones applications, personal digital assistant (PDA), customer relationship management tools) that can improve my sales’ process.	1.169	***
	3 I will use Customer Relationship Management system to sort, visualize and analyze customer data.	1.000	***
	4 I will consider myself a frequent user of Customer Relationship Management system.	1.280	***
	5 I will have completely integrated our Customer Relationship Management system applications into my sales process.	1.393	***

***P<0.001

4.5.8.4. The transactional sales approach on a customer with whom the relationship is problematic (bad customer).

For the new construct of transactional sales approach on a bad customer, the measurement of fit as maintained by the TLI and the CFI goes beyond the lowest margin of 0.9. Thus, the model is deemed to be sufficient in terms of fit. All measures linked to the construct are statistically significant. All measures have the correct positive signs. Cronbach's alpha is below the threshold of 0.70. Moreover, composite reliability (0.68) does not exceed the lowest margin of 0.7, at the same time the average variance extracted is lower than the lowest margin tolerable, of 0.5 (CFI=0.98, TLI= 0.96, RMSEA=0.05, AVE=0.31, CR=0.68, Cronbach's alpha= 0.61).

From the outcome of research, a comprehensive evaluation is that the measurement model for transactional sales approach on bad customers is marginally acceptable. According to Borsboom, Mellenbergh, & van Heerden (2004), if the model fits, then even indicators with a low composite reliability can work well because measurement error is taken into account, this is why latent variables and SEM are used. Therefore, the composite reliability as well as the average variance extracted may be sufficient for the indicators but do not signify that one can or cannot use the indicators. Much more important is the fit of the whole model, supporting the structure of the factor model and thus the basis of any validity issues and the individual loadings which give some hints about the meaning of the latent variable (see Table 9).

For each item, the null hypothesis that the real value of the coefficient is zero is dismissed at the 0.001 level of significance (see Table 9). All measures have the correct positive signs.

Table 9: Transactional sales approach on a bad customer construct items and estimates

Construct 4	Item	Estimate	P
Transactional sales approach on a bad customer	1 I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings in order to achieve a better deal (when customer receives damaged product)	1.916	***
	2 I will try to minimize the costs of this incident for my company. (when customer damages product)	1.000	***
	3 I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings in order to achieve a better deal (when customer damages product)	1.765	***
	4 I will try to minimize the costs of this incident for my company. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	0.527	0.05
	5 I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings in order to achieve a better deal (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	2.793	***

***P<0.001

4.5.8.5. *The consultative sales approach on a customer with whom the relationship is problematic (bad customer).*

The sales approach constructs are new constructs developed for the current research, examining how sales representatives react to some incidents with their customers. Regarding the consultative sales approach on a bad customer, CFA fit indices do not indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. Confirmatory factor analysis results also indicate that the average variance extracted is under the limit of 0.5 and composite reliability is over 0.7. In terms of the internal consistency the Cronbach’s α coefficient equals the threshold of 0.7 (CFI=1.00, TLI= 1.03, RMSEA=0.01, AVE=0.47, CR=0.75, Cronbach’s α = 0.70). Therefore, this evidence indicates that the scale is considered not reliable and cannot be used for further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). For each formulated item, the null hypothesis that the real value of the coefficient is zero is dismissed at the .001 level of confidence (see Table 10). All measures have the correct positive signs.

Table 10: Consultative sales approach on a bad customer construct items and estimates

Construct 5	Item	Estimate	P
Consultative sales approach on a bad customer	1 CRM tools are going to be used to help me resolve this problem (when customer receives damaged product)	0.197	0.038
	2 I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings. (when customer receives damaged product)	1.000	***
	3 I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings. (when customer damages product)	1.037	***
	4 I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	0.754	***

*** $P < 0.001$

4.5.8.6. *The strategic sales approach on a customer with whom the relationship is problematic (bad customer).*

The construct strategic sales approach on a bad customer was measured with a new scale developed for the purposes of this study. For this construct the fit indices are well within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. In terms of internal consistency, Cronbach's α coefficient remains higher than the suggested threshold of 0.7. Confirmatory factor analysis results also indicate that the average variance extracted is over the limit if 0.50 and the composite reliability is higher than 0.7 (CFI=0.98, TLI= 0.93, RMSEA=0.08, AVE=0.50, CR=0.82, Cronbach's alpha= 0.70). Therefore, it can be supported that this scale is also reliable and can be used for further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). The 'strategic sales approach on a bad customer' item estimates are presented in detail Table 11. For each formulated item, the null hypothesis that the real value of the coefficient is zero, is dismissed at the .001 level of confidence (see Table 11). All measures have the correct positive signs.

Table 11: Strategic sales approach on a bad customer construct items and estimates

Construct 6	Item	Estimate	P
Strategic sales approach on a bad customer	1 I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future. (when customer receives damaged product)	1.147	***
	2 I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future. (when customer damages product)	1.225	***
	3 I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.023	***
	4 I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, and tailored packaging and/or similar offerings. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.000	***

***P<0.001

4.5.8.7. *The transactional sales approach with customer with whom the relationship is trustworthy (good customer).*

The measures of fit for transactional sales approach on a good customer, meaning the TLI and the CFI are well within the suggested limits and the model is judged to have a good fit. RMSEA value also indicates a good fit. The items association with the construct have been found found to be of statistical significance. For every individual calculation, the null hypothesis that the real value of the coefficient is zero, is dismissed at the .001 level of significance. All items have the correct positive signs (see Table 12). Moreover, composite reliability exceeds the minimum threshold of 0.70 while the average variance extracted is higher than the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.50. In terms of internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha is higher than the suggested threshold of 0.7 (CFI=0.99, TLI= 0.99, RMSEA=0.01, AVE=0.69, CR=0.90, Cronbach’s alpha= 0.71). From the outcome, a comprehensive evaluation is that the measurement model for transactional sales approach on a good customer is acceptable. The item estimates for the ‘transactional sales approach on a good customer’ are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Transactional sales approach on a good customer construct items and estimates

Construct 7	Item	Estimate	P
Transactional sales approach on a good customer	1 I will try to minimize the sales associated costs for my company (in the case of cross- selling and up- selling to the customer)	0.58	***
	2 I will try to minimize the costs of this incident for my company. (when customer asks for cooperation in an advertising campaign)	1.28	***
	3 I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings in order to achieve a better deal (when customer asks for cooperation in an advertising campaign)	0.48	0.02
	4 I will try to minimize the costs of this incident for my company. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.00	***
	5 I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings in order to achieve a better deal (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	0.48	0.01

***P<0.001

4.5.8.8. *The consultative sales approach on a customer with whom the relationship is trustworthy (good customer).*

Regarding the construct of the consultative sales approach on a good customer which is again a new construct that is developed for this research the results are really good. CFA fit indices are well within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. Confirmatory factor analysis also indicates that the average variance extracted is over that the limit of 0.50 while the composite reliability is over the threshold of 0.70. In terms of the internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha is higher than the suggested threshold of 0.7 (CFI=0.99, TLI= 0.97, RMSEA=0.05, AVE=0.61, CR=0.74, Cronbach's alpha= 0.72). Therefore, this evidence indicates that the scale is considered reliable and can be used for further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). For every measure, the null calculation that the real value of the coefficient is zero is dismissed at the .001 level of credence. Each individual

item has the correct positive sign (see Table 13). The items' coefficient loadings for the 'consultative sales approach on a good customer' are presented in detail in Table 13.

Table 13: Consultative sales approach on a good customer construct items and estimates

Construct 8	Item	Estimate	P
Consultative sales approach on a good customer	1 I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings. (in the case of cross- selling and up- selling to the customer)	1.00	***
	2 CRM tools are going to be used to help me resolve this problem (when customer asks for cooperation in an advertising campaign)	0.21	***
	3 I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings. (when customer asks for cooperation in an advertising campaign)	0.91	***
	4 I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings. . (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	0.74	***

***P<0.001

4.5.8.9. The strategic sales approach on a customer with whom the relationship is trustworthy (good customer).

The construct of strategic sales approach on a good customer is measured with a nine item scale. Only four items are found to be statistically significant while the CFA fit indices are well within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. The confirmatory factor analysis results also demonstrate that the average variance extracted is above the threshold of 0.50 while the composite reliability is also higher than 0.70. In terms of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha remains higher than the suggested threshold of 0.70. (CFI=0.97, TLI= 0.93, RMSEA=0.08, AVE=0.52, CR=0.75, Cronbach's alpha= 0.75). Therefore, this evidence indicates that the scale is considered reliable and can be used for further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). For every individual calculation, the null hypothesis that the real value of the coefficient is zero is dismissed at the .001 level of confidence. All items have the correct positive signs (see Table 14).

Table 14: Strategic sales approach on a good customer construct items and estimates

Construct 9	Item	Estimate	P
Strategic sales approach on a good customer	1 I will resolve this issue as efficiently as I can no matter the costs involved. (in the case of cross- selling and up- selling to the customer)	1.00	***
	2 I will resolve this issue as efficiently as I can no matter the costs involved. (when customer asks for cooperation in an advertising campaign)	1.40	***
	3 I will resolve this issue as efficiently as I can no matter the costs involved. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.06	***
	4 I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, and tailored packaging and/or similar offerings. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	0.52	***

***P<0.001

4.5.8.10. *The resolution of a critical incident of a customer with whom the relationship is problematic (bad customer).*

The construct referring to the resolution of a critical incident for a customer that has a problematic relationship with the sales representative is based on Bolton and Lemon (1999) construct named ‘Payment Equity Equation.’ CFA fit indices are well within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. In terms of internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha is also higher than the suggested threshold of 0.70. Moreover, the average variance extracted as well as the composite reliability are over the limits of 0.50 and 0.70 (CFI=0.98, TLI= 0.95, RMSEA=0.08, AVE=0.53, CR=0.77, Cronbach’s alpha= 0.80). There is evidence that this scale is reliable in the research at hand and it is suitable for use in further analyses. The construct had initially twelve items but only six of them were found statistically significant, the item estimates’ loadings are presented on Table 15.

Table 15: Critical Incident Resolution on a bad customer construct items and estimates

Construct 10	Item	Estimate	P
Critical Incident Resolution Bad Customer	1 After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased. (when customer receives damaged product)	0.53	***
	2 After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season. (when customer damages product)	0.77	***
	3 After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased. (when customer damages product)	0.66	***
	4 After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	0.92	***
	5 I would dare to ensure my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for your company. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	0.73	***
	6 After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.00	***

***P<0.001

4.5.8.11. *The resolution of a critical incident for a customer with whom the relationship is trustworthy (good customer).*

The construct measuring the resolution of a critical incident for a customer that has a trustworthy relationship with the sales representative is based on Bolton and Lemon (1999) construct named ‘Payment Equity Equation.’ The construct had initially twelve items but only seven of them found statistically significant. CFA fit indices are within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. In terms of internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha is significantly higher than the suggested threshold of 0.70 reaching 0.84. Moreover, the average variance extracted as well as the composite reliability are over the limits of 0.50 and 0.70 (CFI=0.99, TLI= 0.97, RMSEA=0.05, AVE=0.56, CR=0.83, Cronbach’s alpha= 0.84). There is sufficient evidence that this scale is reliable and it suitable for use in further analyses. For every individual calculation, the null

hypothesis that the real worth of the coefficient is zero is dismissed at the .001 level of significance. All items have the correct positive signs (see Table 16).

Table 16: Critical Incident Resolution on a good customer construct items and estimates

Construct 11	Item	Estimate	P
Critical Incident Resolution Good Customer	1 After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season. (in the case of cross- selling and up- selling to the customer)	0.83	***
	2 After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased. (in the case of cross- selling and up- selling to the customer)	1.03	***
	3 After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season. (when customer asks for cooperation in an advertising campaign)	0.88	***
	4 After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased. (when customer asks for cooperation in an advertising campaign)	0.84	***
	5 After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.45	***
	6 After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.46	***
	7 I would dare to ensure my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for your company. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.00	***

***P<0.001

4.5.8.12. Generation of reciprocal behaviours to a customer with whom the relationship is problematic (bad customer).

The ‘generation of reciprocal behaviours’ construct mentioned in Chapter 3 was measured according to the pre-existing scale ‘Gratitude-Based Reciprocal Behaviours,’ adapted from McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002). Regarding the Generation of reciprocal behaviours on a bad customer, CFA fit indices are not within the suggested limits without indicating a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. Confirmatory factor analysis results indicate that the average variance extracted is close to the limit of 0.5 and composite reliability is over 0.7. In terms of the internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha

remains higher than the suggested threshold of 0.7 (CFI=0.92, TLI= 0.87, RMSEA=0.12, AVE=0.48, CR=0.86, Cronbach’s alpha= 0.86). According to Borsboom et al., (2004) if the model fits, then even indicators with an average variance extracted can work well because measurement error is taken into account, this is why latent variables and SEM are used. Therefore, the average variance extracted may be sufficient for the indicators but do not signify that one can or cannot use the indicators. Much more important is the fit of the whole model, supporting the structure of the factor model and thus basis of any validity issues and the individual loadings which give some hints about the meaning of the latent variable (see Table 17). For every individual calculation, the null hypothesis that the real worth of the coefficient is zero is dismissed at the .001 level of significance (see Table 17). All measures have the correct positive signs.

Table 17: Generation of reciprocal behaviours on a bad customer construct items and estimates

Construct 12	Item	Estimate	P
Generation of reciprocal behaviours on a bad customer	1 I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me. (when customer receives damaged product)	1.00	***
	2 I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts. (when customer receives damaged product)	0.59	***
	3 I believe that I can make this customer feel grateful to me. (when customer damages product)	0.61	***
	4 I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort. (when customer damages product)	0.76	***
	5 I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me. (when customer damages product)	1.22	***
	6 I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts. (when customer damages product)	0.66	***
	7 I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	0.87	***
	8 I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.06	***

***P<0.001

4.5.8.13. *Generation of reciprocal behaviors to a customer with whom the relationship is trustworthy (good customer).*

The ‘generation of reciprocal behaviours’ construct was measured according to the pre-existing scale ‘gratitude-based reciprocal behaviours,’ adapted from McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang 2002. Regarding the generation of reciprocal behaviours on a good customer, CFA fit indices are well within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. The confirmatory factor analysis results also indicate that the average variance extracted is over the limit of 0.5 and composite reliability is over 0.7. In terms of the internal consistency Cronbach’s alpha is higher than the suggested threshold of 0.7 (CFI=0.99, TLI= 0.99, RMSEA=0.04, AVE=0.51, CR=0.85, Cronbach’s alpha= 0.85). Therefore, this evidence indicates that the scale is considered reliable and can be used for further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). For every individual calculation, the null hypothesis that the real worth of the coefficient is zero is dismissed at the .001 level of significance (see Table 18). All measures have the correct positive signs.

Table 18: Generation of reciprocity on a good customer construct items and estimates

Construct 13	Item	Estimate	P
Generation of reciprocal behaviours on a good customer	1 I believe that I can make this customer feel grateful to me. (in the case of cross- selling and up- selling to the customer)	0.68	***
	2 I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort. (in the case of cross-selling and up- selling to the customer)	0.71	***
	3 I believe that I can make this customer feel grateful to me. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.07	***
	4 I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.36	***
	5 I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.25	***
	6 I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me. (when customer receives a better offer from a competitor)	1.00	***

***P<0.001

4.5.8.14. *Good conclusion on a problematic relationship (bad customer).*

The final construct of the questionnaire is the new construct developed for the current research (four-item scale) that measures the relationship outcome. For the case of the bad relationship the CFA fit indices are well within the suggested limits, indicating a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. Confirmatory factor analyses results also indicate that the average variance extracted as well as the composite reliability are above the limits of 0.50 and 0.70. The internal consistency is measured with Cronbach’s alpha and it is higher than the suggested threshold of 0.70 (CFI=0.99, TLI= 0.96, RMSEA=0.07, AVE=0.53, CR=0.76, Cronbach’s alpha= 0.75). In conclusion, this scale is reliable and can be used for further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). Information about the CFA results for the construct of ‘Good conclusion on a bad relationship’ is presented on Table 19.

Table 19: Good conclusions on a bad relationship construct items and estimates

Construct 14	Item	Estimate	P
Good conclusion on a bad relationship	1 I believe that the treatment to the problematic customer will lead me to increase sales growth.	1.00	***
	2 I believe that the treatment to the problematic customer will increase his satisfaction from our cooperation.	1.03	***
	3 I can assure my supervisor that the profitability form the problematic customer will be higher in the long run as a result of my treatment to the incidents occurred.	1.23	***
	4 I believe that the way I treated the problematic customer helped me improve my company’s total product offering.	1.29	***

***p<0.001

4.5.8.15. *Good conclusion on a trustworthy relationship (good customer).*

Finally, for the case of the good relationship (four-item new scale) the CFA fit indices are well within the suggested limits, indicating a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model. The comparative fit index that analyzes the model fit by examining the discrepancy

between the data and the hypothesized model with values of 0.90 is acceptable. Confirmatory factor analyses results also indicate that the average variance extracted as well as the composite reliability are above the limits of 0.50 and 0.70. Cronbach's alpha is higher than the suggested threshold of 0.70 (CFI=0.99, TLI= 0.97, RMSEA=0.05, AVE=0.51, CR=0.86, Cronbach's alpha= 0.74). In conclusion, this scale is reliable and can be used for further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). There is evidence that this scale is reliable in the research at hand and it is suitable for use in further analyses. The construct had initially four items and all four of them were found statistically significant, the item estimates' loadings are presented on Table 20.

Table 20: Good conclusion on a good relationship construct items and estimates

Construct 15	Item	Estimate	P
Good conclusion on a good relationship	1 I believe that the treatment to the good customer will lead me to increase sales growth.	1.39	***
	2 I believe that the treatment to the good customer will increase his satisfaction from our cooperation.	1.2	***
	3 I can assure my supervisor that the profitability form the good customer will be higher in the long run as a result of my treatment to the incidents occurred.	1.29	***
	4 I believe that the way I treated the good customer helped me improve my company's total product offering.	1.00	***

***P<0.001

4.6. Conclusions

The research at hand was created with specific goals. Firstly, the extraneous variables effects had to be controlled to generate an experiment context homogenous for the respondents coming from diverse industries. Secondly, within the same constructs a variety of critical incidents had to be examined that pose threats and opportunities for good and bad customers. The fact that the constructs measured were the same and the examination of the final relationship outcomes created the need for questionnaire completion at three different

times. Thirdly, the focus on specific literature gaps and similar sales practitioners' needs created the need for new scale construction for the respondents' sales approach and relationship outcome. Fourthly, the research design was such that confirmatory factor analysis with structural equation modelling was an adequate choice for the scale construction (see section 4.5.7.).

Finally, despite the fact that the data collection was performed in a very difficult financial context, during the summer of 2015 in Greece, the completed questionnaires were 190 including respondents of various educational levels, several industries, and various age groups. The fact that well respected companies and organizations like the Greek Sales Institute, Kapa-Research, Mars, Bayer, Chiesi, Kerakoll and Berling were actively participating in the research at hand was very helpful in carrying out the data collection process, enhancing the significance, the objectivity, and the generalizability of the results. These results are going to be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Hypothesis Testing

This chapter reports on the test of the hypotheses of the conceptual model. The conceptual model was divided into two parts in an effort to make the interpretation of the results easier for the reader (see section 3.13.).

This chapter starts with the normality and multicollinearity tests to investigate the normality of the data and construct independence. Before starting the tests, the chapter exhibits the evolution of the main research constructs over the rounds to highlight the learning process that arises when the respondents have to make choices as the experiment unfolds from the first to the third round.

The hypotheses testing starts with the first part of the conceptual model that links the construct ‘relationship outcome’ with the constructs ‘critical incident resolution’, ‘customer gratitude’, and ‘sales approach.’ This first part of the conceptual model is tested by using multi-group structural equation modelling to examine this series of dependence relationships simultaneously. ‘Sales approach’ construct is both a dependent and an independent variable and structural equation modelling is the suitable technique to test these key theoretical relationships (Hair et al., 2006). The grouping factor will be the type of the relationship with the customer. CRM software investments along with the sales investments should be relevant within the mutuality of the buyer-seller relationship. Since the sales approach is measured in all three rounds for the two types of the relationship, the conceptual model can be compared for the “good-trustworthy” customer and for the “bad-problematic” customer.

The hypothesis testing will proceed with the structural equation modelling for the second part of the model that examines the links among the constructs of ‘sales approach’, ‘level of system usage’, ‘firm commitment to CRM usage’ and finally ‘CRM software perceived usefulness’. In other words, since ‘perceived usefulness’ and ‘firm-CRM commitment’ affect ‘level of CRM software usage’ and this construct affects the ‘sales

approach' that is measured in the three round setting, the combination of multi-group SEM with SEM is an adequate statistics technique in the present hypotheses testing.

5.1. Normality and Multicollinearity tests

The normality of a dataset is the degree to which the distribution of the sample data corresponds to a normal distribution (Hair et al. 2006). Normality is a significant trait of the data since it is one of the basic assumptions required in order to carry out structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis (Byrne 2012). A dataset is considered to be normal when the data are normally distributed with mean=0, standard deviation=1 and a symmetric bell shaped curve. For a normal distribution the skewness value should be within the range ± 2 for normal distribution, whereas kurtosis value should be within range ± 3 for normal distribution (Groeneveld & Meeden, 1984).

Several studies have shown that most data in social sciences follow a non-normal distribution (Bentler & Chou, 1987). Moreover, it is proven that maximum likelihood estimators are considered relatively robust to violations of normality assumptions (Bollen, 1989; Diamantopoulos et al., 2000). Finally, Monte-Carlo experiments found no major differences in terms of SEM analysis results using ML estimator on samples of different sizes and with different kurtosis and skewness levels (Reinartz et al., 2009). In table 21 the results for the skewness and kurtosis are presented. In extremely limited cases some variables are approaching or slightly exceeding skewness of 1 and kurtosis of 3 (12 variables out of 132, see table 21). Therefore the distribution of the observations for the research at hand is perceived as a normal distribution.

Table 21: Skewness and Kurtosis

	N		Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness *	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis*
	Valid	Missing				
(1st Round)						
I expect using the system in my job would enable me to accomplish tasks more quickly. I expect using the system would improve my job performance.	190	0	0.90	0.18	0.75	0.35
I expect using the system in my job would increase my productivity (quantity of sales).	190	0	-1.08	0.18	1.25	0.35
I expect using the system would enhance my effectiveness on the job (quality of sales).	190	0	-0.49	0.18	0.14	0.35
I expect using the system would make it easier to do my job.	190	0	-0.93	0.18	1.30	0.35
I expect I would find the system useful in my job.	190	0	-0.88	0.18	1.61	0.35
Sales Managers will take into account my customer information inputs in customer relationship management system to evaluate positively my performance.	190	0	-0.71	0.18	0.54	0.35
Taking into account that the management has provided you the necessary training and help, you were encouraged to use Customer Relationship Management system quickly. The encouragement and the support from your immediate supervisor will be stimulating for you to use Customer Relationship Management system in your job.	190	0	-0.57	0.18	0.54	0.35
I am convinced that my immediate supervisor is sure as to what benefits can be achieved with the use of Customer Relationship Management system. My immediate supervisor is always using the Customer Relationship Management system to perform their tasks.	190	0	-0.75	0.18	0.22	0.35
I will fully use the capabilities of my organization's Customer Relationship Management system.	190	0	-0.08	0.18	-0.52	0.35
I will use Customer Relationship Management system applications (such as smart phones applications, personal digital assistant (PDA), customer relationship management tools) that can improve my sales' process.	190	0	-0.78	0.18	0.48	0.35
I will use Customer Relationship Management system applications (such as smart phones applications, personal digital assistant (PDA), customer relationship management tools) that can improve my sales' process.	190	0	-0.94	0.18	2.54	0.35
I will use Customer Relationship Management system applications (such as smart phones applications, personal digital assistant (PDA), customer relationship management tools) that can improve my sales' process.	190	0	-1.02	0.18	3.54	0.35

I will use Customer Relationship Management system to sort, visualize and analyze customer data.	190	0	-0.87	0.18	3.20	0.35
I will consider myself a frequent user of Customer Relationship Management system.	190	0	-0.93	0.18	2.14	0.35
I will have completely integrated our Customer Relationship Management system applications into my sales process.	190	0	-0.73	0.18	0.47	0.35
I expect that the usage of CRM tools will help me resolve the problem.	190	0	-0.59	0.18	-0.29	0.35
After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased.	190	0	-0.31	0.18	0.18	0.35
I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as Likely to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future.	190	0	-1.16	0.18	2.76	0.35
I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings.	190	0	-0.93	0.18	1.03	0.35
I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings.	190	0	-0.60	0.18	-0.41	0.35
I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.	190	0	0.02	0.18	-0.39	0.35
I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts.	190	0	-0.61	0.18	1.21	0.35
The usage of CRM tools will help me persuade my customer by making a better offer, minimizing the cost for my company.	190	0	-0.94	0.18	1.53	0.35
The usage of CRM tools will help me create the best offer focusing on the long term result without considering the short term costs involved.	190	0	-0.66	0.18	0.19	0.35
After this attempt and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.	190	0	-0.69	0.18	1.61	0.35
After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that our market share will be increased (as a result of this first success).	190	0	-0.76	0.18	1.27	0.35
I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings improving our personal	190	0	-0.65	0.18	0.02	0.35

relationship as a way to make a better agreement.

I believe I can make this customer feel grateful to me.

190 0 -0.96 0.18 1.87 0.35

I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.

190 0 -0.56 0.18 0.58 0.35

(2nd Round)

I will try to minimize the costs of this incident for my company.

190 0 **-1.19** 0.18 1.59 0.35

After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.

190 0 -0.54 0.18 0.11 0.35

After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased.

190 0 -0.30 0.18 -0.26 0.35

I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future.

190 0 **-1.16** 0.18 2.75 0.35

I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings.

190 0 -0.38 0.18 -0.42 0.35

I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings.

190 0 -0.55 0.18 -0.29 0.35

I believe I can make this customer feel grateful to me.

190 0 -0.68 0.18 1.00 0.35

I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.

190 0 -0.95 0.18 2.35 0.35

I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.

190 0 -0.25 0.18 -0.58 0.35

I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts.

190 0 -0.24 0.18 -0.22 0.35

The usage of CRM tools will help me persuade my customer by making a better offer, minimizing the cost for my company.

190 0 -0.82 0.18 1.19 0.35

The usage of CRM tools will help me create the best offer focusing on the long term result without considering the short term costs involved.

190 0 -0.49 0.18 -0.28 0.35

I expect that the usage of CRM tools will help me resolve this problem.	190	0	-0.78	0.18	0.61	0.35
After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.	190	0	-0.40	0.18	0.01	0.35
I would dare to ensure my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for our company.	190	0	-0.24	0.18	-0.25	0.35
I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings as a way to make a better agreement.	190	0	-0.60	0.18	0.44	0.35
I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings improving our personal relationship as a way to make a better agreement.	190	0	-0.68	0.18	0.30	0.35
(3rd Round)						
I will try to minimize the costs of this incident for my company.	190	0	-0.74	0.18	0.64	0.35
After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.	190	0	-0.47	0.18	0.10	0.35
I would dare to ensure to my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for our company.	190	0	-0.88	0.18	1.19	0.35
After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased.	190	0	-0.50	0.18	0.39	0.35
I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future	190	0	-1.01	0.18	3.04	0.35
I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings.	190	0	-0.67	0.18	0.37	0.35
I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings.	190	0	-0.70	0.18	-0.01	0.35
I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, tailored packaging and/or similar offerings.	190	0	-1.21	0.18	1.85	0.35
I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.	190	0	-0.57	0.18	0.10	0.35

I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.	190	0	-0.10	0.18	-0.22	0.35
The usage of CRM tools will help me persuade my customer by making a better offer, minimizing the cost for my company.	190	0	-1.11	0.18	2.98	0.35
The usage of CRM tools will help me create the best offer focusing on the long term result without considering the short term costs involved.	190	0	-0.62	0.18	0.04	0.35
After this Incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.	190	0	-0.55	0.18	0.65	0.35
I would dare to ensure my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for our company.	190	0	-0.11	0.18	-0.08	0.35
I managed to have a joint advertisement with this customer; I could ensure my superiors that my overall market share will be increased (as a result of this first success).	190	0	-0.47	0.18	0.35	0.35
I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings as a way to make a better agreement.	190	0	-0.82	0.18	0.98	0.35
I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings improving our personal relationship as a way to make a better agreement.	190	0	-0.99	0.18	0.94	0.35
I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, and tailored packaging and/or similar offerings integrating processes from the two companies as a way to make a better agreement.	190	0	-1.03	0.18	2.40	0.35
I believe I can make this customer feel grateful to me.	190	0	-0.53	0.18	0.26	0.35
I believe this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.	190	0	-0.64	0.18	0.64	0.35
I believe this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.	190	0	-0.10	0.18	-0.37	0.35
I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts.	190	0	-0.51	0.18	0.42	0.35
I believe that the treatment to the problematic customer will lead me to increase sales growth.	190	0	-0.62	0.18	1.31	0.35

I believe that the treatment to the problematic customer will lead my firm to increase my market share from this customer.	190	0	-0.85	0.18	3.06	0.35
I can assure my supervisor that the profitability from the problematic customer will be higher in the long run as a result of my treatment to the problems occurred.	190	0	-0.52	0.18	0.77	0.35
I believe that the way I treated the problematic customer helped me improve my company's total product offering.	190	0	-0.73	0.18	0.51	0.35
I believe that the treatment to the benefited customer will lead me to increase sales growth.	190	0	-0.65	0.18	0.64	0.35
I believe that the treatment to the benefited customer will lead my firm to increase my market share from this customer.	190	0	-0.75	0.18	2.86	0.35
I can assure my supervisor that the profitability from the benefited customer will be higher in the long run as a result of my treatment to the problems occurred.	190	0	-0.52	0.18	0.80	0.35
I believe that the way I treated the benefited customer helped me improve my company's total product offering.	190	0	-0.74	0.18	1.41	0.35

* Note that the standard error of skewness and the standard error of kurtosis are stable because they are only affected by the sample size

The multicollinearity of a dataset is the extent to which a variable can be explained by other predictor scales in the analysis. As multicollinearity increases, it complicates the interpretation of the variance because it is more difficult to ascertain the effect of any single variable owing to their interrelationships (Hair et al. 2006). The variance inflation factor (VIF) is an indicator of high degree of collinearity or multicollinearity among the independent variables. The VIF recommendation of 10 corresponds to the tolerance recommendation of 0.10 (i.e., $1 / .10 = 10$). However, a recommended maximum VIF value of 5 and even 4 (Pan & Jackson, 2008) can be found in the literature. On the tables 22 and 23 the VIF for the study variables is presented. There are no values with variance inflation factor

that exceed 3 meaning that the study variables can be interpreted independently without statistically significant interrelations.

Table 22: Multicollinearity tests bad customer

1. Dependent variable- Perceived system usefulness	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Firm-CRM commitment	0.66	1.53
Level of CRM software usage	0.64	1.56
Transactional approach	0.82	1.21
Consultative approach	0.84	1.19
Strategic approach	0.72	1.38
Critical incident resolution	0.47	2.14
Customer reciprocity	0.49	2.02
Relationship outcome	0.56	1.80
2. Dependent Variable- Firm- CRM commitment	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.07
Transactional approach	0.83	1.20
Consultative approach	0.84	1.20
Strategic approach	0.72	1.39
Critical incident resolution	0.47	2.11
Customer reciprocity	0.50	2.02
Relationship outcome	0.56	1.79
Perceived system usefulness	0.50	1.99
3. Dependent Variable- Level of CRM software usage	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Transactional approach	0.83	1.20
Consultative approach	0.83	1.20
Strategic approach	0.75	1.34
Critical incident resolution	0.47	2.12
Customer reciprocity	0.50	2.02
Relationship outcome	0.55	1.81
Perceived system usefulness	0.62	1.62
Firm-CRM commitment	0.60	1.66
4. Dependent variable- Transactional sales approach on a bad customer	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Consultative approach	0.84	1.20
Strategic approach	0.73	1.38
Critical incident resolution	0.47	2.11
Customer reciprocity	0.54	1.86
Relationship outcome	0.55	1.80
Perceived system usefulness	0.46	2.18

Firm-CRM commitment	0.60	1.67
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.09

5. Dependent Variable- Consultative sales approach on a bad customer	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Strategic approach	0.73	1.37
Critical incident resolution	0.47	2.13
Customer reciprocity	0.50	2.00
Relationship outcome	0.55	1.80
Perceived system usefulness	0.46	2.17
Firm-CRM commitment	0.56	1.68
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.10
Transactional approach	0.83	1.21

6. Dependent variable- Strategic sales approach on a bad customer	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Critical incident resolution	0.47	2.14
Customer reciprocity	0.49	2.02
Relationship outcome	0.60	1.67
Perceived system usefulness	0.46	2.19
Firm-CRM commitment	0.60	1.68
Level of CRM software usage	0.49	2.03
Transactional approach	0.82	1.21
Consultative Approach	0.84	1.19

7. Dependent variable- Critical Incident resolution with a bad customer	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Customer reciprocity	0.64	1.56
Relationship outcome	0.61	1.65
Perceived system usefulness	0.46	2.19
Firm-CRM commitment	0.60	1.66
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.09
Transactional approach	0.83	1.20
Consultative Approach	0.83	1.20
Strategic Approach	0.72	1.38

8. Dependent variable- Reciprocity from a bad customer	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Relationship outcome	0.55	1.80
Perceived system usefulness	0.46	2.19
Firm-CRM commitment	0.60	1.68
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.09
Transactional approach	0.90	1.12
Strategic Approach	0.72	1.38
Critical Incident Resolution	0.60	1.65

Consultative Approach	0.84	1.19
9. Dependent variable- Good outcome on a bad relationship	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Perceived system usefulness	0.46	2.17
Firm-CRM commitment	0.60	1.67
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.10
Transactional approach	0.82	1.21
Strategic Approach	0.78	1.28
Critical Incident Resolution	0.52	1.94
Consultative Approach	0.83	1.20
Customer Reciprocity	0.50	2.02

Table 23: Multicollinearity tests good customer

1. Dependent variable- Perceived system usefulness	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Firm-CRM commitment	0.64	1.57
Level of CRM software usage	0.64	1.57
Transactional approach	0.68	1.48
Strategic Approach	0.61	1.64
Critical Incident Resolution	0.40	2.45
Customer Reciprocity	0.49	2.03
Consultative Approach	0.73	1.34
Relationship Outcome	0.51	1.97
2. Dependent Variable- Firm commitment for CRM software usage	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Transactional approach	0.67	1.48
Strategic Approach	0.60	1.68
Critical Incident Resolution	0.42	2.40
Customer Reciprocity	0.49	2.03
Consultative Approach	0.73	1.37
Relationship Outcome	0.50	1.99
Perceived system usefulness	0.47	2.15
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.08
3. Dependent Variable- Level of CRM software usage	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Firm commitment for CRM software usage	0.59	1.70
Transactional approach	0.66	1.50
Strategic Approach	0.60	1.67
Critical Incident Resolution	0.41	2.41
Customer Reciprocity	0.49	2.03

Consultative Approach	0.73	1.38
Relationship Outcome	0.50	1.99
Perceived system usefulness	0.57	1.76

4. Dependent variable- Transactional sales

Collinearity Statistics

approach on a good customer

Tolerance

VIF

Strategic Approach	0.64	1.57
Critical Incident Resolution	0.40	2.52
Customer Reciprocity	0.51	1.95
Consultative Approach	0.72	1.38
Relationship Outcome	0.51	1.97
Perceived system usefulness	0.43	2.30
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.09
Firm commitment for CRM software usage	0.59	1.70

5. Dependent Variable- Consultative sales

Collinearity Statistics

approach on a good customer

Tolerance

VIF

Relationship Outcome	0.51	1.98
Perceived system usefulness	0.43	2.33
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.09
Firm commitment for CRM software usage	0.59	1.71
Transactional approach	0.66	1.51
Strategic Approach	0.61	1.65
Critical Incident Resolution	0.40	2.53
Customer Reciprocity	0.51	1.97

6. Dependent variable- Strategic sales approach

Collinearity Statistics

on a good customer

Tolerance

VIF

Critical Incident Resolution	0.40	2.48
Customer Reciprocity	0.49	2.03
Consultative Approach	0.74	1.35
Relationship Outcome	0.51	1.95
Perceived system usefulness	0.44	2.29
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.09
Firm commitment for CRM software usage	0.58	1.72
Transactional approach	0.71	1.41

7. Dependent variable- Critical Incident

Collinearity Statistics

resolution with a good customer

Tolerance

VIF

Customer Reciprocity	0.57	1.76
Consultative Approach	0.73	1.37
Relationship Outcome	0.55	1.83
Perceived system usefulness	0.43	2.31
Level of CRM software usage	0.50	2.00
Firm commitment for CRM software usage	0.61	1.63
Transactional approach	0.67	1.50

Strategic Approach	0.61	1.64
8. Dependent variable- Reciprocity from a good customer	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Consultative Approach	0.75	1.33
Relationship Outcome	0.54	1.85
Perceived system usefulness	0.43	2.34
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.09
Firm commitment for CRM software usage	0.58	1.71
Transactional approach	0.69	1.44
Strategic Approach	0.60	1.67
Critical Incident Resolution	0.46	2.20
9. Dependent variable- Good outcome on a good relationship	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Perceived system usefulness	0.43	2.31
Level of CRM software usage	0.48	2.10
Firm commitment for CRM software usage	0.58	1.72
Transactional approach	0.67	1.49
Strategic Approach	0.61	1.64
Critical Incident Resolution	0.43	2.33
Relationship Outcome	0.53	1.88
Consultative Approach	0.73	1.36

5.2. The sales representatives' learning process

One significant element of the present research was the measurement of the same constructs in consecutive steps. This measurement was suitable for revealing possible learning processes effect on the sales representatives, revealing whether the sales representatives were enhancing their sales approach or their results from the first to the second and to the third round. Despite the fact that this element does not provide a straight answer to any of the research questions it can provide significant insights into the way the respondents' answers evolved over the rounds to enhance the knowledge context, prior to the hypotheses testing.

However, the constructs of the sales approach, the critical incident resolution, and the customer gratitude scales were built upon items measured in all the three rounds. These scales were tested through three diverse critical incidents; one positive, one negative and one 'competitive offer (see section 4.3.1). The advantages of having the scales' items split in three rounds were significant. To begin with, the questionnaire was kept at a reasonable size with fewer items, since having full scales in every round would require at least four items, resulting in a much lengthier questionnaire, pulling towards incomplete responses. Secondly, the descriptions of the incidents in the beginning of the rounds, before testing the scales' items brought responses closer to the sales reality. However, the comparison of the constructs among the rounds (sales approach, critical incident resolution and customer gratitude) was impossible without taking into account these introductory incidents' descriptions.

In order to overcome the restriction of the construct comparison among the rounds, independent samples t-tests were performed among each round items, comparing the sales approach, the critical incident resolution, and the customer gratitude without deploying the constructs derived from the factor analysis since CFA constructs incorporated items from all the three rounds. Thus, data was retrieved from the same respondents measuring the developments. Figure 11 presents the statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) differences.

Beginning with the problematic relationship the differences between the main constructs of the research in the three rounds were calculated. The first incident in the problematic relationship was negative for the sales representatives, since their company delivered damaged products to the customer, the second incident was negative for the customers, since they destroyed accidentally well delivered products and the final incident gave the opportunity to the customer to switch supplier. The constructs that exhibit

significant differences over the rounds were the ‘consultative sales approach’, the ‘strategic sales approach’, and the ‘customer gratitude.’

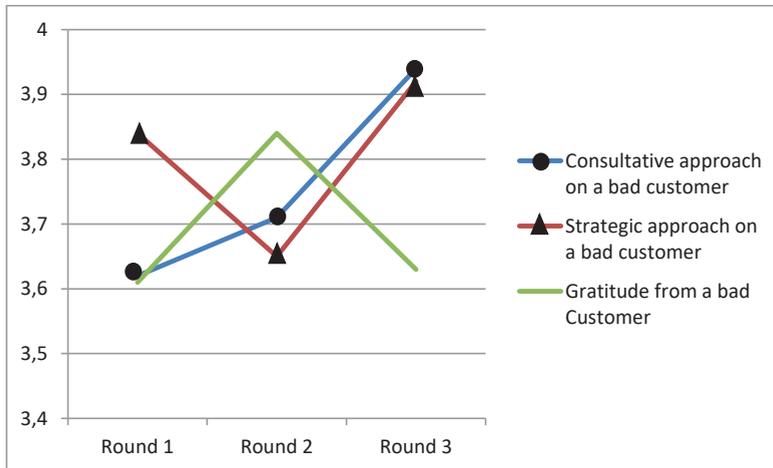


Figure 11: Time comparison, bad customer (problematic relationship)

More specifically, the consultative sales approach is steadily enhanced, this is happening because following this approach, a sales representative may lose a sale or some profit in the short term but creates a better context for selling more in the future. This finding is in line with DeVincentis and Rackham (1998), supporting that the product of a consultative sales representative, is the consulting itself, the empathy to the customer’s problem, and the subsequent solution. The consultative sales approach builds upon the provided customer solutions to create a steady relationship with the customer no matter the barriers.

On the other hand, gratitude in a problematic relationship works as anticipated. The customers tend to feel gratitude only when a problem caused by them is resolved by the sales representative. In cases when sales representatives resolve efficiently problems caused by their company, customers tend to take this resolution for granted without feeling grateful. In conclusion, even when sales representatives increase their efforts to retain the bad customer,

again this behaviour seems to be anticipated and does not increase the customer gratitude and the subsequent need to reciprocate.

Finally, the strategic approach is weakening when the problematic relationship faces another problem, especially if caused by the customer. However, in the case of switching to a competitor, sales representatives tend to embrace a strategic sales approach on a bad customer. In other words, the sales representatives who confront the possibility of losing a key account tend to adopt more strategic approaches to safeguard their relationship. Since the strategic sales approach is usually chosen in well-established relationships that are covered contracts, it is rare for such an approach to be used resolving one incident all alone. Moreover, in a strategic approach the incident resolution is agreed upon by both sides.

In the case of the good customer (see figure 12), the first incident the sales representative has the opportunity to sell more products to the customer, when in the second incident the customer requests to share with the selling company some costs of an advertising campaign and in the third round-incident there is again the possibility for the good customer to switch.

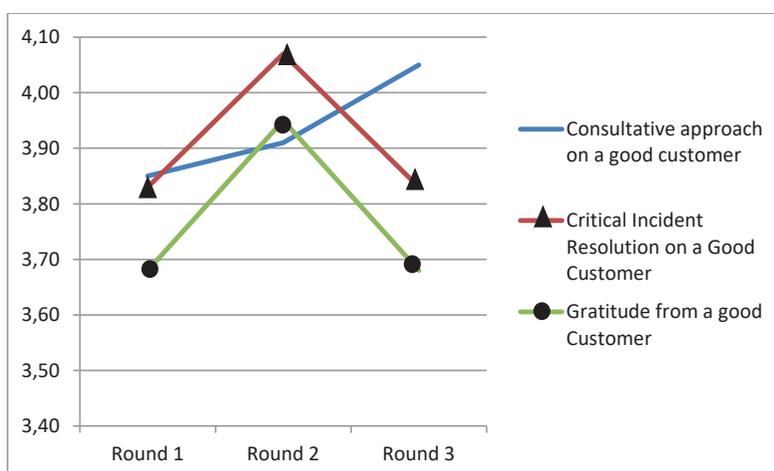


Figure 12: Time comparison, good customer

The consultative sales approach and the customer gratitude follow similar routes in both customer relationship types' cases. This finding means that the evolution of consultative sales approach is not affected by the type of the customer but by the sales representative learning process. More specifically, the consultative sales approach increases throughout the rounds, confirming the consistency of the consultative sales representatives to their goal of creating a strong buyer-seller relationship. It is relevant that the consultative sales approach is becoming stronger in every incident. This type of sales approach does not require the effort and the costs of the strategic approach, and also it is not short-term focused like the transactional sales approach, it is the safest route for a sales representative who aims for a long-term mutually beneficial relationship, without endangering significant time and assets for an ambiguous result (since the customer may not respond).

On the other hand, the fluctuation of the generation of reciprocal behaviours for the good customer should be attributed to the incidents that the sales representatives have to resolve. In this case, the results make perfect sense, since the gratitude increases when the respondents have to give a solution to the split-advertising costs, an idea that came from the customer (2nd round) when the gratitude decreases when the respondents have to retain the customer, defending their relationship (3rd round). For the case of the good relationship when the customer requests the sales representative to split the costs for the buying organization advertising campaign, it is reasonable that the sales representative believes that the customer gratitude will be high, an estimation that falls when there is a possibility of switching supplier in the third round. Finally, sales representatives feel that when it comes to helping their customer, exceeding their ordinary efforts, this help has a positive impact on the customer, greater than when trying to cross-sell. They face this request as an opportunity to make their relationship with their customer robust and this is the reason why they are disappointed in the final round with the possibility of losing the customer.

The final observation is that the strategic approach for the good customer is enhanced again in the final round, when facing the possibility of losing the customer. The strategic sales occur usually in cases where there are contracts, years of cooperation and in some cases integration of processes between buyer and seller companies. Therefore, the strategic approach that underlines the aforementioned relationship traits seems to be the most suitable approach for retaining the customer. The results of the time comparisons are presented briefly in Table 24.

Table 24: Constructs' Time comparisons

Construct	Round 1	Round 2	Sig.	Round 2	Round 3	Sig.	Round1	Round3	Sig.
Transactional Approach on a Bad Customer	3,90	3,80	*	3,80	3,90	-	3,90	3,90	-
Consultative Approach on a Bad Customer	3,62	3,71	*	3,71	3,94	***	3,62	3,94	***
Strategic Approach on a Bad Customer	3,84	3,65	***	3,65	3,92	***	3,84	3,92	-
Critical Incident resolution for a Bad Customer	3,67	3,75	*	3,75	3,76	-	3,67	3,76	*
Gratitude generated on a Bad Customer	3,61	3,84	***	3,84	3,63	***	3,61	3,63	-
Transactional Approach on a Good Customer	3,84	3,81	-	3,81	3,91	*	3,84	3,91	-
Consultative Approach on a Good customer	3,85	3,91	**	3,91	4,05	*	3,85	4,05	***
Strategic Approach on a Good Customer	3,94	3,93	-	3,94	4,01	**	3,94	4,01	***
Critical Incident Resolution for a Good Customer	3,83	4,07	***	4,07	3,83	***	3,83	3,83	-
Gratitude Generated on a Good Customer	3,68	3,95	***	3,95	3,68	***	3,68	3,68	-

*** p<0.001, two-tailed

** p<0.01, two-tailed

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Furthermore, the round comparisons reveal that there are no significant differences between the rounds when a transactional sales approach is followed. A transactional sales approach is not affected by different incidents or by the sales representative's learning process. This finding validates the short-term orientation of the transactional sales approach. On the other hand, the consultative sales approach that follows the learning process and is

based on the relationship building, is enhanced, affected by the time but not by the type of the customer or the details of a critical incidents. Additionally, the strategic sales approach increases throughout the rounds for the bad customer, but is more sensitive to the incidents for the good customer. This finding confirms that the strategic sales approach is the most time consuming and rational approach without affective elements. For the bad customer, the goal of the strategic sales representative is to improve the relationship when for the good customer the goal is to serve the needs of the customer relationship as efficiently as possible.

In conclusion, the aforementioned time comparisons reveal a remarkable finding; the sales approach scale that is developed for the first time for the thesis at hand is reflecting actual sales reality. Firstly, the transactional sales approach is focused on the short-term profit without any intensification of the sales representative efforts responding to the critical incidents. Secondly, the consultative sales approach that is intensifying round after round, reveals the consultative sales representatives' investment in the relationship with the customer without fluctuations due to the incident itself. Thirdly, the strategic sales approach is led by prudence since it intensifies or lessens based on the critical incident nature. It intensifies when the customer has to be retained or when there is a customer opportunity arising and lessens when the customer reveals low interest on deeper buyer-seller cooperation.

5.3. Multiple structural equation modelling testing hypotheses 1-2-3-4

The two groups that are going to be analysed are the good customer group and the bad customer group. The main research objective was to identify through which buyer-seller relationship CRM software usage can generate results that are mutually beneficial and sustainable. The sustainability of the results requires a long-term approach from the seller side and a relationship that has the potential to be beneficial from the customer side. In other

words, such a relationship needs a trustworthy (good) customer that aims for long-term cooperation and a sales representative that follows a long term-approach like consultative and/or strategic for the same reason. Since the sales approach is researched and the type of customer is described for both cases, the critical factor to compare functionality of the model is the type of the relationship from the customer side.

Therefore, a multi-group analysis examining whether differences exist between the two types of customers is conducted in order to identify whether the hypothesized effects vary among the two groups (Byrne, 2006). In the conceptual model chapter (chapter 3, section 3.13.), the way sales approach affects critical incident resolution and customer gratitude was described in detail. By deploying a multigroup structural equation modelling, the differences between structural parameters, indicating differences in relationships between the groups, are going to be examined.

The multi-group analysis in structural equation modelling is functional since it allows comparing multiple samples across multiple population groups for any identified structural equation model (Byrne, 2006). Subsequently, structural equation modelling allows for testing whether different groups show different sets of path coefficients. The grouping condition is the type of the customer (good or bad). Therefore, the sample was divided into two separate groups (good and bad customers) for each sales representative approach (transactional, consultative, and strategic). Since all the participants answered questions for both the types of customer, each group contains 190 observations. The hypothesized model testing was performed using maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method (Bollen, 1989).

Finally, in this study Z-tests were deployed to complete the comparisons between the groups in the multi-group analysis. The Z-test is appropriate to be conducted since the number of the observations (190) is sufficient (Afthanorhan, Ahmad, & Sabri, 2015). Z-tests are suitable for completing a multi-group analysis since they achieve the requirement for

population proportion (Afthanorhan et al., 2015). Z-test is considered significant once its absolute value is greater than 1.96 (p value<0.05). Finally, in order to implement a Z-test the requirement is the normality of the data. For the present research the normality of the data is presented in section 5.1.

5.3.1. Comparing transactional sales approach for good and bad customers

Regarding the transactional sales approach, it is examined how the relationship works in terms of critical incident resolution, customer reciprocity, and relationship outcome. In other words, it will be investigated whether the pattern of the structural equation model results differ between the two groups. To assess the between construct effects, path coefficients are reported but before this the overall model fit was examined. The chi-square statistic ($\chi^2=846.20$, DF=332) is at a significant level (p<0.001). The fit indices are as follows: CFI=0.91, TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.06 and indicate that the model fits the data reasonably well (Byrne, 2006).

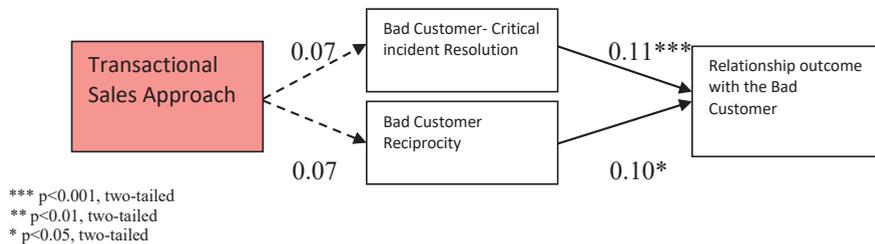


Figure 13: Standardized beta coefficients-Conceptual Model, Transactional sales approach on a bad customer.

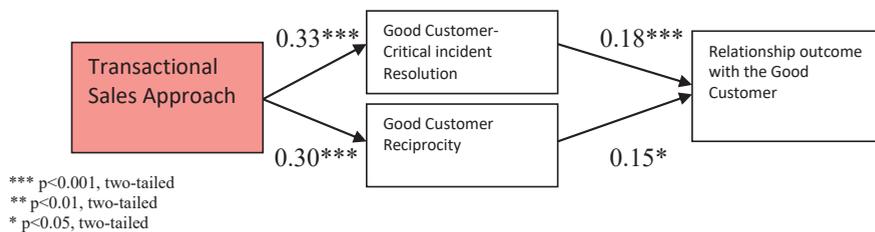


Figure 14: Standardized beta coefficients-Conceptual Model, Transactional sales approach on a good customer.

Figures 13 and 14 present the results of the multi-group SEM. The outcome of the multigroup analysis shows that the pattern of the results for the two groups is different. Therefore, hypothesis H4a is rejected and hypothesis H4b is corroborated. Moreover, transactional sales approach fails to create customer reciprocity in a bad customer, therefore, hypothesis H3a is rejected, and hypothesis H3b is verified. Finally, in the case where a transactional sales approach helps to resolve critical incidents and/or generates feelings of gratitude, the relationship with the customers improves no matter whether they are bad or good customers. The hypotheses H2a, H2b, H1a and H1b are all verified. The significance of the differences among the two groups is presented in Table 25.

Table 25: Transactional salesman model z-scores

<i>Paths</i>	<i>z-score</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Transactional Approach → Critical Incident Resolution	-1.10	<i>p</i> >0.05
Transactional Approach → Customer Reciprocity	-1.56	*
Critical Incident Resolution → Relationship Outcome	-0.72	<i>p</i> >0.05
Customer Reciprocity → Relationship Outcome	-2.39	***

*** *p*<0.001, two-tailed

** *p*<0.01, two-tailed

* *p*<0.05, two-tailed

The most significant difference is that in the good customer condition a transactional approach leads to customer reciprocity and to better relationship outcome. These findings are in line with the initial research idea that a relationship can be beneficial when both sides are feeling that good about it, when it becomes mutually beneficial. Finally, these findings are underlining again the significance of customer gratitude and reciprocity to the relationship outcome result.

5.3.2. Comparing consultative sales approach for good and bad customers

As far as the consultative sales approach is concerned, it was tested whether such an approach is affecting the critical incident resolution, the generation of reciprocity to the customer and the relationship outcome for good and for bad customers. More specifically, it was compared between good and bad customers whether the focus on more personal aspects of buyer-seller relationships and the consultative selling from sales representative side, could lead to better relationship outcomes. In order to calculate the between construct effects, the overall fit of the model was examined and also the path coefficients were reported. The chi-square statistic ($\chi^2=947.18$, $DF=332$) is at a significant level ($p<0.001$). The fit indices are the following: $CFI=0.92$, $TLI=0.95$, $RMSEA=0.07$ and indicate that the model fits the data reasonably well (Byrne, 2006, Hair et al. 2006). The results for the multi- group SEM for the consultative sales approach are presented on figures 15 and 16.

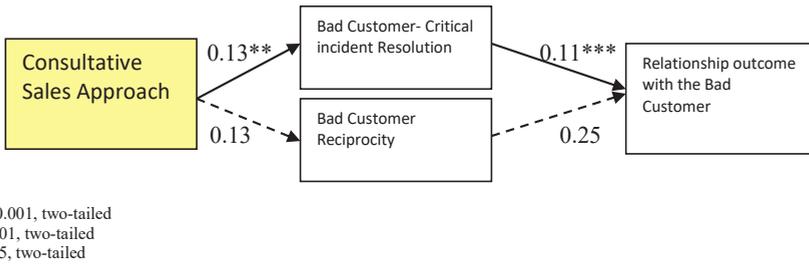


Figure 15: Standardized beta coefficients-Conceptual Model, Consultative sales approach on a bad customer.

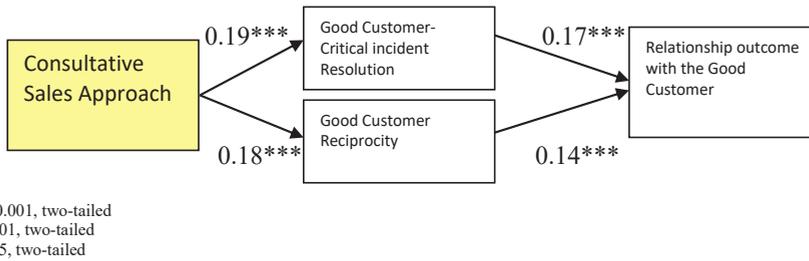


Figure 16: Standardized beta coefficients-Conceptual Model, Consultative sales approach on a good customer.

The outcome of the multigroup analysis shows that the pattern of the results for the two groups is different. In line with the previous results, the consultative sales approach is helpful in resolving a critical incident with the good and the bad customer whereas fails to create feelings of customer reciprocity and indirectly improve the relationship outcome when the relationship with the customer is problematic.

In any case, the resolution of a critical incident improves the overall relationship with the customer both for good and for bad customers. Analysing these results from the research hypotheses point of view hypothesis H4c and H4d are verified. However, the consultative sales approach has a positive effect on generating reciprocal behaviours only for the trustworthy customers. Hypothesis H3c is rejected whereas hypothesis H3d is verified. Solving a critical incident for the customer will improve the relationship outcomes both for good and for bad customers. Therefore, the hypotheses H1c and H1d are verified. Finally the reciprocity generated, affects only the good customers, reflecting that to the hypotheses, the Hypothesis 2c is rejected, while hypothesis H2d is verified. The weight of the differences among the two groups is presented in Table 26.

Table 26: Consultative salesman model z-scores

<i>Paths</i>	<i>z-score</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Consultative Approach → Critical Incident Resolution	-1.38	<i>p</i> >0.05
Consultative Approach → Customer Reciprocity	-1.39	<i>p</i> >0.05
Critical Incident Resolution → Relationship Outcome	0.80	<i>p</i> >0.05
Customer Reciprocity → Relationship Outcome	-2.66	***

*** *p*<0.001, two-tailed

** *p*<0.01, two-tailed

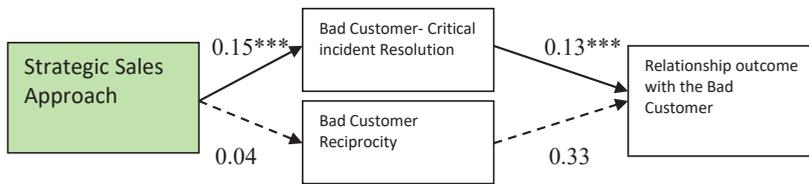
* *p*<0.05, two-tailed

In alignment with the results for the transactional salesman approach, it is demonstrated that the generation of reciprocal behaviors is not working in a bad relationship with a customer. Following a consultative sales approach, will not create gratitude to the bad customer and also, customer gratitude will not lead to better relationship outcomes when this relationship is not trustworthy (good customer). On the other hand, when a sales representative manages to resolve a critical incident, this will have a direct effect, improving the relationship with the customer. These findings are in line with the origin of this research, claiming that sales representatives have to invest more in relationships that are mutually beneficial.

5.3.3. Comparing strategic sales approach for good and bad customers

The most complicated and time consuming approach in terms of marketing strategy and CRM software usage is the strategic one. Below, it is presented whether this approach has positive results on the critical incident resolution, the generation of reciprocity to the customer and the relationship outcomes for trustworthy and problematic customers. Subsequently it is examined if the focus on a strategic sales approach from the sales representative side, could lead to a more effective business relationship both for a good and for a bad customer.

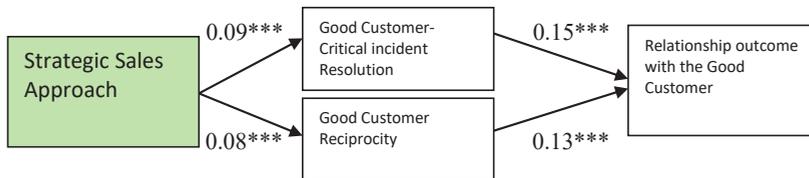
In an effort to estimate the between construct effects, the overall fit of the model was examined and also the path coefficients were reported ($\chi^2=897.34$, $DF=332$ $p<0.001$). The fit indices are the following: CFI=0.95, TLI=0.94, RMSEA=0.07 and indicate that the model fits the data well (Byrne, 2006, Hair et al. 2006). Analysing the results of the multi- group SEM for the strategic sales approach on figures 17 and 18, many interesting findings arise. First of all, the conclusion of the multigroup analysis shows that the pattern of the results for the two groups is different.



*** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed
 ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed
 * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed

Figure 17: Standardized beta coefficients-Conceptual Model, Strategic sales approach on a bad customer.

The strategic sales approach is successful when resolving critical incidents and when generating customer reciprocity for the good customers. In this case also the resolved incidents and the customer reciprocity improve the relationship too. On the other hand, the strategic approach on a bad customer makes the incident resolution possible, improving there the relationship outcomes, failing though to create reciprocity for the bad customer.



*** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed
 ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed
 * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed

Figure 18: Standardized beta coefficients-Conceptual Model, Strategic sales approach on a good customer.

From the research hypotheses point of view, hypothesis H4e and H4f are verified. Nevertheless, the strategic sales approach has positive results on generating reciprocal behaviours only for the trustworthy customers. The hypothesis H3e is rejected while hypothesis H3f is confirmed. The resolution of a critical incident for the customer will improve the relationship outcomes both for good and for bad customers. Therefore, the

hypotheses H1e and H1f are verified. In conclusion, the reciprocity generated, affects only the good customers. Hypothesis H2e is rejected, whereas hypothesis H2f is confirmed. The weight of the differences among the good customer group and the bad customer group is presented in Table 27.

Table 27: Strategic salesman model z-scores

<i>Paths</i>	<i>z-score</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Strategic Approach → Critical Incident Resolution	-2.256	***
Strategic Approach → Customer Reciprocity	-2.473	***
Critical Incident Resolution → Relationship Outcome	0.603	<i>p</i> >0.05
Customer Reciprocity → Relationship Outcome	2.725	***

*** *p*<0.001, two-tailed

** *p*<0.01, two-tailed

* *p*<0.05, two-tailed

The differences among the groups of good and bad customers prove the core hypotheses of this research about the necessity of the mutuality when investing in long-term buyer-seller relationships. The strategic sales approach, which is the most demanding in time and effort from the sales representatives' side, when applied on a good buyer-seller relationships, the results on the critical incident resolution, the customer reciprocity and the relationship outcome differ significantly when compared with similar applications on a problematic buyer-seller relationship (see Table 26). Especially the fact that the results are similar with the consultative sales approach makes clear the distinction between short-term focus (transactional approach) and long term-focus (consultative and strategic approach) from the sales representative side.

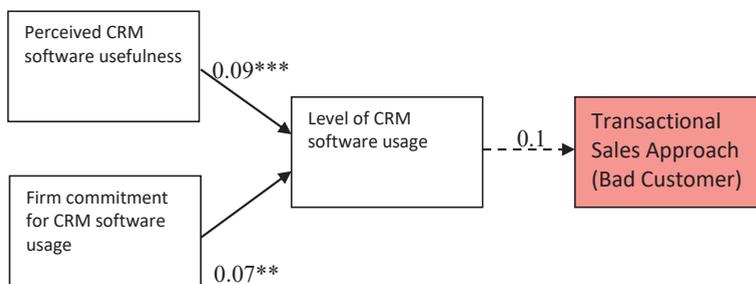
5.4. Structural equation modeling testing hypotheses 5-6-7

This section tests the hypotheses developed without constructs involving two groups with good and bad customers. More specifically, it examines the connection between the CRM software attitudes (salesman and company) and sales approach, trying to explain the

link of the sales representatives' perceived CRM usefulness, the selling firm commitment to CRM software usage and the subsequent sales approach. Therefore, a structural equation modelling analysis was used to examine whether this part of the model includes statistically significant relationships among the aforementioned variables.

5.4.1. The effect of CRM software on transactional sales approach (Bad Customer)

This part of the conceptual model hypotheses testing begins with the examination of the relationship between sales representatives' perceived usefulness, firm commitment to CRM usage and the actual level of system usage. Then how the level of system usage affects the transactional sales approach on a bad customer is examined. To assess the effects between the different constructs, path coefficients are reported and the overall fit of the model is examined ($\chi^2=640.75$, $df=395$, $p<0.001$). The fit indices are: CFI=0.89, TLI=0.88, RMSEA=0.06 and indicate a reasonably good fit of the data in the model (Byrne, 2006). The results in Figure 19 verify that the sales representatives' perceived CRM usefulness affects how much they are actually using it.



*** $p<0.001$, two-tailed
 ** $p<0.01$, two-tailed
 * $p<0.05$, two-tailed

Figure 19: Standardized beta coefficients testing hypotheses 5-6-7 for transactional sales approach on a bad Customer

Moreover, the commitment that the company exhibits on CRM usage, aligning its management practices and tactics with the CRM software usage, also has a significant effect on the usage. Therefore, for the case of the transactional approach on a bad customer H7 is verified since a CRM software is used more when perceived from the sales representatives as useful. Additionally, H6 is confirmed too since the selling firm's commitment on CRM software usage affects positively its usage too. Finally, H5 is not confirmed since for a bad customer and a transactional sales approach, there is no connection between level of software usage and sales approach.

The level of CRM software usage cannot affect the construct of the transactional sales approach on a bad customer. The low percentage (2.8%) of variance explained for predicting the transactional sales approach is presented on the table 28:

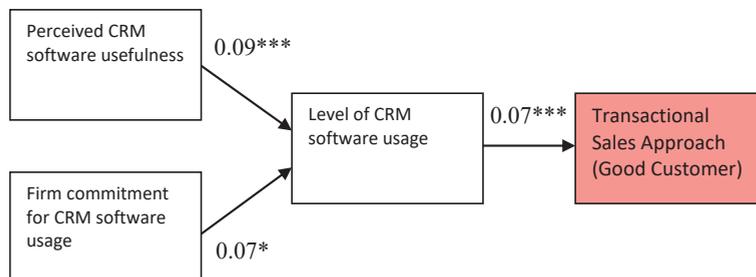
Table 28: Percentage of variance explained for transactional Approach (BC)

Antecedent	Outcome	R²
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	54.4%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment	Transactional Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	2.8%
Level of CRM software usage		

5.4.2. CRM on Transactional sales approach (Good Customer)

The next step in the analysis is to examine how the same constructs affect the overall transactional sales approach on a good customer ($\chi^2=1197.39$, $df=653$, $p<0.001$). The fit indices (CFI=0.90, TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.07) indicate a reasonably good fit of the data in the model (Byrne, 2006). The results on the figure 20 verify that the sales representative's 'perceived CRM usefulness' affects 'CRM software usage'. Moreover, the 'firm-CRM

commitment’ that the selling company exhibits has also an effect on sales representatives’ ‘CRM software usage.’



*** p<0.001, two-tailed

** p<0.01, two-tailed

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Figure 20: Standardized beta coefficients testing hypotheses 5-6-7 for transactional sales approach on a good Customer

Table 29 presents the percentage of variance explained for the transactional sales approach in combination with the good customer. Based on the significance of mutuality in the buyer-seller relationship, it is reasonable that much more variance is explained in the case of the good customer. In this case the sales representatives have the motivation to use the system more to accomplish their goals since the customer has the potential to return this investment even when they follow a transactional sales approach. For the case of the transactional sales approach on a good customer H6 and H7 are verified.

Table 29: Percentage of variance explained for transactional Approach (GC)

Antecedent	Outcome	R ²
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	56.6%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment		
Level of CRM software usage	Transactional Sales Approach on a Good Customer	36.3%

The level of usage is related to the transactional sales approach only when the relationship with the customer is trustworthy. Therefore, H5, increased CRM software usage has a positive effect on long term sales approach (consultative and strategic) is not verified.

On the contrary, when the customer is good, the increased usage of CRM software is related to the transactional sales approach. This finding is not fully unexpected since it means that when the customer is good and the sales representatives can benefit from such a relation, even if they have a short-term focus, they will do their best to satisfy this customer, deploying as much as they can CRM software.

5.4.3. CRM on Consultative sales approach (Bad Customer)

Moving to the consultative sales approach, the bad customer structural model is presented first. The path coefficients assess the effects between constructs, examining the overall model fit ($\chi^2=643.30$, $df=394$, $p<0.001$). The fit indices are the following: CFI=0.90, TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.06 and indicate a good fit of the data in the model (Byrne, 2006). Figure 21 presents the standardized beta coefficients for the model. Hypotheses H7, H6 and H5 are all supported by the data. Moreover, and in agreement with the research objectives, for a consultative sales approach on a bad customer, CRM software usage is more related to a consultative sales approach since there are elements of long-term focus in the buyer-seller relationship.

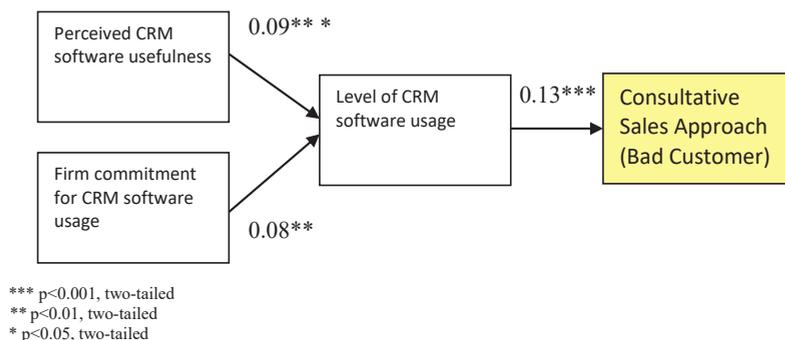


Figure 21: Standardized beta coefficients testing hypotheses 5-6-7 for consultative sales approach on a bad Customer

Table 30 shows that the percentage of variance explained is the highest for the first part of the model. The constructs of ‘perceived CRM usefulness’ and ‘firm-CRM commitment’ are good predictors of the ‘level of CRM software usage’ and subsequently, the ‘level of CRM software usage’ construct explains significant part of ‘consultative sales approach on a bad customer’ variance.

Table 30: Percentage of variance explained for consultative sales Approach (BC)

Antecedent	Outcome	R ²
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	57.2%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment		
Level of CRM software usage	Consultative Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	45.1%

5.4.4. CRM on Consultative sales approach (Good Customer)

The next step on the analysis is to examine how the same constructs affect the consultative sales approach on a good customer ($\chi^2=1193.22$, $df=618$, $p<0.001$). The fit indices (CFI=0.92, TLI=0.90, RMSEA=0.07) indicate a good fit of the data in the model (Byrne, 2006). The results of the figure 21 confirm all the research hypotheses H5, H6, and H7 for the consultative sales approach.

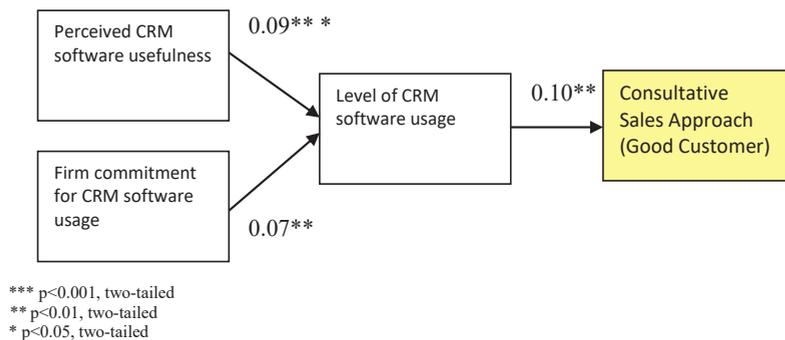


Figure 22: Standardized beta coefficients testing hypotheses 5-6-7 for consultative sales approach on a good customer

In agreement with the research objectives it is supported by the data that in the cases of mutual focus on a long-term relationship by the customer and the sales representative, increased ‘CRM software usage’ is necessary and therefore, it is related with the ‘consultative sales approach on a good customer.’

Finally, as it can be seen on the table 31, there is a relatively low percentage of the variance explained for the consultative sales approach on a good customer. The consultative sales representatives when treating critical incidents with a good customer tend to trust their ability to understand the problem, their empathy skills, and the relationship that is already established. Therefore, they do not solely rely on the CRM software resulting to this low percentage of variance explained.

Table 31: Percentage of variance explained for consultative sales Approach (GC)

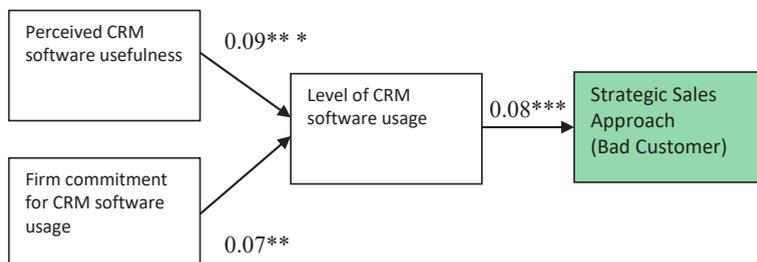
Antecedent	Outcome	R²
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	54.9%%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment		
Level of CRM software usage	Consultative Sales Approach on a Good Customer	5.1%

5.4.5. CRM on Strategic sales approach (Bad Customer)

Finally, the strategic sales approach is analysed starting with its application on the bad customer. The path coefficients assess the effects between the constructs, inspecting the overall model fit ($\chi^2=647.22$, $df=395$, $p<0.001$). The fit indices are: CFI=0.92, TLI=0.93, RMSEA=0.06 and indicate a good fit of the data in the model (Byrne, 2006).

Research hypotheses H5, H6, and H7 are supported by the data. The selling organization’s commitment on CRM software usage along with the perceptions of the sales representatives for this usage is affecting significantly the degree to which CRM software is used. Moreover, the construct ‘level of CRM software usage’ is significantly related to the

construct ‘strategic sales approach on a bad customer’ in agreement with the research objectives.



*** p<0.001, two-tailed
 ** p<0.01, two-tailed
 * p<0.05, two-tailed

Figure 23: Standardized beta coefficients testing hypotheses 5-6-7 for strategic sales approach on a bad customer

Table 32 presents the percentage of variance explained in the model. The fact that the percentage of variance explained, as well as the standardized beta coefficients are lower for the strategic sales approach on a bad customer in comparison with the good customer is not necessarily in deviation with the research objectives. On the contrary it creates a direction of how the CRM software investments should be allocated. The strategic sales approach needs much more effort from the selling organization than a skillful sales representative and a clever CRM software deployment. Moreover, the strategic sale requires a collective effort from all the selling organization’s departments to a degree that the sales approach and the CRM software; even if they remain significant they do not play the most critical role.

Table 32: Percentage of variance explained for strategic sales Approach (BC)

Antecedent	Outcome	R ²
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	55.0%%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment	Strategic Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	12.5%
Level of CRM software usage		

5.4.6. CRM on Strategic sales approach (Good Customer)

The next and final step in the analysis of the first part of the model is to examine how the same constructs affect the overall strategic sales approach on a good customer. In order to assess the effects between the constructs the path coefficients examine the overall model fit ($\chi^2=1193.22$, $df=618$, $p<0.001$). The fit indices are: CFI=0.90, TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.07 and indicate a reasonably good fit of the data in the model (Byrne, 2006).

Figure 24 completes the presentation of the strategic sales approach model. All the research hypotheses H5, H6, and H7 are supported by the data. The fact that the company commitment to CRM usage effect on the Strategic sales approach effect is significant at the 0.001 level is in agreement with the essence of this research, aiming to prove that the technology support on sales helps in creating long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between sales representatives and their customers.

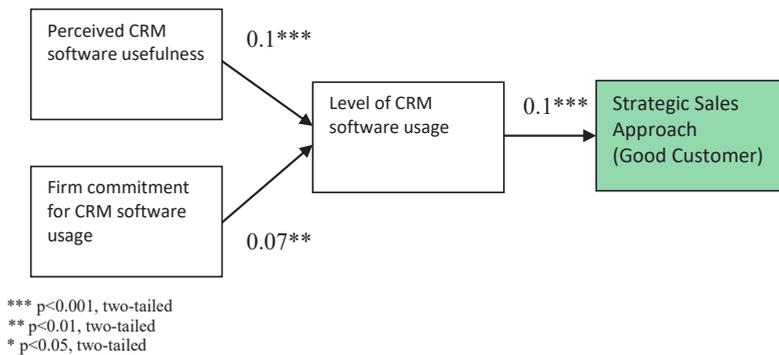


Figure 24: Standardized beta coefficients testing hypotheses 5-6-7 for strategic sales approach on a good customer

Table 33 exhibits the percentage of variance explained for the strategic sales approach on a good customer. In general, both in terms of standardized coefficients level, model

significance and percentage of variance explained the strategic sales approach on a good customer is the best combination for this part of the model.

Table 33: Percentage of variance explained for strategic sales approach (GC)

Antecedent	Outcome	R²
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	57.0%%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment	Strategic Sales Approach on a Good Customer	29.7%
Level of CRM software usage		

This part of the model worked well for a consultative sales approach on a bad customer too. The consultative sales approach is chosen when there is an effort to upgrade and safeguard the relationship deploying CRM software to serve better and retain the customer. CRM software usage is also relevant to the strategic sales approach on a bad customer, even without mutuality, to retain a relationship that has reached the level of strategic integration. Finally, the most surprising finding that was not anticipated is the fact that the model works for the transactional sales approach on a good customer too.

5.5. Integrated structural equation models

This is the final section of the hypotheses testing part. This section presents the structural equation model for the experimental designs including the percentage of variance explained for each construct. With this presentation even the smallest difference among the different sales approaches and the different type of customer will be visible in an effort to visualize the total conceptual model of the research at hand. Moreover, the full models comparing each other will be analysed to reach a conclusive overview of this research before proceeding to the implications part in the next chapter.

In this section both types of customers and all sales approaches will be presented for the total model, further explaining the conclusions drawn in multigroup structural equation modelling section and the conclusions from structural equation modelling section (sections 5.3-5.4.)

5.5.1. Transactional Sales Approach

Figures 25a and 25b present the full models for the transactional sales approach. The SEM model for the transactional approach in a bad customer relationship is not supported by the data. Additionally, the construct ‘transactional sales approach on a bad customer’ was marginally acceptable. On the other hand, the first part of the model is working as well as the last part of it. This finding means that the ‘perceived software usefulness’ and the ‘firm commitment to CRM’ indeed increase its usage. Furthermore, a transactional sales representative who resolves a critical incident or creates gratitude in the customer will improve the buyer- seller relationship. However, no relationship can be found between CRM software usage and the relationship outcome. Finally, the percentages of variance explained are presented on the figure below:

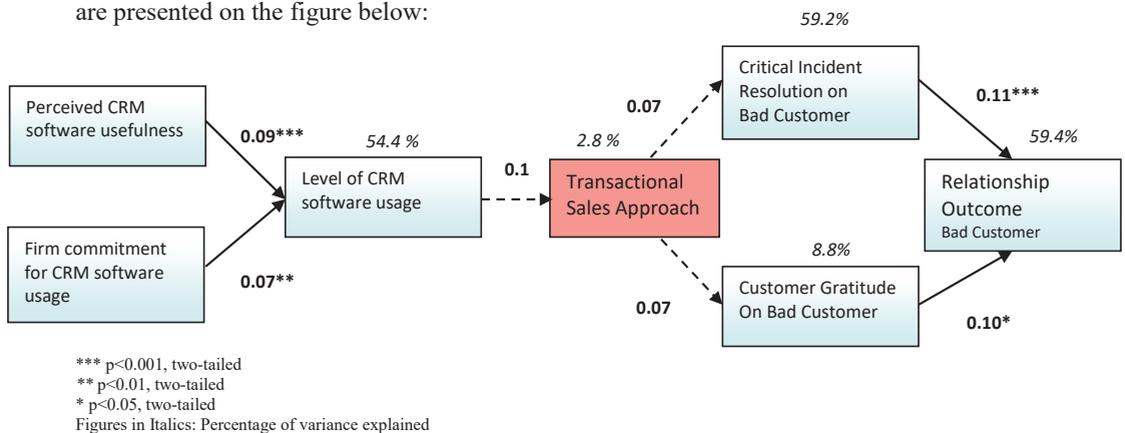


Figure 25a: Transactional Sales Approach complete (BC)

Figure 25b shows that the model is totally functional and in terms of statistical significance. Despite the short-term approach from the sales representative side, it seems that a trustworthy relationship is worth the effort to go the extra mile. The level of CRM software usage is a good predictor of the transactional sales approach on a good customer. This approach creates gratitude and subsequent positive reciprocal behaviors from the customer, ending up to a relationship that creates beneficial results for the selling organization. Given the fact that much from the transactional sales today require limited or no face- to-face communication, it makes sense that the CRM software usage is the best way for the sales representative to serve the good customer as professionally as possible, aiming for the fruits of their cooperation no matter if his/her targets are not exceeding too much the close of the sale.

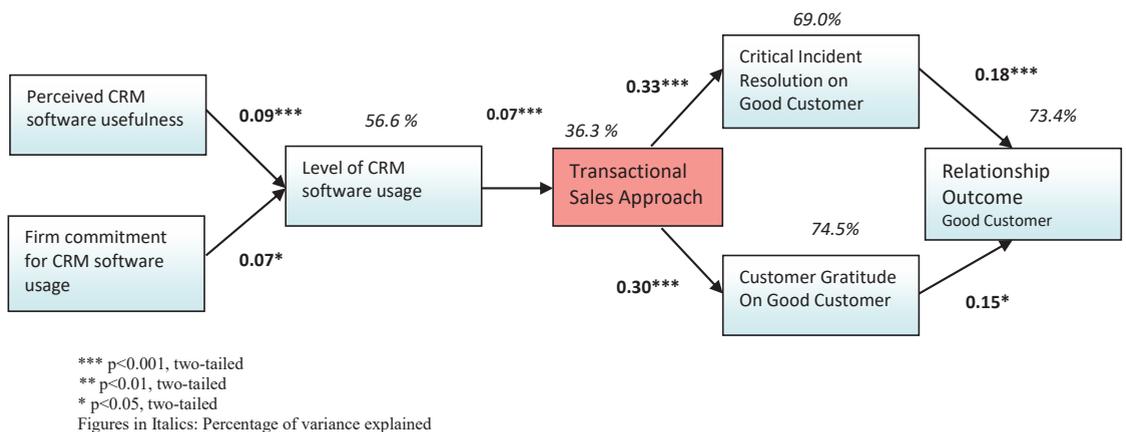


Figure 25b: Transactional Sales Approach complete (GC)

5.5.2. Consultative Sales Approach

Figures 26a and 26b present the standardized beta coefficients for the consultative sales approach, their significance and the percentage of variance explained for each construct. The model works well for the consultative sales approach on a bad customer (figure 26a).

This type of sales approach, as presented in the learning process part in the beginning of this chapter is followed by sales representatives with consistency, no matter the intrinsic relationship problems and the difficulty of the incidents that occur. As anticipated, it is gratitude generation does not work for a bad customer and subsequently does not improve the relationship based on customer’s reciprocal behaviours. On the other hand, the consultative sales approach on a bad customer is fruitful when resolving critical incidents, in this way improving the overall buyer- seller relationship.

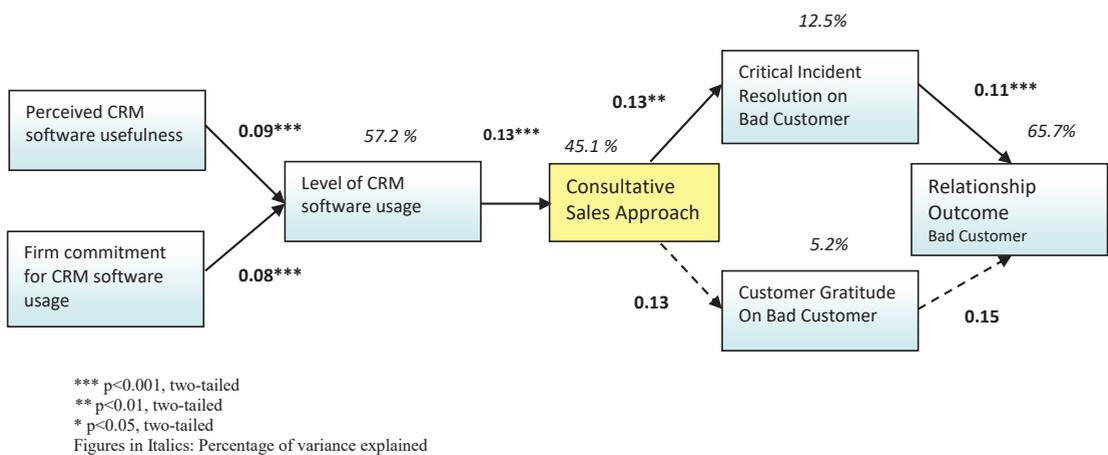
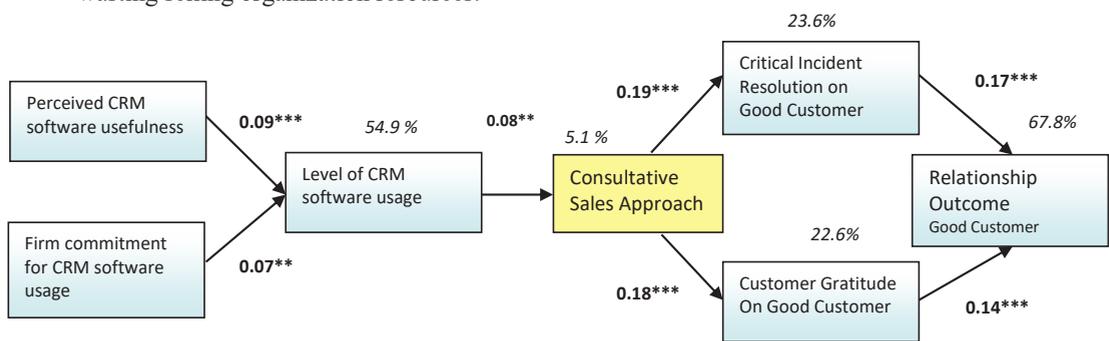


Figure 26a: Consultative Sales Approach complete (BC)

The only concerning element in the interpretation of the results for a consultative sales approach on a good customer is the low percentage of variance that is explained from the level of CRM software usage (figure 26b). A possible interpretation of this fact is that consultative sales approach includes plenty of elements more qualitative in nature like empathy and communication skills. Additionally, by definition a consultative sales representative is the one that knows very well the needs and the wants of the customer as well as customer’s product usage criteria. Thus, the CRM software is one of the significant factors that define this type of approach.

Other than the fact that the model works in perfect alignment with the research objectives and establishes a causal relationship between CRM software usage and business to business sales relationship outcome, it also takes into account critical incident resolution and customer gratitude for the first time in the marketing literature. Furthermore, the fact that there are differences due to the type of customer and the sales approach in the relationships of the constructs of the integrated model, identify a CRM software usage roadmap through which a buyer-seller relationship which can be mutually beneficial and sustainable without wasting selling organization resources.



*** p<0.001, two-tailed
 ** p<0.01, two-tailed
 * p<0.05, two-tailed
 Figures in Italics: Percentage of variance explained

Figure 26b: Consultative Sales Approach complete (GC)

5.5.3. Strategic Sales Approach

Proceeding to the strategic sales approach, the results are in total alignment with the research objectives. The fact that reciprocity does not work for the problematic relationship is an additional confirmation of the fact that in problematic buyer-seller relationships, gratitude does not affect the relationship outcome. This finding is added to the previous result for the consultative sales approach on a bad customer and the role of gratitude in that. Subsequently, the critical incident resolution is a construct that is always related to the relationship outcome no matter the relationship with the customer.

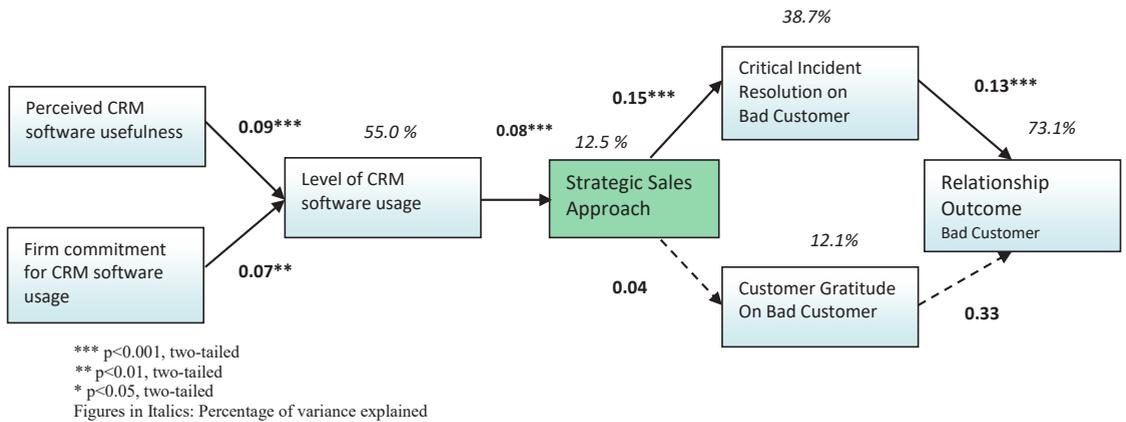


Figure 27a: Strategic Sales Approach complete (BC)

In conclusion, the model that is supported by the data to the greatest extent, along with the one for the transactional sales approach on a good customer, is the one below (figure 27b). The surprisingly high percentage of variance explained for the relationship outcome in a strategic sales approach, means that in this type of relationships the critical incident resolution and the customer reciprocity play a significant role, improving the relationship outcome. This is one of the most significant, original thesis results, in line with the research objectives.

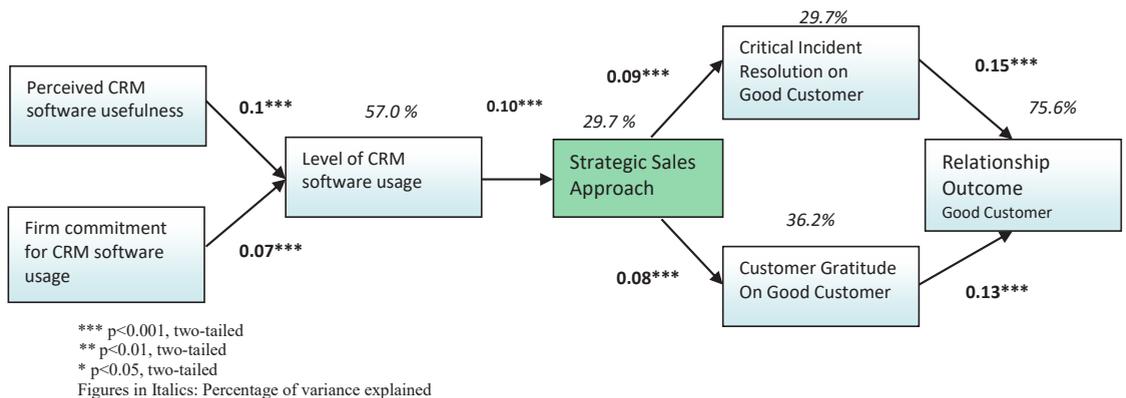


Figure 27b: Strategic Sales Approach complete (GC)

5.6. Conclusions

The data analysis was completed in four stages. In the first stage the way the main constructs of the study are developed throughout the three rounds was examined. In the second stage and after completing the confirmatory factor analysis with structural equation modelling, the differences amongst relationships including bad and good customer using multigroup structural equation modelling were also examined. In the third phase, structural equation modelling was used to test the hypotheses of the first part of the model, examining the constructs that affect the ‘level of CRM software usage’ and how this usage relates with ‘sales approach.’ Finally, in the fourth part, the model was united to describe in detail the full path that links ‘CRM software usage’ and ‘relationship outcome’ for all six customer-sales approach combinations. In general, table 34 summarizes the hypotheses testing results.

Table 34: Hypotheses testing results

	Hypothesis	Supported
H1	Sales representatives that resolve efficiently critical incidents achieve improved customer relationship outcomes.	Y
H1a	<i>Transactional sales representatives that resolve efficiently bad customers’ critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.</i>	Y
H1b	<i>Transactional sales representatives that resolve efficiently good customers’ critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.</i>	Y
H1c	<i>Consultative sales representatives that resolve efficiently bad customers’ critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.</i>	Y
H1d	<i>Consultative sales representatives that resolve efficiently good customers’ critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.</i>	Y
H1e	<i>Strategic sales representatives that resolve efficiently bad customers’ critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.</i>	Y
H1f	<i>Strategic sales representatives that resolve efficiently good customers’ critical incidents achieve improved relationship outcomes with their customers.</i>	Y
H2	Sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude to their customers achieve improved customer relationship outcomes.	N
H2a	<i>Transactional sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their bad customers</i>	Y

H2b	<i>Transactional sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their good customers</i>	Y
H2c	<i>Consultative sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their bad customers</i>	N
H2d	<i>Consultative sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their good customers</i>	Y
H2e	<i>Strategic sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their bad customers</i>	N
H2f	<i>Strategic sales representatives that generate feelings of gratitude achieve improved relationship with their good customers</i>	Y
H3	Sales representatives that focus on long term results are generating feelings of gratitude in their customers.	N
H3a	<i>Transactional sales representatives are generating feelings of gratitude in their bad customers.</i>	N
H3b	<i>Transactional sales representatives are generating feelings of gratitude in their good customers.</i>	Y
H3c	<i>Consultative sales representatives are generating feelings of gratitude in their bad customers.</i>	N
H3d	<i>Consultative sales representatives are generating feelings of gratitude in their good customers.</i>	Y
H3e	<i>Strategic sales representatives generating feelings of gratitude in their bad customers.</i>	N
H3f	<i>Strategic sales representatives generating feelings of gratitude in their good customers.</i>	Y
H4	Sales representatives that focus on long term results (consultative and strategic), are resolving critical incidents efficiently.	Y
H4a	<i>Transactional sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their bad customers efficiently.</i>	N
H4b	<i>Transactional sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their good customers efficiently.</i>	Y
H4c	<i>Consultative sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their bad customers efficiently.</i>	Y
H4d	<i>Consultative sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their good customers efficiently.</i>	Y
H4e	<i>Strategic sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their bad customers efficiently.</i>	Y
H4f	<i>Strategic sales representatives are resolving critical incidents with their good customers efficiently.</i>	Y
H5	High levels of CRM software usage facilitate long term sales approaches.	N
H5a	<i>High level of CRM software usage is related to transactional sales approach for a bad customer.</i>	Y
H5b	<i>High level of CRM software usage is related to transactional sales approach for a good customer.</i>	Y
H5c	<i>High level of CRM software usage is related to consultative sales approach for a bad customer.</i>	Y

H5d	<i>High level of CRM software usage is related to consultative sales approach for a good customer.</i>	Y
H5e	<i>High level of CRM software usage is related to the strategic sales approach for a bad customer.</i>	Y
H5f	<i>High level of CRM software usage is related to the strategic sales approach for a good customer.</i>	Y
H6	Increased firm commitment to CRM software usage has a positive effect on sales representative usage of this software.	Y
H7	Increased CRM software perceived usefulness has a positive impact on sales representative usage of this software.	Y

In bold letters: The main hypotheses before breaking down to the sub- hypotheses for the 3 sales approaches and for the two customers.

The research objective is achieved based on the supported hypotheses in table 34. However, there are some cases where the results were unexpected. These results are going to be further analysed in the following chapter of research implications.

Chapter 6: Research Implications- Discussion

6.1. Academic Implications

The first research priority for 2016-2018 set by the Marketing Science Institute was the creation of quantitative models to understand causality, levers, and influence in a complex world (Marketing Science Institute, 2016). The first priority is the attribution and the need for improvements in ROI modeling to more accurately identify and quantify the impact of various digital efforts. In line with this first research priority, this study suggests the causality between software usage and sales performance in the contemporary changing sales landscape. Additionally, it examines the impact of one specific digital effort, namely CRM software implementation in business-to-business markets.

Regarding the research design, the Marketing Science Institute (2016) argues that, “there is a lot of unrealized potential in the field experiment approach, where different levels of a marketing activity (or different activities) are employed (along with a control condition) and both immediate and long-term effects are tracked.” The structural, balanced design of the research at hand, which also controls for several factors in order to examine long-term effects of sales approaches in a business-to-business relationship, is in agreement with the Institute’s proposal. However, as stated in the research priorities, “there are key trade-offs between models that are focused on big important problems with many variables -sometimes hundreds- and the models we often see in the literature that are based on a handful of variables. These trade-offs require a focus on important issues, an acceptance that we’ll never get pure causality, and a willingness to be approximately right on less essential issues”.

More specifically, the Marketing Science Institute proposed specific topics for research including identifying the critical paths to purchase in B2B environments using

causal models, and identifying those marketing activities that can drive behavioural change. Regarding B2B decision-making, the Institute focuses on how digitalization is transforming the traditional sales model and how digitalization influences how decision-makers use their time and how they value their time.

The study at hand recognizes possible contexts under which CRM software usage enhances sales approaches and subsequently improves relationship outcomes. The findings of the research at hand can lead to behavioural change and -in the managerial implications section- specific areas for sales department improvements are proposed. In addition, this study is exactly relevant to B2B decision-making and the contemporary digital transformation of sales departments and the sales profession. In conclusion, it can be argued that this study is aligned with the 2016-2018 marketing research priorities.

The relevant academic literature suggests that different relationship marketing programs (financial, social, and strategic) can build different types of relational bonds and norms that generate varying levels of return (Cannon, Achrol, & Gundlach, 2000). In the present research, where the relationship marketing programs correspond to three different sales approaches, it is argued that there are indeed varying levels of customer return in the buyer-seller relationship. Unfortunately, the question of how the transactional sales approach combines with a difficult buyer-seller relationship cannot be explained from the findings of the research at hand. However, the transactional sales approach with good customers by using CRM software can create great results which improve the relationship. Consultative and strategic sales approaches when applied to any customer can produce better relationship and sales performance results. In the case of a problematic relationship these two approaches based on CRM software usage are helpful in resolving critical incidents and therefore in improving the relationship, whereas in the case of a trustworthy customer, these approaches

do not only help with critical incident resolution, but also engender feelings of gratitude in the customer.

In agreement with Singh and Sabol (2002), who argue that returns from customer relationship management programs can vary according to factors associated with any of the relational participants (customer, salesperson, selling firm), the results of this study highlighted that all these three parameters are significant for the implementation of and the subsequent returns generated by a CRM program. The selling company has to support CRM software usage, whereas the sales representatives have to accept and use it, adjusting it to the sales approach they deploy. Finally, it was argued that the customer (more accurately the relationship with the customer) is a critical factor that significantly influences the returns generated by a CRM program.

One unprecedented element of the research at hand is that it makes a connection between CRM software usage and sales performance; an element that much research failed to establish according to Francis et al. (2006). Based on this connection between CRM software usage and relationship outcomes, Ahearne et al. (2007) suggested that longitudinal research using an experimental design could overcome the limitation imposed by cross-sectional designs with respect to the drawing of causal inferences. The present research design addresses these causal inferences, illustrating the connection between CRM software usage and sales performance. Additionally, this research for the first time in academic literature incorporates customer gratitude and critical incident resolution together as main drivers for improving relationship outcomes in the business-to-business context.

Another original element of the research at hand is the development and deployment of the sales approach scale that was found to be reliable, functional and relevant for the sales representatives. Moving one step further, the level of CRM software was deployed for the first time as a predictor of sales approaches. So far research has focused on the organizational

or the personal traits of the sales representatives as predictors of how, and how much, CRM software was used (Speier & Venkatesh, 2002; Bus et al., 2005; Ahearne et al., 2007). Last but not least, the multiple measurement research design choice that allowed the same constructs to be measured under different relational and incidental circumstances was another original element of the research at hand, in line with contemporary academic suggestions for similar experimental treatments (Hamerling et al., 2015). Furthermore, as Hamerling et al., (2015) suggest, research on critical incidents in business-to-business markets has to be carried out with sellers as participants. Finally, they suggested that not only should negative incidents be explored, but also that it was vital to include positive ones. The research at hand combines all the aforementioned suggestions.

The study at hand also answers to Rodriguez and Honeycutt (2011) who report there is a sufficient number of studies that deal with relationship marketing issues in business-to-business (B2B) interactions with no research to explain how to leverage these selling organization's investments for specific clients. In this research, a basic distinction between customers was drawn, based on their type of relationship with the selling organization and also the study moved one step further, proposing which types of sales investments should be made in specific incidents and customer relations. Thus, this study's results suggest specific selling organization investments in specific customers according to their relationship status with the selling company and also according to the sales representatives' approach.

In particular, when the buyer-seller relationship is not stable and mutually beneficial, the sales investments should be more focused on critical incident resolution (negative and positive). Moreover, when there is a competition threat on the customer side, it is proposed that the sales representatives should also switch to a strategic sales approach, making similar investments and proposals to safeguard their customer.

Finally, in this research the relationship outcome construct includes both relational and financial results. This is another original idea from the viewpoint of the academic literature since as Reimann et al., (2010) conclude, despite the fact that CRM literature is huge, there is limited research about how specific situational factors can interact with CRM to influence financial outcomes.

6.2. Managerial Implications

Sales representatives today have to become data-driven, dealing with increasing complexity that derives from social networks, more demanding and better informed customers, multiple sales channels, and complicated internal organizational structures. Therefore, after consolidating their sales approach and adjusting it to the customer needs sales representatives should become co-creators of the sales information architecture to support their organization, improve customer relationship results, and subsequently achieve their goals more easily than before.

The sales representatives' perception of the usefulness of CRM software is a critical factor that influences CRM software usage no matter the sales approach employed. Additionally, organizational support for CRM software usage is also a significant factor for sales representatives, in order to adopt this usage into their everyday routines. High levels of CRM software usage are related to a strategic sales approach towards customers and with a consultative sales approach towards customers and surprisingly with a transactional sales approach towards a good customer. In the latter case, where the sales representatives have a short-term focus one would not expect to find such a correlation. However, it makes sense for a transactional sales representative, who has to manage a good relationship with a customer without any other selling investments available to him, to rely on the CRM software to provide the best he can to a customer who has good features and offers potential. In any case,

the statistical significance of the results indicates a clear correlation between sales approach and CRM software usage. The research at hand also argues that sales' investments aimed at creating customer gratitude are irrelevant when the customer has a short-term focus. Despite the significant influence customer gratitude has on a business-to-business relationship, short-term focus on the customer's side, absorbs its impact. This observation can be explained by the fact that customers who do not want to engage more with the selling organization do not expect -and therefore do not appreciate- such efforts from the sales representative, since these efforts are perceived as an attempt at creating a bond that is not welcomed. In contrast, such investments are significant when the customer takes a long-term view about the business relationship. In this case, customer gratitude has to be cultivated and it is the main driver for further expanding the relationship into strategic integration; a stage that is the optimum for many selling organizations.

This study found critical incident resolution to be universally effective in all kinds of buyer-seller relationships, subsequently improving sales performance. CRM software should be developed in a way that can provide solutions and ideas to all types of incidents no matter if they are opportunities or threats; no matter how complicated they are. Critical incident resolution is a factor that creates a robust connection between CRM software usage and sales performance. In other words, the degree CRM software usage can provide ideas and solutions to critical incidents, and corresponds to the degree to which CRM software usage improves relationship outcomes no matter the buyer-seller relationship status.

In line with the origins of this study, when both the buyer and seller are interested in long-term cooperation, CRM software usage investments are needed along with investments that enhance customer gratitude and provide solutions for critical incident resolution. This result is helpful for sales managers since it presents a clear path for CRM software usage that corresponds to specific customer types. However, in cases where the customer has a short-

term focus and does not want to engage further, the selling organization can safeguard this cooperation by resolving and overcoming critical incidents when they occur. In conclusion, selling organizations or sales representatives who have a short-term focus, short-term incentives, and work in an industry that requires no engagements have weak motivation to proceed to full CRM software usage since it proves to be more relevant for long-term approaches.

6.2.1. The Transactional Sales Approach

Regarding the fact that there are significant effects from the use of transactional sales approaches, a possible explanation can be found in the make-up of the sample since the majority of the participants were relatively young with an average age of 36 years and therefore the possibility of undertaking a strategic relationship in their professional life, was low. On the other hand, those sales representatives who have university degrees have the willingness, the age, and the skills to use CRM software and performing transactional sales in a sophisticated way.

Subsequently, the excellent fit of data between the transactional sales approach and the good customer model, can be attributed to the fact that even when there is a short-term focus from the sales representative side, for the case of a good customer the only way to provide the best sales support possible and to close the sale is to deploy CRM software to the greatest extent possible since the options of investing more time or assets into the given sale is out of the transactional sales representatives' scope.

Moreover, key accounts are usually handled in a specific manner by all employees of the selling organization's departments. In addition, discussing this result with sales managers who participated in the research, they commented that in the cases where the market is unstable -and taking into account the digitalization of sales- in many business cases

sales are becoming more and more transactional with less personal sales representative involvement, but with extensive customer intelligence and CRM software usage.

6.2.2. The Consultative Sales Approach

The multiple measurement comparisons test revealed that the consultative sales approach is the one that becomes stronger as the relationship between the sales representative and the customer develops no matter if the relationship is based on trust or not. This finding makes sense since sales representatives develop personal bonds with their customers with the aim of fostering a long-term business relationship with them, without jeopardizing additional selling firm investments that a strategic approach would require. For sales managers, this result is an indicator about the information and the sales investments that their sales representative may require.

When discussing the results with sales managers who participated in the research, there were many insightful remarks from their side. First of all, as far as the learning process of the consultative sales representatives is concerned, when trying to explain the consistency of the respondents on this approach over the rounds no matter how problematic the relationship is and how difficult the critical incidents to overcome are, the managers commented that the consultative sales representatives are like hunters, waiting in one particular spot for the best sale based on their relationship and customer knowledge. There is an effort from sales management to make the consultative sales force more responsive to customer's misbehavior and not wait too long for a sale that never materializes. However, sales representatives who utilize a consultative sales approach are afraid that instead of their goal which is customer gratitude, they will receive reprisal from their customers in case they decide to invest less in it, no matter whether the relationship used to be trustworthy or problematic. Also, there is inertia in sales representatives when they include meeting certain

customers and resolving their problems in their routines, without measuring the actual effort or cost of a meeting or problem resolution.

Discussing the fact that in the case of a consultative sales approach, there is way more variance explained in the bad customer condition, the sales managers commented that in well-established business relationships both parties know the topics relevant to their cooperation too well to rely too much on the CRM software to create customer gratitude or to resolve critical incidents.

6.2.3. The Strategic Sales Approach

No matter the relationship with the customer, in the case of competition threat, sales representatives should treat their customers more strategically, based on previous successful business cases for their organization. Subsequently, the documentation of customer information relevant to the sales relationships is a critical factor for customer retention as well as for critical incident resolution. This documentation has to be done as clearly and as comprehensively as possible, in an objective and accurate manner.

The sales managers confirmed that in order to become less vulnerable to this world of smart machines, sales representatives today have to develop a close relationship with the customer and the role of the sales manager is to include in their performance appraisals more qualitative indicators to measure this intimacy in the long run. This proposal is totally aligned with the Marketing Science Institute Research priorities (Marketing Science Institute, 2016) and more specifically with one of the seven questions to ponder: “What is the role of humans in a world of smart machines?”

6.2.4. Bad/Problematic customers

One unexplored area of the research at hand is the problematic customer in a transactional relationship. Regarding the “bad customers” condition, sales managers commented that as long as there is potential in the cooperation due to size or expected growth, one approach could be to change the sales representative- key account manager that serves them. In some cases the long-term or short-term customer view is relevant for the sales representative who serves them and not the approach followed. On the other hand, some customers have a problematic relationship and only look out for their own company interests in any cooperation. Especially for this type of customer, who is usually disreputable in the market, relationship investments should be diminished. Additionally, bad customers are usually the ones who ask the extra mile from the sales organization without any returns. If the selling organization accepts such requests there is a possibility that good customers will enjoy reduced service as well.

6.2.5. The learning process

The fact that a consultative sales approach was followed with greater intensity by sales representatives in subsequent rounds confirms the sales representatives’ commitment to the relationship but entails two possible threats from the selling organization. One is that sales representatives cannot interpret the negative signs from a customer that will not invest more in the relationship, thereby harming the profitability and abusing the advantages of a consultative sale. The subsequent threat is that by overinvesting in the wrong customer, the selling organization does not invest more in other existing customers and new customer allocation that could improve sales results.

The learning process results for ‘customer gratitude’ and ‘strategic sales approach,’ and ‘critical incident resolution’ prove that sales representatives are responsive to the relationship challenges and transform their approaches, their resources and their behavior towards the customer accordingly. Thus, the multiple measurements experimental design of this research, created the context for the research participants to respond in a way similar to the real-life sales.

6.3. Recommendations

Based on the research at hand there are some significant recommendations for sales managers and sales representatives. Starting with the sales managers, it is recommended that:

1. Based on an updated and accurate customer segmentation built upon the relational status between the customers and the selling organization, they should set specific amounts and types of sales representative investments for specific customers. Avoid common sales approaches that cover all customers and more specifically avoid efforts to create customer gratitude in a problematic relationship; avoid giving more to those customers who just ask for it.

2. Full CRM software implementation has to be supported by the sales representatives and the company but this is not enough. A CRM software effect is mainly visible in the long run when the accumulated information and corporate knowledge is fully integrated into it.

3. Before categorizing a customer relationship as problematic, try another sales representative with the same customer.

Continuing with sales representatives the following are recommended:

1. It is essential to use information to meet the complexity of demanding customers and markets. This use will help achieve better results, maintain and even improve the significance and the contribution of the selling profession in the contemporary selling landscape. Using data will allow a better job to be done, especially for sales representatives who use the consultative sales approach.

2. Where the customer relationship seems beneficial and has potential, do not hesitate to go the extra mile, even if the selling company's focus is short-term. Serve this customer as resourcefully as possible and document all successes in the system, at the end of the day sales goals will be achieved and the selling company will benefit.

3. The beginning of many good relationships was problem resolution; so focus on the problem and treat the critical incidents as opportunities for something bigger and better no matter the nature of the incident, no matter if it seems disastrous at first sight, these moments of truth define a long-term and successful buyer-seller relationship.

4. When the relationship with the customer is good, this is the time to do even more, to make this good customer feel grateful for the extra effort. Do not take the success of the relationship for granted. At the end of the day, only great relationship investments that focus on creating gratitude pay off.

6.4. Limitations and Suggestions for future research

The findings of this study are not definite. The greatest threat is the fact that sales representatives as research participants had to evaluate themselves in terms of performance and this fact creates potential bias (Behrman & Perreault, 1982). Additionally, to measure more the qualitative aspects of sales performance, the customer side has to be taken into account since the customer is the one who actually feels grateful, expresses satisfaction and

dissatisfaction with problem resolution, and can better explain the drivers behind choosing a short or long-term approach with a given selling organization. Dyadic research in business-to-business settings requires extensive cross-industrial research. However, one exciting aspect that can be studied in a longitudinal-dyadic setting is the degree to which buyer-seller relationships follow the rules of game theory (Camerer, 2010) and the Nash equilibrium (Camerer, 2010). A finding like that would be particularly innovative and would create robust rules for the issues that I have tried to partially highlight.

Moreover, research should focus more on the sales incentives side and not just on controlling this parameter but on incorporating it as a major element of the study. Incentives are significant in the sales profession and in many cases the way in which sales goals are set, the significance of the sales reward, and the degree to which the sales goals are achievable, determinate what the sales approach and the sales behavior will be. It became clear from the qualitative part of this study, that sales representatives are probably the most incentive-driven employees in commercial companies. Their salaries are also heavily interrelated with their performance and their performance is measured based on the targets set by their departments.

The fact that the construct of ‘transactional sales approach on a bad customer’ was not found sufficient for further analysis creates a gap in this research result. The combination of transactional sales and customer short-term focus should be better examined to provide information regarding the way this type of sales is performed, even if it does not entail the usage of sophisticated software, gratitude generation and critical incident resolution. Subsequently, the total ‘sales approach’ scale should be further used and checked for reliability and validity in order to be used as a well-established scale.

Finally, this research was conducted in the Greek market which has been in a recession for nine years now (2017) and the data collection was performed during what was financially the most difficult period (Summer-Autumn 2015), when capital controls were

imposed on Greek banks and comparatively speaking there was political instability. Inevitably, these external parameters affected the attitudes and the morale of the respondents, therefore similar research needs to be performed in more ordinary markets and more stable states over the long term.

6.4.1. Direction of causality

Lastly, one possible limitation could be the relationship direction among the constructs of the ‘sales approach’ and the ‘level of CRM software usage.’ This relationship direction is reasonable and supported at a theoretical level (Rigby, Reichheld, & Scheffer, 2002) and therefore after running SEM, on the table 35 there are presented the standardized beta coefficients and the percentage of variance explained for the six different sales approaches;

Table 35: Sales Approach predicting Level of usage

Sales Approach	Standardized Beta Coefficient	Percentage of Variance Explained	More significant than the other way
Transactional on Bad Customer	0.17	2%	No
Transactional on Good Customer	0.15	12.1%	No
Consultative on Bad Customer	0.28	5%	No
Consultative on Good Customer	0.55	10%	No
Strategic on Bad Customer	0.10**	27.5%	Yes
Strategic on Good Customer	0.07*	16.7%	No

*** p<0.001, two-tailed

** p<0.01, two-tailed

* p<0.05, two-tailed

The only relationship that is significant is the one between the strategic sales approach on a bad customer and the level of usage. When a sales representative follows this approach then, CRM software usage can be predicted. In general, based on the results presented on the previous table, causality cannot be claimed between sales approach and the level of CRM software usage with different direction than the one in the conceptual model of the research at

hand. However, additional research is needed to link CRM software usage with sales representatives' traits and preferred sales approaches using the same scales as the research at hand.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire Cover letter

Dear Sir/Madam

For the completion of my PhD I will run a survey with a sample of business to business salesmen and account managers. The research is relevant to the customer relationship management implementation during critical periods of a buyer- seller relationship.

For this research I am collaborating with the biggest market research company in Greece, the Greek Sales Institute and with my university in the Netherlands, Nyenrode Business University.

The scope of the research and the research questions were found extremely interesting during my presentation in the European Marketing Academy conference in Valencia last year (see the link below)

(<http://newsroom.nyenrode.nl/en/improving-sales-efficiency-through-information-technology2/>)

The research will be completed in three rounds; therefore I will need your email in order to send you the questionnaires, one per week. It goes without saying that all emails will be used strictly for this research and your anonymity is fully preserved. Finally, I can you upon request all the research results.

In case you want to participate and/or you need any additional information, please let me know.

Best Regards

Konstantinos

Appendix 2: The Research Questionnaire

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS SECTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I of the questionnaire

The questionnaire at hand is going to be filled in three rounds. During the completion you will not be allowed to change answers you provided in previous rounds. Thank you very much for your participation.

Imagine that you work as a sales representative in a construction wholesaler. A company like this is selling laminated wood, ceramic floor tiles, wall tiles, carpet floor tiles and granites to building manufacturers that undertake projects with a variety from airports and hospitals to summer resorts and normal buildings for domestic usage. **The technological turbulence of this market is low.** The basic material for covering floors are staying the same over time and decoration trends and interior design innovations are the only reason to propose something new and provocative. **The market turbulence of such industry is low too;** construction companies usually share their vision of creating buildings with the seller of the floor material and the companies co- create the ideas of filling the empty spaces of a new building. New companies are difficult to enter as competitors since they need a good investment on designing software, showrooms, warehouses and good contracts with a sufficient number of floor producers that provides them the variety of products and prices to fulfil buyer needs. The success of such companies is mainly based on a certain number of good projects that they can serve on an annual basis. The technological development is driven by interior design needs and usually for a limited number of expensive projects that have the ambition to be characterized as architectural innovations. **All in all technological development is rather low.** Taking into account the current economic downturn in Europe where real estate faces really tough times and at the same time the countries are developed enough to have significant infrastructure projects, like hospitals, schools or airports, **this market is facing recession.**

1. The description above was:
<input type="radio"/> Very Easy to Understand
<input type="radio"/> Easy to Understand
<input type="radio"/> Not Easy nor Difficult to Understand
<input type="radio"/> Difficult to Understand

<input type="radio"/> Very Difficult to Understand
2. How would you describe the Technological Turbulence of this industry?
<input type="radio"/> Very Low
<input type="radio"/> Low
<input type="radio"/> Not Low nor High
<input type="radio"/> High
<input type="radio"/> Very High
3. How would you describe the Technological Development of the products in this industry?
<input type="radio"/> Very Low
<input type="radio"/> Low
<input type="radio"/> Not Low nor High
<input type="radio"/> High
<input type="radio"/> Very High
4. How would you describe the Market Turbulence of this industry?
<input type="radio"/> Very Low
<input type="radio"/> Low
<input type="radio"/> Not Low nor High
<input type="radio"/> High
<input type="radio"/> Very High

5. How would you describe the growth rate of this industry?

Very Low
 Low
 Not Low nor High
 High
 Very High

6. Please distribute 10 points over the following sales accomplishments that are rewarded by your company giving more points to the ones that are rewarded better.

1. Sales representative achieves more revenues.	
2. Sales representative shares efficiently all important customer related information	
3. Sales representative has satisfied customers	
4. Sales representative maintains longest relationships with her/his customers.	
5. Sales representative finds new customers- markets to penetrate.	
6. Other, please specify _____	
Maximum	10

You have just started your job as a sales representative in the aforementioned company, responsible for a limited number of valuable customers- key accounts.

- The company has a strong customer base in the market and you have to cover these large customers and a bigger number of small and medium customers.
- **In this study imagine that all the customers that are going to be mentioned below are key accounts (The problematic customer is A, the good customer is B).**
- Your objective is to maintain all your existing customers, expanding their value as much as you can.
- New customers are rare in the market and the existing ones cooperate with a variety of suppliers.
- Your predecessor told you to be extremely careful with the key accounts, using Customer relationship

management systems to better serve their needs.

- You have to focus on your key accounts, meeting and contacting them, resolving all their problems and improving your position, the competition is harsh.
- Your manager wants you to share all the crucial information you gather from your contacts and the reward system is based on customer profitability (80%) and on reporting accurate and well-documented customer data (20%).
- You can handle your relationships independently based on your customer and marketing knowledge but you have to be very careful because the outcomes of your decision are crucial for your evolution in the organization (like in real life).
- The CRM system is connected to the company's ERP (enterprise resource planning) software.
- The CRM system includes several applications for the salesman like:
 - Customer Profiling
 - Customer Segmentation
 - Customer Complaint history
 - Customer Profitability analysis
 - Product presentation
 - Customer Contact history
 - Appointment Schedule
 - New customer allocation
- The customers for you as a salesman in the Construction Material market are big construction companies like Hochtief, Vinci, ACS or Bechtel and big construction material wholesalers.

Based on your experience, how many customers is a "limited number" of customers?

7.

Perceptions and attitude regarding CRM technology

Nowadays sales people are using more and more computer based information systems for keeping customer profiles, appointment history, market information etc. How would you feel about using these systems in your work as it was described above?

For each statement, check the box that best describes your expectations.

8. I expect using the system in my job would enable me to accomplish tasks more quickly.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

9. I expect using the system would improve my job performance.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

10. I expect using the system in my job would increase my productivity (quantity of sales).

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

11. I expect using the system would enhance my effectiveness on the job (quality of sales).

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

12. I expect using the system would make it easier to do my job.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

13. I expect I would find the system useful in my job.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Perceived firm-CRM commitment

Based on your experience so far, as a sales representative, and taking into account the details of the experiment at hand please answer the following questions.

14. Sales Managers will take into account my customer information inputs in customer relationship management system to evaluate positively my performance.
<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/> Disagree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Agree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree
15. When the reward system is connected with information sharing, (the more information I share the better evaluation I am going to have as a sales representative) the quality of my job can be easily improved.
<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree <input type="radio"/> Disagree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Agree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree
16. Management is really keen to see that we are happy using our Customer Relationship Management system.
<input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

17. Taking into account that the management has provided you the necessary training and help, you were encouraged to use Customer Relationship Management system quickly.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

18. The encouragement and the support from your immediate supervisor will be stimulating for you to use Customer Relationship Management system in your job.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

19. I am convinced that my immediate supervisor is sure as to what benefits can be achieved with the use of Customer Relationship Management system.

Strongly Disagree

- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

20. My immediate supervisor is always using the Customer Relationship Management system to perform their tasks.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

21. I will be influenced to use the Customer Relationship Management system more if my peers are always using the system to perform their tasks.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

22. I will be influenced to use the Customer Relationship Management system more if my subordinates are always using the system to perform their tasks.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

The Level of the system Usage

Based on your current routines and the experiment at hand, please answer the following questions.

23. I will fully use the capabilities of my organization's Customer Relationship Management system.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

24. I will use Customer Relationship Management system applications (such as smart phones applications, personal digital assistant (PDA), customer relationship management tools) that can improve my sales' process.

- Strongly Disagree

- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

25. I will use Customer Relationship Management system to sort, visualize and analyze customer data.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

26. I will consider myself a frequent user of Customer Relationship Management system.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

27. I will have completely integrated our Customer Relationship Management system applications into my sales process.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree

<input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree
<input type="radio"/> Agree
<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree

Part 2 of the questionnaire

A problematic group of your products is delivered to customer A of yours causing his firm lost revenues since these products could not be used or sold (products with technical problems). This incident has to be resolved by you.

28. Name the first three key words that come to your mind in such a case

(e.g. Discount, Contact- Apologize, Inform Supervisor, Ignore, Wait, Explain, Resolve now etc).

--

Based on your experience as a sales representative rank the likelihood of the occurrence of the following;

(All the following questions are rated on a 5 degree scale from 1- Highly unlikely to occur to 3 neither likely nor unlikely to 5- Highly likely to occur)

29. I will try to minimize the costs of this incident for my company
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur

Highly likely certain to occur

30. I will resolve this issue as efficiently as I can no matter the costs involved

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

31. I expect that the usage of CRM tools will help me resolve the problem.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

32. After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

33. I would dare to ensure my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for your company.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

34. After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

35. I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as Likely to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future.

Highly unlikely to occur

<input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur

36. I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings.

<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur

37. I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings.

<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur

38. I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, and tailored packaging and/or similar offerings.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

39. I believe that I can make this customer feel grateful to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

40. I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

41. I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

42. I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

You request from the customer of yours (B) who has benefited the most from his cooperation with your company to add more products (cross selling- up selling products) of your firm to his next order, note that your additional products will be similar in type and quality with products that your customer currently buys, products like these have already helped him to be successful in his/her market.

Based on your experience as a sales representative rate the likelihood of the occurrence of the following;

(All the following questions are rated on a 5 degree likert scale from 1-unlikely to occur to 3 neither likely nor unlikely to 5- Highly likely to occur)

43. The usage of CRM tools will help me persuade my customer by making a better offer, minimizing the cost for my company.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

44. The usage of CRM tools will help me create the best offer focusing on the long term result without considering the short term costs involved.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

45. I expect that the usage of CRM tools will help me persuade the customer by finding the arguments to propose an offer in line with my customer needs.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

46. After this attempt and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

47. After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that our market share will be increased (as a result of this first success).

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

48. I would dare to ensure my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result to positive word of mouth for our company.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur

49. I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future.

<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur

50. I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings as a way to make a better agreement.

<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur

--

51. I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings improving our personal relationship as a way to make a better agreement.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

52. I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, and tailored packaging and/or similar offerings integrating processes from the two companies as a way to make a better agreement.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

53. I believe I can make this customer feel grateful to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

54. I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

55. I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

56. I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

<input type="radio"/>	Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/>	Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/>	Highly likely to occur

End of 1st PART

Thank you very much for your time!

In case you want a copy of the research results or any additional information feel free to contact me by sending an email to the following address; konstantinos.rigopoulos@gmail.com

Or contact me directly calling 0030 69 47 822 412.

Part 3 of the questionnaire

The questionnaire at hand is going to be filled in three rounds. During the completion you will not be allowed to change previous rounds replies. Thank you very much for your participation.

You have just started your job as a sales representative in the aforementioned company, responsible for a limited number of valuable customers- key accounts.

- The company has a strong customer base in the market and you have to cover these large customers and a bigger number of small and medium customers.
- **In this study imagine that all the customers that are going to be mentioned below are key accounts (The problematic customer is A, the good customer is B).**
- Your objective is to maintain all your existing customers, expanding their value as much as you can.
- New customers are rare in the market and the existing ones cooperate with a variety of suppliers.
- Your predecessor told you to be extremely careful with the key accounts, using Customer relationship management systems to better serve their needs.
- You have to focus on your key accounts, meeting and contacting them, resolving all their problems and improving your position, the competition is harsh.
- Your manager wants you to share all the crucial information you gather from your contacts and the reward system is based on customer profitability (80%) and on reporting accurate and well-documented customer data (20%).
- You can handle your relationships independently based on your customer and marketing knowledge but you have to be very careful because the outcomes of your decision are crucial for your evolution in the organization (like in real life).
- The CRM system is connected to the company's ERP (enterprise resource planning) software.
- The CRM system includes several applications for the salesman like:
 - Customer Profiling
 - Customer Segmentation
 - Customer Complaint history
 - Customer Profitability analysis
 - Product presentation
 - Customer Contact history
 - Appointment Schedule
 - New customer allocation

- The customers for you as a salesman in the Construction Material market are big construction companies like Hochtief, Vinci, ACS or Bechtel and big construction material wholesalers.

The problematic customer A of yours accidentally destroys a load of your products resulting to lost resources for yours and his firm too. You try to resolve this problem effectively and quickly but you diminished your profitability too.

Name the first three key words that come to your mind in such a case

(E.g. Discount, Contact- Apologize, Inform Supervisor, Ignore, Wait, Explain, Resolve now etc.)

57.

Based on your experience as a sales representative rank the likelihood of the occurrence of the following;

(All the following questions are rated on a 5 degree likert scale from 1- Highly unlikely to occur to 3 neither likely nor unlikely to 5- Highly likely to occur)

58. I will try to minimize the costs of this incident for my company.
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Likely to occur <input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur
59. I will resolve this issue as efficiently as I can no matter the costs involved.
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur

- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

60. I expect that the usage of CRM tools will help me resolve the problem.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

61. After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

62. I would dare to ensure my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for our company.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

63. After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased .

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

64. I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur

<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur
65. I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings.
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Likely to occur <input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur
66. I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings.
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Likely to occur <input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur
67. I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, tailored packaging and/or similar offerings.
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

68. I believe I can make this customer feel grateful to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

69. I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

70. I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

71. I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

The customer B of yours who has benefited the most from his cooperation with your company is asking from you to split the cost of his commercial campaign, as mentioned above he/she is one of your key accounts and in case you deny probably this joint advertisement is going to be proposed to a competitor of yours. You decide to help him despite the additional cost, making decisions that exceed this commercial campaign, having as a goal to maintain a good relationship with this customer.

Name the first three key words that come to your mind in such a case

(e.g. Discount, Contact- Apologize, Inform Supervisor, Ignore, Wait, Explain, Resolve now etc.)

72.

Based on your experience as a sales representative rank the likelihood of the occurrence of the following:

(All the following questions are rated on a 5 degree likert scale from 1-unlikely to occur to 3 neither likely nor unlikely to 5- Highly likely to occur)

73. The usage of CRM tools will help me persuade my customer by making a better offer, minimizing the cost for my company.
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Likely to occur <input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur
74. The usage of CRM tools will help me create the best offer focusing on the long term result without considering the short term costs involved.
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Likely to occur <input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur
75. I expect that the usage of CRM tools will help me resolve this problem.
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

76. After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

77. I would dare to ensure my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for our company.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

78. I managed to have a joint advertisement with this customer; I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased (as a result of this first success).

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

79. I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

80. I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings as a way to make a better agreement.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

81. I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings improving our personal relationship as a way to make a better agreement.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

82. I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, and tailored packaging and/or similar offerings integrating processes from the two companies as a way to make a better agreement.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

83. I believe that I can make this customer feel grateful to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

<p><input type="radio"/> Likely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur</p>
--

84. I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.

<p><input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Likely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur</p>

85. I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.

<p><input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Likely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur</p>

86. I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts.

<p><input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur</p>
--

- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

End of 2nd PART

Thank you very much for your time!

In case you want a copy of the research results or any additional information feel free to contact me by sending an email to the following address konstantinos.rigopoulos@gmail.com or contact me directly calling 0030 69 47 822 412.

Part 4 of the questionnaire

The questionnaire at hand is going to be filled in three rounds. The first round is the longest and the second round the smallest. During the completion you will not be allowed to change previous rounds replies. Thank you very much for your participation.

You have just started your job as a sales representative in the aforementioned company, responsible for a limited number of valuable customers- key accounts.

- The company has a strong customer base in the market and you have to cover these large customers and a bigger number of small and medium customers.
- **In this study imagine that all the customers that are going to be mentioned below are key accounts (The problematic customer is A, the good customer is B).**
- Your objective is to maintain all your existing customers, expanding their value as much as you can.
- New customers are rare in the market and the existing ones cooperate with a variety of suppliers.
- Your predecessor told you to be extremely careful with the key accounts, using Customer relationship management systems to better serve their needs.
- You have to focus on your key accounts, meeting and contacting them, resolving all their problems and improving your position, the competition is harsh.
- Your manager wants you to share all the crucial information you gather from your contacts and the reward system is based on customer profitability (80%) and on reporting accurate and well-documented customer data (20%).
- You can handle your relationships independently based on your customer and marketing knowledge but you have to be very careful because the outcomes of your decision are crucial for your evolution in the organization (like in real life).
- The CRM system is connected to the company's ERP (enterprise resource planning) software.
- The CRM system includes several applications for the salesman like:
 - Customer Profiling
 - Customer Segmentation
 - Customer Complaint history
 - Customer Profitability analysis
 - Product presentation

- Customer Contact history
- Appointment Schedule
- New customer allocation
- The customers for you as a salesman in the Construction Material market are big construction companies like Hochtief, Vinci, ACS or Bechtel and big construction material wholesalers.

The problematic A customer has a cheaper offer from a competitor of yours for similar products. You meet him and you remind him of all the solutions you provided to him, trying to persuade him to keep up with you at least for the next season.

Name the first three key words that come to your mind in such a case

(e.g. Discount, Contact- Apologize, Inform Supervisor, Ignore, Wait, Explain, Resolve now etc).

87.

Based on your experience as a sales representative rank the likelihood of the occurrence of the following;

(All the following questions are rated on a 5 degree likert scale from 1- Highly unlikely to occur to 3 neither likely nor unlikely to 5- Highly likely to occur)

88. I will try to minimize the costs of this incident for my company.
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

89. I will resolve this issue as efficiently as I can no matter the costs involved.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

90. I expect that the usage of CRM tools will help me resolve the problem.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

91. After this incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

92. I would dare to ensure to my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for our company.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

93. After the resolution of this problem I could ensure my superiors that my market share will be increased .

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

Likely to occur

Highly likely to occur

94. I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future.

Highly unlikely to occur

Unlikely to occur

<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur

95. I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings.

<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur

96. I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings.

<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Likely to occur
<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur

97. I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, tailored packaging and/or similar offerings.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

98. I believe that I can make this customer feel grateful to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

99. I believe that this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

100. I believe that this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

101. I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

6th- Last Incident

The benefited customer B has a cheaper offer from a competitor of yours. You meet him and you remind him of all your efforts to help both firms to cooperate and be mutually benefited increasing the dual commercial, he seems persuaded to keep up with you at least for the next season.

Name the first three key words that come to your mind in such a case

(e.g. Discount, Contact- Apologize, Inform Supervisor, Ignore, Wait, Explain, Resolve now etc).

102.

Based on your experience as a sales representative rank the likelihood of the occurrence of the following;

(All the following questions are rated on a 5 degree likert scale from 1-unlikely to occur to 3 neither likely nor unlikely to 5- Highly likely to occur)

103. The usage of CRM tools will help me persuade my customer by making a better offer, minimizing the cost for my company.
<p><input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Likely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur</p>
104. The usage of CRM tools will help me create the best offer focusing on the long term result without considering the short term costs involved.
<p><input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Likely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur</p>

105. I expect that the usage of CRM tools will help me resolve the problem.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

106. After this Incident and my subsequent treatment I would dare to promise to my superior that the profitability from this customer will increase for the next season.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

107. I would dare to ensure my superiors that this incident if treated correctly will result in positive word of mouth for our company.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur

<input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur
<p>108. I managed to have a joint advertisement with this customer; I could ensure my superiors that my overall market share will be increased (as a result of this first success).</p>
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Likely to occur <input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur
<p>109. I will document this problem resolution as clearly and comprehensively as possible to help my company improve its total product offering and resolve similar problems in the future.</p>
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Likely to occur <input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur
<p>110. I will give this customer financial benefits such as price discount, free products and similar benefits and/or similar offerings as a way to make a better agreement.</p>
<input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur

- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

111. I will give this customer social benefits such as, entertainment, special treatment, meals and personalized information and/or similar offerings improving our personal relationship as a way to make a better agreement.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

112. I will give this customer strategic benefits such as customized order processing systems, dedicated personnel, and tailored packaging and/or similar offerings integrating processes from the two companies as a way to make a better agreement.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

113. I believe I can make this customer feel grateful to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur

- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

114. I believe this customer took positive decisions for me based on his/her gratitude for my extra effort.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

115. I believe this customer has given more business to me because he owed to me.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

116. I believe that I have received opportunities to sell additional products as a payback for my efforts.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

Based on your experience as a sales representative rank the likelihood of the occurrence of the following;

(All the following questions are rated on a 5 degree likert scale from 1-unlikely to occur to 3 neither likely nor unlikely to 5- Highly likely to occur)

117. I believe that the treatment to the problematic customer will lead me to increase sales growth.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

118. I believe that the treatment to the problematic customer will lead my firm to increase my market share from this customer.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur

<p><input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Likely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur</p>
--

119. I can assure my supervisor that the profitability from the problematic customer will be higher in the long run as a result of my treatment to the problems occurred.

<p><input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Likely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur</p>

120. I believe that the way I treated the problematic customer helped me improve my company's total product offering.

<p><input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Likely to occur</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Highly likely to occur</p>

121. I believe that the treatment to the benefited customer will lead me to increase sales growth.

<p><input type="radio"/> Highly unlikely to occur</p>

- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

122. I believe that the treatment to the benefited customer will lead my firm to increase my market share from this customer.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

123. I can assure my supervisor that the profitability from the benefited customer will be higher in the long run as a result of my treatment to the problems occurred.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

124. I believe that the way I treated the benefited customer helped me improve my company's total product offering.

- Highly unlikely to occur
- Unlikely to occur
- Neither likely nor unlikely to occur
- Likely to occur
- Highly likely to occur

Now please provide us some information about yourself.

125. How old are you?

126. Gender

- Male
- Female

127. Please indicate your highest level of education

- High School
- Bachelor (HBO)
- Master (Msc, MBA)

- | Doctorate
- | Other (please specify)

128. Your position in your firm is;

129. Years of experience in current firm- industry- position

130. Total years of working as a sales representative

131. Do you know the researcher personally?

- | YES
- | NO

The following questions are relevant to the percentage of time spent to different tasks in a normal day in work. Please divide 100 points among the different tasks, where the most time consuming task should receive the most points.

132. Communication with customers (both personal and impersonal), spending time with customers.

133. Business meetings in the firm.

134. Journey time spend between appointments with customers. Travelling time.

135. Data retrieval and analysis of customer information. Administrative activities.

136. Data entry to enrich customer profiles. Customer/market Research.

137. Information seeking outside firm's databases (magazines, internet etc.).

138. Other tasks (please specify).....

End of the Questionnaire

Thank you very much for your time!

In case you want a copy of the research results or any additional information feel free to contact me by sending an email to the following address konstantinos.rigopoulos@gmail.com or contact me directly calling 0030 69 47 822 412.

Appendix 3: Percentage of Variance explained and antecedents for each dependent construct

Antecedent	Outcome	R ²
1. Transactional Sales Approach on a Bad Customer		
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	54.4%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment		
Level of CRM software usage	Transactional Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	2.8%
2. Transactional Sales Approach on a Good Customer		
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	56.6%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment		
Level of CRM software usage	Transactional Sales Approach on a Good Customer	36.3%
3. Consultative Sales Approach on a Bad Customer		
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	57.2%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment		
Level of CRM software usage	Consultative Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	45.1%
4. Consultative Sales Approach on a Good Customer		
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	54.9%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment		
Level of CRM software usage	Consultative Sales Approach on a Good Customer	5.1%
5. Strategic Sales Approach on a Bad Customer		
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	55.0%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment		
Level of CRM software usage	Strategic Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	12.5%
6. Strategic Sales Approach on a Good Customer		
Perceived CRM usefulness	Level of CRM software usage	57.0%
Selling Firm- CRM commitment		
Level of CRM software usage	Strategic Sales Approach on a Good Customer	29.7%
7. Transactional Sales Approach on a Bad Customer		
Transactional Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Critical Incident Resolution	59.2%
Transactional Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Customer Gratitude	8.8%
Critical Incident Resolution	Relationship Outcome (Bad Customer)	59.4%
Customer Gratitude		
8. Transactional Sales Approach on a Good Customer		
Transactional Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Critical Incident Resolution	69.0%
Transactional Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Customer Gratitude	74.5%
Critical Incident Resolution	Relationship Outcome (Good Customer)	73.4%
Customer Gratitude		
9. Consultative Sales Approach on a Bad Customer		
Consultative Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Critical Incident Resolution	12.5%
Consultative Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Customer Gratitude	5.2%

Critical Incident Resolution	Relationship Outcome (Good Customer)	65.7%
Customer Gratitude		
10. Consultative Sales Approach on a Good Customer		
Consultative Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Critical Incident Resolution	23.6%
Consultative Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Customer Gratitude	22.6%
Critical Incident Resolution	Relationship Outcome (Good Customer)	67.8%
Customer Gratitude		
11. Strategic Sales Approach on a Bad Customer		
Strategic Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Critical Incident Resolution	38.7%
Strategic Sales Approach on a Bad Customer	Customer Gratitude	12.1%
Critical Incident Resolution	Relationship Outcome (Bad Customer)	73.1%
Customer Gratitude		
12. Strategic Sales Approach on a Good Customer		
Strategic Sales Approach on a Good Customer	Critical Incident Resolution	29.7%
Strategic Sales Approach on a Good Customer	Customer Gratitude	36.2%
Critical Incident Resolution	Relationship Outcome (Good Customer)	75.6%
Customer Gratitude		

Summary (Dutch)

Academisch onderzoek toont dat in business-to-business markten met customer intelligence de verkoopresultaten significant zijn te verbeteren. Tegelijkertijd wordt het verband tussen het *proces van ontwikkelen en implementeren* van customer intelligence en de toename van de verkoopresultaten in zakelijke markten nog niet aangetroffen. Het feit dat dit verband nog niet is vastgesteld wordt aan uiteenlopende oorzaken toegeschreven, verband houdend met de interne en de externe omgeving van de organisatie en het karakter van de klant-leverancier relatie. Deze studie toont welke factoren de succesvolle implementatie van customer intelligence beïnvloeden en hoe deze de uitkomsten van zakelijke relaties veranderen. De resultaten zijn een aanvulling op bestaande belangrijke studies en er wordt een nieuwe benadering voorgesteld om customer intelligence te implementeren in ‘business to business sales’.

In hoofdstuk 1 wordt de context van verkoop in de zakelijke markt beschreven in relatie tot de ontwikkeling van informatietechnologie. Aangegeven wordt hoe klantinformatie vanuit verschillende bronnen wordt verzameld, in lijn met de verkoopstrategie, met het oog op het ondersteunen van verkopers. In hoofdstuk 2, wordt geanalyseerd hoe het verkooplandschap in het digitale tijdperk verandert en hoe diverse parameters de dagelijkse verkooproutines veranderen. Parameters waaraan aandacht wordt geschonken zijn klantverwachtingen, de complexiteit van de organisatie, informatieinfrastructuur en de mogelijkheden voor klant en leverancier om contact te hebben.

In hoofdstuk 3 mondt de literatuurstudie uit in de formulering van het conceptuele model en de bijbehorende hypothesen. In hetzelfde hoofdstuk wordt het belang van sales incentives uitgelegd, alsmede de behoefte aan de uitwerking van de verkoopbenadering in lijn met de klantbehoeften, de rol van gunning in de ontwikkeling van de klant-leverancierrelatie

en de zwaarwegende rol van de wijze waarop kritische incidenten in de relatie worden opgelost op de uitkomsten van de relatie. Het onderzoeksontwerp, samen met de validiteit van de gehanteerde constructen, komt in hoofdstuk 4 aan bod. Het kwalitatief onderzoek dat aan de basis van de ontwikkeling van de vragenlijst staat, wordt beschreven.

In hoofdstuk vijf worden met structurele vergelijkingmodellen de hypothesen getoetst. Het zesde hoofdstuk beschrijft de beperkingen van het onderzoek; de uitkomsten van het onderzoek worden bediscussieerd. De relevantie van het gepercipieerde nut van customer intelligence en organisatiesupport voor customer intelligence adoptie door verkoop komt aan bod. Verder blijkt dat gunning een positieve invloed heeft op klant-leverancierrelaties als deze wederzijds van waarde is. De wijze waarop kritische incidenten worden opgelost, is ongeacht de aard van de relatie, van invloed op de relatie.

Deze uitkomsten zijn waardevol voor salesmanagers; ze geven aan dat de klantsegmentatie gebaseerd moet zijn op het ontwikkelingsstadium van de relatie met de klant. Deze segmentatie vormt het fundament voor een succesvolle implementatie van de customer intelligence. Mede in het licht van de explosieve toename waarin data beschikbaar komen, blijkt het gebruik van customer intelligence door verkoop nodig voor het verbeteren van de verkoopresultaten. Tot slot, het is cruciaal dat verkoop verder investeert in een wederzijds waardevolle relatie, teneinde meer gunning te krijgen, effectief kritische incidenten in de relatie te adresseren en uiteindelijk de duurzame positieve ontwikkeling van relatie-uitkomsten zeker te stellen.

Summary (English)

Previous academic research supports that Customer Intelligence can improve business to business sales results. At the same time, other academic research fails to support causality between customer intelligence implementation and improvement in business to business sales results. This absence of a relationship has been attributed to a plethora of causes that can be found in the selling organization's internal environment, its external environment and in specific buyer-seller relationship traits. The study at hand examines how these causes affect the successful implementation of customer intelligence in business to business sales and subsequently how business to business relationship outcomes can be improved. The findings complement conclusions of significant studies, proposing a new approach of customer intelligence implementation in business to business sales.

In Chapter one, business to business sales context is described taking into account information technology development. It is explained how customer information gathered from a variety of sources, along with the appropriate sales strategy, is vital for sales representatives' support. In Chapter two, the contemporary sales landscape is described focusing on parameters that affect sales representatives' everyday routines in today's digital era. These parameters include customer expectations, selling organization complexity, information infrastructure and buyer-seller communication possibilities.

In Chapter three, the conceptual model creation process is analyzed along with the literature-based hypotheses development. In the same chapter, the significance of the sales incentives is explained along with the need for sales approach and customer needs alignment, the role that customer gratitude has in the formation of a functional buyer-seller relationship, and the gravity the critical incident resolution has on the business to business relationship outcome. The research methodology as well as the validity of the study's constructs is

analyzed in Chapter four where the qualitative research needed for the questionnaire construction is presented too.

In Chapter five the hypotheses testing results through structural equation modeling are presented. In Chapter six the research implications are discussed supporting the significance of customer intelligence perceived usefulness and customer intelligence organizational support on its deployment by the sales representatives. Moreover, it is supported that customer gratitude affects buyer-seller relationship only when it is mutually beneficial. On the contrary, critical incident resolution improves buyer-seller relationship no matter the buyer-seller relationship status.

These results are significant for sales managers since it is supported that customer segmentation has to be based on customer current relationship status with the vendor company. This segmentation is the foundation for the successful deployment of customer intelligence. Furthermore, considering the contemporary data explosion, customer intelligence usage from sales representatives is necessary for improving their sales results based on customer information, market information and critical incident resolution information. Finally, it is vital for the sales representatives to further invest in mutually beneficial relationships aiming at customer gratitude and effective critical incident resolution, safeguarding sustainable positive business to business relationship outcomes.

Summary (Greek)

Προηγούμενες ακαδημαϊκές έρευνες υποστηρίζουν πως η χρήση συστημάτων διαχείρισης πελατειακών σχέσεων μπορεί να βελτιώσει τα αποτελέσματα των πωλήσεων μεταξύ επιχειρήσεων. Ταυτόχρονα άλλες έρευνες αποτυγχάνουν να αποδείξουν την ύπαρξη αιτιώδους συνάφειας μεταξύ της εισαγωγής των συστημάτων αυτών στις διεπιχειρησιακές πωλήσεις και την βελτίωση των αποτελεσμάτων πωλήσεων. Αυτή η απουσία βελτίωσης έχει αποδοθεί σε μία πληθώρα αιτιών που εντοπίζονται στο εσωτερικό περιβάλλον της πωλήτριας επιχείρησης, στο εξωτερικό της περιβάλλον αλλά και σε χαρακτηριστικά της σχέσης που αναπτύσσεται μεταξύ των δύο επιχειρήσεων, αγοράστριας-πωλήτριας. Η παρούσα διατριβή εξετάζει πως αυτά τα αίτια επηρεάζουν την επιτυχία της χρήσης των συστημάτων διαχείρισης πελατειακών σχέσεων και κατ' επέκταση την βελτίωση των αποτελεσμάτων των διεπιχειρησιακών πωλήσεων. Τα ευρήματα της διατριβής συμπληρώνουν τα ευρήματα βασικών ερευνών προτείνοντας μία νέα προσέγγιση στην εφαρμογή συστημάτων διαχείρισης πελατειακών σχέσεων στις διεπιχειρησιακές πωλήσεις.

Στο πρώτο κεφάλαιο περιγράφεται το περιβάλλον των βιομηχανικών πωλήσεων σήμερα λαμβάνοντας υπόψη την εξέλιξη της ψηφιακής τεχνολογίας. Επεξηγείται πως η χρήση πληροφοριών που έχουν συλλεχθεί για τους πελάτες από μία πληθώρα πηγών, συνδυασμένη με την κατάλληλη στρατηγική πωλήσεων είναι καθοριστικής σημασίας για την υποστήριξη των εκπροσώπων πωλήσεων. Στο δεύτερο κεφάλαιο περιγράφονται συγκεκριμένες παράμετροι που επηρεάζουν την καθημερινότητα των εκπροσώπων πωλήσεων όπως αυτές έχουν διαμορφωθεί στην σημερινή ψηφιακή εποχή. Οι παράμετροι αυτοί περιλαμβάνουν τις προσδοκίες των πελατών, την περιπλοκότητα των πωλητριών επιχειρήσεων, την διαθεσιμότητα των πληροφοριών αλλά και τις δυνατότητες επικοινωνίας μεταξύ πωλητή και πελάτη.

Στο τρίτο κεφάλαιο αναλύεται η διαδικασία δημιουργίας του εννοιολογικού μοντέλου της διατριβής που βασίζεται σε υποθέσεις που προκύπτουν από την βιβλιογραφία. Στο ίδιο κεφάλαιο, επεξηγείται η σημασία του ρόλου των κινήτρων στις πωλήσεις, η ανάγκη προσαρμογής της προσέγγισης του εκπροσώπου πωλήσεων ανάλογα με τον πελάτη, ο ρόλος της ευγνωμοσύνης στην διαμόρφωση λειτουργικής σχέσης πωλητή- πελάτη αλλά και η βαρύτητα που έχει για την εξέλιξη της διεπιχειρησιακής σχέσης η παροχή λύσης σε προβλήματα του πελάτη. Η μεθοδολογία της έρευνας καθώς και η εγκυρότητα της δομής της αναλύονται στο τέταρτο κεφάλαιο όπου παρουσιάζεται και η διαδικασία δημιουργίας του ερωτηματολογίου μέσα από ποιοτική έρευνα.

Στο πέμπτο κεφάλαιο παρουσιάζονται τα αποτελέσματα του ελέγχου των υποθέσεων βάσει μοντέλων δομικών εξισώσεων και σύγκρισης μοντέλων δομικών εξισώσεων μεταξύ ομάδων. Στο έκτο κεφάλαιο παρουσιάζονται τα συμπεράσματα της διατριβής που υποστηρίζουν πως είναι πολύ σημαντικό οι εκπρόσωποι πωλήσεων να θεωρούν τα συστήματα διαχείρισης πελατειακών σχέσεων κομμάτι της βασικής επιχειρησιακής στρατηγικής και ικανά να βελτιώσουν την ποιότητα της δουλειάς τους. Επιπλέον η ευγνωμοσύνη του πελάτη έχει αποτέλεσμα στην διεπιχειρησιακή σχέση μόνο όταν αυτή θεωρείται αμοιβαία επωφελής. Εξάλλου, υποστηρίζεται ότι η παροχή λύσης σε προβλήματα πελατών έχει καθοριστική σημασία στην εξέλιξη της σχέσης με τον πελάτη αλλά και στα αποτελέσματα των πωλήσεων σε κάθε περίπτωση.

Τα αποτελέσματα αυτής της διατριβής έχουν μεγάλη αξία για τους διευθυντές πωλήσεων καθώς υποστηρίζουν την σημασία της κατηγοριοποίησης των πελατών με βάση την κατάσταση της σχέσης τους με την πωλήτρια εταιρεία. Η κατηγοριοποίηση αυτή είναι η βάση για την επιτυχημένη εισαγωγή συστημάτων διαχείρισης πελατειακών σχέσεων. Άλλωστε δεδομένης της πληθώρας πληροφοριών σήμερα, είναι απολύτως απαραίτητη η χρήση των συστημάτων αυτών από τους εκπροσώπους πωλήσεων ώστε να βελτιώσουν τα

αποτελέσματά τους λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τόσο πληροφορίες σχετικές με τον πελάτη αλλά και με την αγορά και την αντιμετώπιση προβλημάτων. Τέλος, προτείνεται η επιπλέον επένδυση σε αμοιβαία επωφελείς διεπιχειρησιακές σχέσεις με έμφαση στην λύση προβλημάτων και στην δημιουργία ευγνωμοσύνης από την πλευρά του πελάτη με στόχο την διασφάλιση σταθερών ικανοποιητικών αποτελεσμάτων για την πωλήτρια εταιρεία.

