

B2B Customer Experience: A Pragmatic Framework for Implementation

Roberto Mora Cortez and Wesley J. Johnston
Georgia State University

Abstract

Customer Experience (CX) is probably the most novel concept of marketing science. Its known genesis comes from applied publications in the late 1990s. Since then, researchers have been inspired and thus have developed studies mainly focused on the business-to-consumer (B2C) context. In business-to-business (B2B) research, however, there is no clear understanding of the term and its implications; only three publications actually include B2B data in a differentiated manner and analyzed the particularities of the industrial setting. Since the world is turning to experiences, there is a need of conceptual and practical clarifications; therefore, we review the applied and academic literature of CX from the last 20 years. We introduce the three-layer B2B CX framework in order to position a theoretical and pragmatic milestone. The layers' interaction involves: B2B experience life cycle map, customer service, and expectations. The specified seven phases in the experience life cycle map are a key contribution to the sequential development of B2B CX with time as the parameter. We include both supplier and customer perspectives in our analyses and state difference between a product-centric and service-centric context. Then, we introduce into the model the customer team and the supplier team in order to strongly emphasize that B2B CX involves multiple human interaction with support of virtual elements. We represent this interaction through an empirical case. The experience is *lived* individually, and, therefore, is corrected by personal expectations that are generally influenced by corporate goals and requirements. These personal experiences are shared through interaction by all decision making unit (DMU) participants. Finally, we discuss how B2B CX can be managed by practitioners and how researchers can improve theory building over our key foundations.

Keywords: customer experience, life cycle map, customer service, expectations, decision making unit.

Introduction

According to Palmer (2010), the term *customer experience* (CX) has been so widely used and abused that a potentially important construct is in danger of being dismissed because of the ambiguous manner in which it has been applied. Numerous attempts have been made in the literature to describe the concept, formulating various models of CX depicting different approaches (e.g., Gentile et al. 2007; Grewal et al., 2009; Nasution et al., 2014; Payne et al., 2008; Verhoef et al., 2009; Voss et al., 2008). In addition, practitioner literature has established some applied understanding of CX (e.g., Berry et al., 2002; Duncan et al., 2013; Meyer and Schwager, 2007). Other academics have changed the focus to *customer experience quality* (CXQ) (e.g., Klaus and Maklan, 2013; Lemke et al., 2011; Maklan and Klaus, 2011) or to *customer experience management* (CXM) (e.g., Homburg et al., 2015; Palmer, 2010). CXQ has been defined as "a perceived judgment about the excellence or superiority of the customer experience" and CXM "refers to the cultural mindsets toward customer experiences (CXs), strategic directions for designing CXs, and firm capabilities for continually renewing CXs, with the goals of achieving and sustaining long-term customer loyalty."

The most significant gap in the literature relates to the business-to-business (B2B) area. Just three articles (Biedenbach and Marell, 2010; Johnston and Kong, 2011; and Lemke et al., 2011) have defined a model, completely or partially, focused on B2B CX. Moreover, a limited number of papers have examined the concept through a case study review (e.g., MacGillavry and Wilson, 2014; Pillai, A., and George, B., 2015). Finally, it is possible to find only a few practitioner articles (e.g., Ulaga and Michel, 2014). Therefore, it can be established that there is a lack of comprehensive theory around B2B CX. The limited

amount of formal research focusing on B2B CX, the lack of agreement among approaches, and the absence of previous efforts to integrate the disparate views of B2B CX can be seen as stimuli and the basis for a theory-based conceptual model.

The purpose of this paper is to review exhaustively what has been done so far in the area of B2B CX, define and integrate the drivers and foundations of B2B CX through a theoretical model, and give useful instructions for managerial issues. To date, researchers in B2B marketing have not separated from the *business to consumer* (B2C) characterization of the *customer experience* concept (e.g., Gentile et al., 2007; Grewal et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009), which is based mainly on the early conceptualization of the experiential aspect of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Why should we be studying B2B CX separately from business to consumer (B2C) CX? As it is widely accepted in organizational buying literature (e.g., Bunn, 1994; Johnston and Bonoma, 1981; Ronchetto et al., 1989), B2B CX involves multiple-person participation. In addition, the rational bias in the organizational buying behavior could predispose the B2B CX. However, even the most *rational* of people use feelings to assist themselves in managerial situations (Monroe et al., 2015). Several authors (e.g., Sherlock, 1992) do not refute the fact that people do not always process information in a rational manner. Moreover, Addis and Holbrook (2001) stated that experiential consumption can be analyzed not only from a rational viewpoint, but also from contextual and symbolic viewpoints.

We start by reviewing the general CX literature. Then we examine the previous B2B CX research in depth. Next, we present the three layers of a B2B CX model, describing its application for services and products. Then we introduce the decision making unit (DMU) of the industrial customer and its implications for the model, in parallel with the responsibilities of the supplier's team. We develop an empirical example of B2B CX in order to clarify the model. Finally, we discuss and summarize key propositions and provide suggestions for future research.

The customer experience (CX) concept

Increased academic attention has been paid to whether or not and how the *customer experience* (CX) concept might go beyond service (Lemke et al., 2011). The *commoditization* view of service has been present in diverse publications (e.g., Gilmore and Pine, 2002; Schmitt, 1999). The idea of an evolution in the dominant basis for marketing-based competitive advantage was developed by Christopher et al. (1991), who noted that, during the 1950s and 1960s, the competitive advantage of enterprises was focused initially on tangible product qualities, and changed gradually to services in the 1970s. In the 1980s, services started to become generic as well, and the quality of relationships was positioned as the new differentiation (Christopher et al., 1991). Recently, in this sense, Palmer (2010) argued that experience may be a differentiator in markets where relationships have ceased to be a point of competitive differential advantage; Nasution et al. (2014) stated that “practitioners evolved to provide differentiation through developing unique experiences in their offerings”; and Voss et al. (2008) explained that experience can be used proactively to create distinctive product and service offerings. Consistent with Johnston and Kong (2011), providing a positive experience is also relevant because it has implications over diverse marketing issues: it affects customer satisfaction (Lijander and Strandvik, 1997), delivers customer loyalty (e.g., Yu and Dean, 2001), influences expectations (e.g., Johnson and Mathews, 1997), instills confidence (Flanagan et al., 2005), supports the brand (e.g., Grace and O’Cass, 2004), enhances word-of-mouth (Klaus and Maklan, 2013), generates brand equity (Biedenbach and Marell, 2010), and creates emotional bonds with customers (Pullman and Gross, 2004).

Empirical studies have supported the idea that improvements need to be made in terms of implementing the CX. On the one hand, Coffman and Stotz (2007) cited a study developed by Bain & Co. of 362 companies, involving different industries and their customers, finding that only eight percent of the customers described their experience as superior, while 80% of the senior executives of the suppliers

believed they were providing a superior CX. Arnold et al. (2005) connected terrible experiences with negative outcomes, such as voicing of complaints and unfavorable word-of-mouth. Kim and Choi (2013) showed in a B2C service context that the CX has a direct and positive impact on customer loyalty. On the other hand, Analysegruppen (2014) showed that the experience in a B2B environment is becoming more important in the market, comparing the relative weighting relevance among experience, products and price. The data collected for the year 2014 indicated 43%, 37%, and 20%, respectively, and for the year 2020, estimated 50%, 34%, and 16%, respectively. Moreover, as expressed in Homburg et al. (2015), a survey (Gardner, 2014) on marketing's role in companies revealed that by 2016, 89% of companies expect to compete primarily by CXM, compared with 36% in 2010. Theoretically, Berry et al. (2002) argue that companies with scarce sensitivity to CX that focus only on cost reductions can decrease the value of their offerings. Furthermore, transcendent CXs have the power to affect customers' attitudes and behaviors (Schouten et al., 2007).

Since Verhoef et al. (2009) listed studies that provided an overview of the CX concept (Berry et al., 2002; Gentile, et al., 2007; Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982; Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Naylor et al., 2008; Sousa and Voss, 2006), many newer studies have been released (e.g., Chahal and Dutta, 2014; Dumitrescu et al., 2012; Kim and Choi, 2013; Maklan and Klaus, 2011; Nasution, 2014; Pozza, 2014), contributing to the enhancement of a rigorous analysis of CX. In addition, Brackus et al. (2009) defined the *brand experience* (BX) as a concept intrinsically attached to CX, "as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environment. Components of Brackus et al.'s (2009) definition of BX are very similar to the dimensions of CX stated by Gentile et al., (2007): sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle, and relational; or those stated by Schmitt (1999): sense, feel, think, act and relate. Therefore, it can be assumed that there is still confusion as to what *customer experience* (CX) really is and how it is generated. An important study of the contribution to the differentiation of the CX concept from other marketing terms was done by Homburg et al. (2015), introducing CXM as "higher-order resource that entails cultural mindsets toward CXs, strategic directions for designing CXs, and firm capabilities for continually renewing CXs, with the goals of achieving and sustaining long-term customer loyalty." They contrasted CXM with CRM and *market orientation* (MO), declaring that CRM and MO have a firm-centric bias toward market performance and profit maximization.

Some of the first authors to publish and popularize the concept of CX in *modern days* were Carbone and Haeckel (1994) and Pine and Gilmore (1998). The former defined *customer experience* as "the takeaway impression formed by people's encounters with products, services, and businesses." The latter stated that a *customer experience* occurs "when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event." Holbrook (2006) cited Abbott (1955) as one of earliest authors that discussed experience as a marketing issue. Abbott (1955) stated that "... what people really desire are not products, but satisfying experiences."

What is customer experience (CX)?

Many contemporary definitions of CX have been developed in the last 20 years. According to Meyer and Schwager (2007), "Customer Experience is the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact." They define *direct contacts* as interactions occurring generally during the purchase, use, and service, and *indirect contacts* as unplanned encounters with physical and symbolic elements of the supplier, such as word-of-mouth, advertising, and news. Lemke et al. (2011) define CX as "the customer subjective response to the holistic direct and indirect encounter with the firm, including, but not necessarily limited to, the communication encounter, the service encounter and the consumption encounter. Payne et al. (2008) defined the customer's experience of a supplier and its products "as a culmination of the customer's cognitions, emotions and behavior during the relationship." The last conceptualization we want to offer is the one made by Verhoef et al. (2009) in a retailing context. They

defined the CX construct as “holistic in nature and involves the customer’s cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses”; moreover, these authors emphasize there are elements that cannot be controlled by the supplier and CX “encompasses the total experience, including the search, purchase, consumption, and after-sale phases of the experience.” In Table 1 we provide a comprehensive general outlook of studies that define the CX term directly or indirectly.

As mentioned by Voss et al. (2008), any contact or moment of truth (Carlzon, 1987) is part of the CX. The six core characteristics of the CX include:

- the temporal aspect, which is originated from the beginning of the *customer journey* (Duncan et al., 2013) until the end of it, between the customer and any element associated with the supplier or its offerings;
- the personal level of analysis due to CX involves rational and emotional engagement (Gentile et al., 2007);
- the fact that some researchers (e.g., Smith, 1993) have found that direct encounters with the supplier offering (e.g., product or service trial) have an overweight regarding indirect contacts (e.g., advertising), which is especially true in B2B interactions;
- not all the contact points have an equivalent relevance (Meyer and Schwager, 2007);
- customers do not consume features; they consume performance (Deighton, 1992); and, finally,
- customers' goals determine the relative distinctness of the offering and supplier, so customers notice what is meaningful for them (Puccinelli et al., 2009; Woodruff and Flint, 2006; Lemke et al., 2011).

Another significant attribute of CX comes from behavioral science (Voss et al., 2008). The experience can involve not just utilitarian value, but hedonic elements of pleasure or pain (Matters et al., 2003). The prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979) expresses that losses hurt more than gains feel good, and this follows their design of the value function, which is generally concave for gains and commonly convex for losses. In addition, Chase and Dasu (2001) gave five principles to improve service experiences:

- finish strong: last impressions—not the first ones—stay in customers' memories (based on the work of Kahneman et al., 1993);
- get bad experiences over with early;
- segment pleasure, combine pain (based on the work of Thaler, 1999);
- build customer commitment through choice; and
- stick to rituals, because people find comfort, order, and meaning in repetitive, familiar activities.

Finally, regarding the newest issue affecting CX in the recent years, Trainor (2012) stated that, in the current competitive marketplace, the use of social media tools can dramatically influence firm performance through customer engagement and the value created from customer interactions. In addition, social media empowers customers to learn from the experience of others (Meseguer-Artola and Rodríguez-Ardura, 2015). Social media usage is also extending beyond B2C settings (Rapp et al., 2013). Specifically, more than 93% of B2B marketers already use one or more forms of social media to interact with their customers (Holden-Bache, 2011). However, findings from Agnihotri et al. (2015) suggest that social media play an important role in communicating information to customers, but only as an antecedent enhancing salesperson behaviors to increase customer satisfaction rather than a direct factor. Introducing this perspective allows for the CX not being completely controlled by the supplier.

Table 1: General outlook of literature on CX definitions and frameworks

Author(s)	Publication	Year	Context	CX Definition and/or Models	Study Type
Berry et al.	MIT Sloan Management Review	2002	General	The CX is made up through experience's clues (two categories). The first concern the actual functioning of the good or service. The second category concerns emotions and includes the smells, sounds, sights, tastes and textures of the good or service, as well as the environment in which it is offered.	Applied
Biedenbach & Marell	Journal of Brand Management	2010	B2B services	The CX construct in this study refers to the experience of different members of a decision making unit, who are directly involved in the choice of the service provider, and who had a direct experience with the company's employees providing the service.	Research
Brakus et al.	Journal of Marketing	2009	B2C	The CX arises in a variety of settings. Most experiences occur directly when the consumer shops, buys, and consumes products. Experiences can also occur indirectly—for example, when consumers are exposed to advertising and marketing communications, including websites.	Research
Chahal & Dutta	The Marketing Review	2014	B2C	The CX is conceptualized through five experiential dimensions (Schmitt, 1999). It includes four determinants (core, supportive, contextual, and socio-characteristics), adding the degree of customer involvement as moderator between the determinants and the customer experience dimensions. It proposes that CX has three possible outcomes: satisfaction, loyalty/word-of-mouth, and brand equity.	Research
Dumitrescu et al.	Studies in Business & Economics	2012	General	The CX comprises the total experience, starting from the search, continuing with the purchase and consumption, and finally with the after-sale experience, which may or may not involve cognitive dissonance.	Research
Gentile et al.	European Management Journal	2007	B2C	The CX originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provokes a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual). Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact.	Research
Ghose	Journal of Brand Management	2002	General (online)	The CX needs to be understood by the internal brand proprietor in terms of how the customer perceives the interactions with the website, taking into account the entire customer experience and not only the economic transaction.	Research
Grewal et al.	Journal of Retailing	2009	B2C (retail)	The CX is developed through firm-controlled factors or retail drivers (promotion, price, merchandise, supply chain, and location) and macro factors that affect retail drivers as well as customer experience. Their model also includes the assumption that marketing and financial metrics of the retailers affects the retail drivers.	Research
Holbrook & Hirschmann	Journal of Consumer Research	1982	B2C	The CX (consumption) has begun to be seen as involving a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun.	Research

Homburg et al.	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	2015	General	CX is the evolvement of a person's sensorial, affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioral responses to a firm or brand by living through a journey of touchpoints along pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase situations and continually judging this journey against response thresholds of co-occurring experiences in a person's related environment	Research
Hutt & Speh	South-Western	2010	B2B	The CX represents the internal and subjective response a business customer has to any direct or indirect contact with a company	Applied
Johnston & Kong	Managing Service Quality	2011	General services	The CX is their personal interpretation of the service process and their interaction and involvement with it during their journey or flow through series of touch-points, and how those things make the customer feel.	Research
Klaus & Maklan	Journal of Market Research	2013	B2C	The CX is defined as the customer's cognitive and effective assessment of all direct and indirect encounters with the firm relating to their purchasing behavior.	Research
Lemke et al.	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	2011	General	The CX is defined as the customer's subjective response to the holistic direct and indirect encounter with the firm, including, but not necessarily limited to, the communication encounter, the service encounter and the consumption encounter.	Research
Meyer & Schwager	Harvard Business Review	2007	General	CX is the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company.	Applied
Nasution et al.	Social and Behavioral Sciences	2014	General services	The formulation of the CX starts with his/her values, needs and wants. The next step of the journey will see the customer and his/her characteristics interacting with the provider's marketing strategy, which results in the third layer of customers having experience with said provider. These experiences are divided into three categories of pre-, during and post-consumption of the service. The accumulation of these experiences will then coagulate, represented by the fourth layer, to ultimately impact the customer's future attitude and behavior towards the provider depicted in the fifth layer	Research
Palmer	Journal of Services Marketing	2010	General	The construct of CX begins with basic stimuli, converged into three higher order constructs (tangible & process quality, brand relationships, and interpersonal relationships) and leads to the development of an attitude, mediated by the sequencing of the stimuli and the emotional predisposition of the individual. The resulting attitude is being weighted towards selected elements of the overall experience.	Research
Payne et al.	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	2008	General	The CX of a supplier and its products is a culmination of the customer's cognitions, emotions and behavior during the relationship.	Research
Prahalad & Ramaswamy	MIT Sloan Management Review	2003	B2C	The CX space has the individual consumer as its central issue, and an event triggers a co-creation experience. The events have a context in space and time, and the involvement of the individual influences that experience. The personal meaning derived from the co-creation experience is what determines the value to the individual.	Applied

Pine II & Gilmore	Harvard Business Review	1998	General	The CX can be described in terms of the type of customer participation (active or passive) and the connection or environmental relationship that unites customers with the event or performance (absorption or immersion).	Applied
Pozza	Gestion 2000	2014	B2C	The CX is triggered by various elements of the marketing mix of an offer in the three stages of purchasing process (pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase) and ultimately is a driver of customer satisfaction.	Research
Puccinelli et al.	Journal of Retailing	2009	B2C (retail)	The CX in a retail environment is driven by seven topics: (1) goals, schema, and information processing; (2) memory; (3) involvement; (4) attitudes; (5) affect; (6) atmospherics; and (7) consumer attributions and choices.	Research
Pullman & Gross	Decision Science	2004	B2C services	The CX occurs when a customer has any sensation or knowledge acquisition resulting from some level of interaction with different elements of a context created by a service provider.	Research
Schmitt	Journal of Marketing Management	1999	B2C	The CX is generated through five strategic experiential modules (SEMs): sensory experiences (SENSE), affective experiences (FEEL), creative cognitive experiences (THINK), physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyles (ACT), and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture (RELATE).	Research
Verhoef et al.	Journal of Retailing	2009	B2C (retail)	The CX is defined as holistic in nature and involves the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer. It submits that CX encompasses the total experience, including search, purchase, consumption, and after-sale phases. It develops eight determinants: social environment, service interface, retail atmosphere, assortment, price, customer experiences in alternative channels, retail brand, and customer experience (t-1)	Research
Voss et al.	Production and Operation Management	2008	B2C services	The CX associated with experience-centric services is generated by four operations strategy choices (Stageware, Orgware, Customerware, and Linkware); then it creates the realized total experience that evoke customer emotions and responses, which, in turn, affects the customer-perceived value and purchase, loyalty, and engagement behaviors.	Research
Walter et al.	Managing Service Quality	2010	B2C services	The CX is defined as the customer's direct and indirect exposure to the service process, including the organization, its facilities, and interactions with the service firm's representatives and other customers.	Research

For our purpose, taking into account the most relevant scientific contributions in CX, we have selected some key elements from the literature review for our own definition and framework in a B2B context (as valid as for product-based interactions as for service-based interactions), specifically: *holistic (total); direct and indirect contacts; elements that can and cannot be controlled by the supplier; impact future attitude and behavior; encompasses phases; and different members of a decision making unit (DMU).*

Therefore, we define B2B CX as *the holistic rational and emotional reaction of each person belonging to the decision making unit that has an impact on the individual future attitude and behavior, generated by direct and indirect contacts between them and the offering, supplier, or part of its organization; including elements that the supplier and/or the customer can't command, encompassed in a combination of layers (experience life-cycle map and customer service) and phases, controlling by the personal expectations of the DMU.*

Therefore we recognize the feasibility of variance in the individual CX among the participants in the DMU. We will offer a more graphical and clear representation of our definition in Figures 1 and 2.

B2B CX studies

As we have acknowledged before, there are just three articles that used B2B empirical data in order to specify their models or research methods, at least partially but explicitly. First, Biedenbach and Marell (2010) investigated the impact of CX on brand equity in a service setting. The study used the customer database of one of the Big Four auditing companies in Sweden, interviewing 669 CFOs or CEOs. They focused the research on the direct interactions between the customer and the supplier. The academics followed the four dimensions of brand equity proposed by Aaker (1991). The results, using structural equation modeling, showed path coefficients statistically significant from the CX construct to Brand Awareness, Brand Associations, Perceived Quality, and Brand Loyalty (at $\alpha = 0.1$). Therefore, the formation of brand equity is significantly leveraged by the B2B CX. The most important contribution of this article, to the best of our knowledge, is that the study is the only one involving data only in a B2B context (limited to a service setting), recognizing the existence of a DMU (e.g., Bonoma, 1982). However, they stated implicitly the use of only one person per industrial customer.

Second, the publication titled "The customer experience: a road map for improvement" by Johnston and Kong (2011), included data from a study case—an international courier and parcel company servicing business customers, among another three business cases in a B2C context. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how organizations actually design and improve their CXs. The unit of analysis was the organization and the focus was the supplier not the customer. The authors found, after four years of research, that the four companies studied followed eight broad stages, even though the way they applied the stages was subtly different. The investigation's main contribution was the proposed 10-stage road map for improving the CX: 1) Instigation and objective setting, 2) Create the business case, 3) Coordinate and oversee the changes, 4) Undertake customer research, 5) Define experience, 6) Prioritize areas for development, 7) Undertake action research, 8) Develop and pilot the changes, 9) Change the support systems, and 10) Assess the impact.

Finally, Lemke et al. (2011) interviewed 40 people, divided evenly between B2B (including products and services) and B2C contexts. The 20 B2B respondents were past attendees of two business schools in the United Kingdom, and they were qualified to ensure they had experience dealing with suppliers. It is implicit that they represented different companies. The purpose of the study was to: (1) validate that customers construe experience quality and not just product and service quality, (2) develop a conceptual model of customer experience quality, and (3) explore whether there are differences in the construction of customer experience quality in B2B and B2C context. The authors found 119 constructs that were

categorized into 17 experience subdivisions (Table 2), using multiple coders and inter-coder reliability checks.

Table 2: Seventeen experience categories
Experience categories and setting of impact

1. Accessibility	2. Application of knowledge	3. Atmosphere	4. Caring/ Attitude	5. Caring/ Procedures and processes	6. Communication
7. Experience context	8. Networks	9. Outcomes	10. Personalization	11. Relationship with company	12. Relationship with other customers ^a
13. Reliability	14. Social impact ^a	15. Value for money	16. Value for time	17. Variety/Choice	

^a Only apply to B2C context

The most important contribution of the study, in a B2B setting, is the identification of the seven key customer experience quality constructs: (1) Extent of personal contact, (2) flexibility, (3) implicit understanding of customer needs, (4) concern to elicit customer's objectives, (5) proactivity in checking that everything is OK, (6) promise fulfillment, and (7) knowledge. We provide Table 3 in order to succinctly review the three B2B studies analyzed.

Table 3: General review of B2B CX studies

Author(s)	Year	B2X	Product/Service	Focus of investigation	CX Definition	Method(s)
Biedenbach & Marell	2010	B2B	Service	CX impact on brand equity	Yes	Survey, structural equation modeling
Johnston & Kong	2011	B2B & B2C	Service	Road map for CX improvement	Yes	Case studies, longitudinal study
Lemke et al.	2011	B2B & B2C	Product & Service	CXQ contrasting B2B v/s B2C	Yes	Structured interviews, repertory grid technique

Proposed framework – three-layer B2B CX model

With this comprehensive conceptualization of CX under consideration, we acknowledge the advancement in the last two decades, valuing the many articles that have arisen important findings associated with CX (e.g., Lemke et al., 2011; Grewal et al., 2009; Pine II and Gilmore, 1998). Nonetheless, only a few have followed a time-dependent process (e.g., Kim and Mauborgne, 2000). Drawing from all previous research on the topic, we propose a three-layer B2B CX conceptual model in order to understand the phases and interactions that describe the experiential world in an industrial setting, considering the time issue. In the current section, we discuss the three layers and the seven main stages of our B2B CX model. In addition, we state some differences (Figures 1 and 2) in the general experience framework between a product-centric and a service-centric experience, because is widely accepted that services and products differ notably regarding the format of their input and output, delivery, and consumption (e.g., Zeithaml et al., 1985).

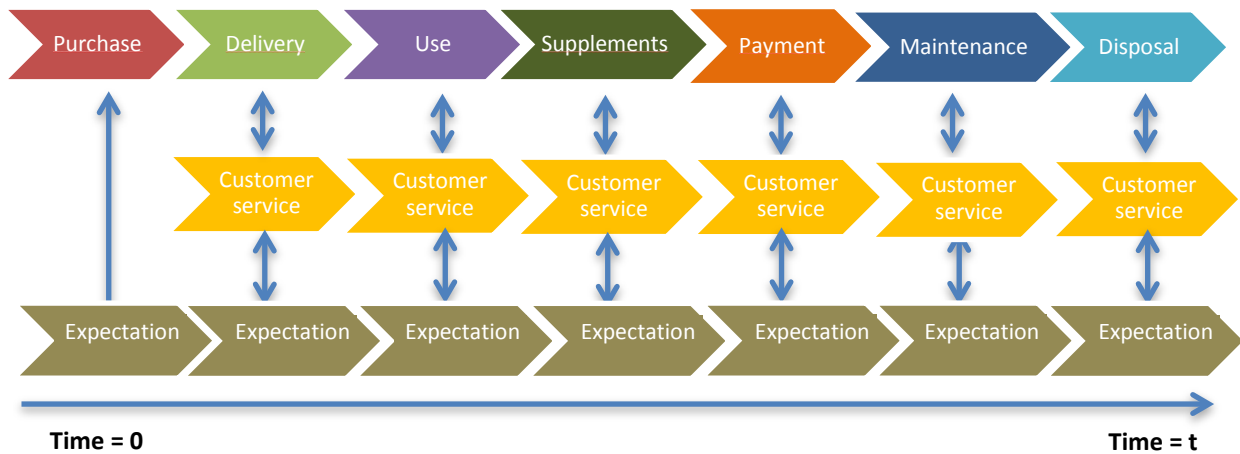


Figure 1: B2B CX framework in a product-centric context

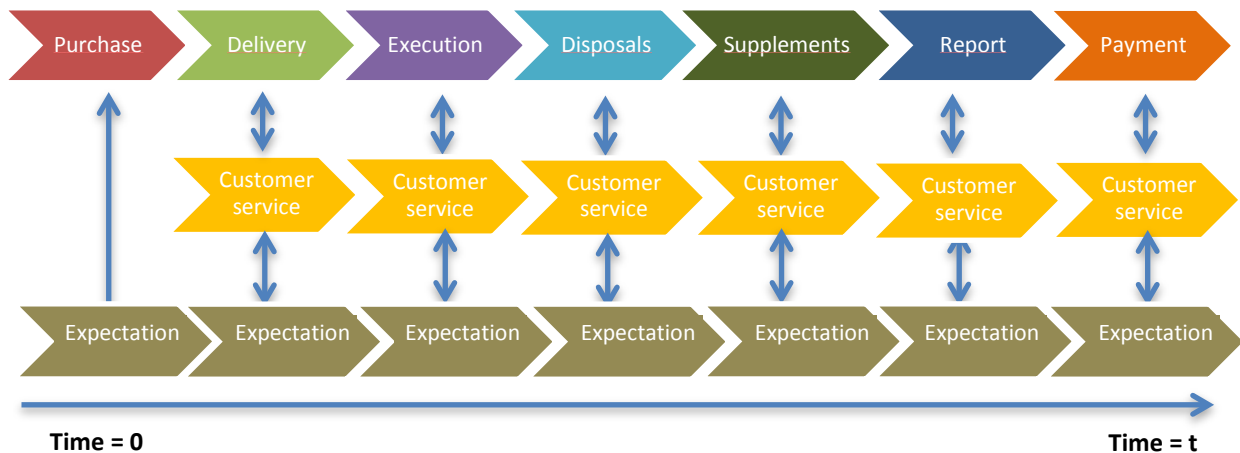


Figure 2: B2B CX framework in a service-centric context

Marketers are increasingly managing journeys as they would any product (Edelman and Singer, 2015). The creation of CXs is less about just the product and more about relationships that the customer has with the total offering (Payne et al., 2008). To understand how to achieve satisfaction, a company must deconstruct the customer’s journey into its component experiences (Mayer and Schwager, 2007). Following the buyer utility map proposed by Kim and Mauborgne (2000) and Hutt and Speh (2010, p. 217), the CX can be broken down into a seven-stage cycle map. We acknowledge the existence of a continuous interaction among all the layers of the models (B2B customer life cycle map, customer service, and expectations). We also state that customer service is feasible once a trade agreement exists (e.g., contract, PO), and then all the contacts before the agreement are part of the purchase phase.

The B2B customer life-cycle map

Some authors have defined the CX cycle, including elements such as pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (Homburg et al., 2015); or search, consumption, and after-sale phases (Verhoef et al., 2009).

However, these representations aren't specific enough to portray the CX in a B2B context. On the one hand, in the product-centric model, the stages generally flow sequentially from purchase to disposal (Kim and Mauborgne, 2000). On the other hand, in the service-centric model, the sequence that fits most commonly in industrial settings has the following configuration: Purchase » Delivery » Execution » Disposals » Supplements » Report » Payment. We acknowledge that the sequence can vary in the product-centric model as well as in the service-centric model, and not all the CXs include all phases. The value co-creation is inherently processual (Woodruff and Flint, 2006) and potentially varying over time through the customer journey (Lemke et al., 2011).

Regarding the purchase stage, it is widely accepted in the literature that the interaction with the B2B customer is primarily led by personal selling (Zoltners et al., 2008) in supplement with advertising, direct marketing, catalogs, and, more recently, the Internet (Long et al. 2007). Some sales force activities during this phase include offering presentation and demonstration, negotiating customer resistance and objections and using closing techniques (Román and Martín, 2008); thus, this stage includes any activity or interaction until contract signing or purchase order delivery. With an increase in frequency of interaction, parties can more easily exchange information (Doney and Cannon, 1997). In addition, Román and Martín (2008) found that an increase in call frequency has a positive effect on sales volume and customer satisfaction. In parallel, as buyers goes through the mental stages of deciding to buy a product, they rely on different sources of information (Webster, 1991). A failure in the pre-purchase and negotiation activities could eliminate the supplier under analysis and then cut-off the CX (from supplier's perspective).

The first seven stages of the "industrial buying process" (Robinson et al., 1967; Wind and Webster, 1972) can be included in the purchasing phase of our B2B CX model, because the post-purchase evaluation is developed by the customer during the rest of the journey. The purchasing can include the experience of browsing the website of an online retailer or as the experience of pushing a shopping cart through supermarket aisles (Kim and Mauborgne, 2000). In a B2B context, the purchase phase includes most commonly: sales force visits, sales force calls, website searching, and product/service trial. In the purchasing experience, different members of the buying center may be involved (Webster and Wind, 1972) alike in the remaining phases of the CX life cycle map.

Researchers (e.g., Rostek, 2012) have pointed out that logistical aspects can impact customer satisfaction and firm competitiveness. Services, such as delivery, for production and manufacturing based firms, are an attempt to achieve market differentiation (Raddats, 2011). Service delivery by industrial firms is increasingly seen as an influential factor for sustained profits (Erkoyuncu et al., 2013). According to Ramanathan (2010), late arrival or non-arrival of the product, accuracy of the order and damage of the product significantly increases customer dissatisfaction. In this matter, now from the supplier perspective, Rangan et al. (1992) stated that physical characteristics of the product, such as bulkiness, handling convenience, and weight/value ratio are important because of their impact on transportation and storage costs.

It is typical for reseller and manufacturing industrial firms to outsource their delivery capabilities. It is then critical for any business to set reasonable and effective criteria while selecting suppliers or business partners (Yu et al., 2015). Researchers in operation management have called for more focus on selection and contract management of product delivery service providers while building collaborative supply chain partnerships (Sahay and Mohan, 2006). Moreover, it is probable that people of the logistics provider are in contact with the customer's customer, therefore they need some customer service skills and appropriate vestment (Hoffman and Bateson, 2005). On the one hand, in the product-centric context, the delivery phase can include: type of transportation, delivery time, packaging, formats, etc. On the other hand, in the service-centric setting, the delivery phase can include: people quantity, punctuality, safety matters, etc.

A product is a physical "thing" whereas a service is an activity - a process - which involves the treatment of a customer or something belonging to them, where the customer performs some role in the productive activity (Johnston and Kong, 2011). The understanding of products and services involves learning about tangible benefits generated by the performance of utilitarian functions based on objective features, just like symbolic meanings of more subjective characteristics (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). According to Deighton (1992) the range of usages is as follows: "consumers attend performances (e.g., theater productions), consumers participate in performances (e.g., consultancy) and consumers perform with products (e.g., symbolic products), and products perform for consumers (e.g., detergents)." The second and fourth classifications are the most typical usages in a B2B context for both product-centric and service-centric settings.

The use/execution is the most important phase in the B2B CX life cycle map. According to Hlavacek and Reddy (1986), industrial products generally provide different economic value for different customer applications, and the different economic value is caused by the way the customer uses the product. Value is co-created when the customer uses the supplier's product and services (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). In addition, MacDonald et al. (2009) stated that value-in-use includes the functional and/or hedonic outcomes that customers create directly through product/service usage. Thus the supplier's role is to deliver a value proposition rather than deliver value (Lemke et al., 2011). In the service-centric context the value co-creation is more evident, the value-in-use tends to be generated by the supplier's people, machinery and/or tools on the customer's products, machinery, people or infrastructure. We differentiate *use* from *execution* because, in a product-centric setting, the customer generally is more involved, in contrast with the service-centric setting where the supplier commonly is more active. It is important to highlight that some phases can overlap the usage or execution, even if it were momentarily; specially in the product-centric context due to the extensive lifespan. For example, Nomura and Momose (2008) found that the lifespan for 195 types of products and machinery owned by businesses range between 8.1 years and 44.1 years.

Several authors have recognized payment as part of the customer experience (e.g. Bryson, 2013; Rickard, 2006). In the U.S. as in most countries, payment systems have evolved from paper-based to electronic (Hayashi and Bradford, 2014). One of the last technology issues is mobile payments (Bryson, 2013). There are three main technologies that have emerged for mobile payments: NFC, code-based (for example, barcode and QR code), and cloud-based (Hayashi and Bradford, 2014). However, many experts consider mobile payment as an application with higher potential in a B2C context (Ghezzi et al., 2010). In addition, although extensive literature on consumer payment preferences exists, not many documented studies are found from the perspective of business payments (e.g., Australian Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2006).

Regarding payment methods, Loke et al. (2013) stated that paper based procedures such as checks are preferred when businesses consider security and convenience as relatively more important than cost. When cost is the priority, businesses prefer electronic-paper payment methods compared to paper based methods. However, checks and telegraphic transfers are commonly used by business payers especially for payments that are relatively high in value (Loke et al., 2013). According to Rickard (2006), the payment procedure involves a customer receiving and validating the invoice, and then making the payment. Payment conditions, when the invoice is received and accepted by the customer, usually are: cash payment, 30, 45, 60-day payments. These periods are generally pre-defined or under contract. In long-term B2B contracts, the collection/payment process tends to be more dynamic, usually including monthly, bi-monthly or biannual rates of consumptions as parameter of payment or agreed fees.

Supplements or adjacent goods are products and services associated with the core offering (product or service) under analysis, these "extra" goods generally are focused on making the original offering more efficient, improving the performance of the central offering, or just making the product able to be used

(Kim and Mauborgne, 2000). An example of the latter is the situation of a buyer acquiring an industrial weighing scale; this product needs the construction of a working platform (Guajardo, 2013) in order to operate. Business paradigms, such as the Delta model (Hax and Wilde II, 1999) or the S-D Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), partially incentivized manufacturers to develop industrial service offerings which are typically product-related and focus on the installed base (Rabetino et al., 2015). However, products as well can be supplements. For example, a conveyor belt supplier can "supplement" its offer with a monitoring scanner, an x-ray machine, and/or a thickness meter (Espinoza, 2012). Another situation is possible when the customer interacts with a supplement's supplier that is a third party (not the same supplier of the main offering). For instance, a ground transportation company can buy an additive in order to improve the performance of the gasoline from a chemical company that is not the fuel supplier (Schilling, 2013). In a service-centric context, a product or a service can supplement the main offering, too. On the one hand, for example, security guard service providers sometimes sell security camera systems. On the other hand, for instance, an advertising campaign service in technical magazines can be supplemented with the digital coverage service through the same media. Finally, we include the legal aspects of the supplements. There is a chance that the product or service in question requires a government or agency permission in order to be used, thus affecting the CX.

Maintenance is defined as the service responsible to increase product life cycles (Kuo and Wang, 2012). The maintenance of a piece of industrial equipment or artifact is considered a tangible act over a material thing (Lovelock, 1983). The maintenance phase of the B2B CX includes aspects such as ease to maintain, requirement of external maintenance, and upgrading the product (Kim and Mauborgne, 2000). The outsourcing of maintenance processes has become a frequent practice for many industries. Government, medical device manufacturers, and aviation are just a few examples of industries increasingly using outsourcing for maintenance services (Cruz et al., 2013). This situation has a high impact on the CX and for the *original equipment manufacturer* (OEM) who is trying to control the CX associated with its offering. In addition, from a broader point of analysis, the integration of an industrial plant with the service maintenance provider through IT (e.g., Internet) have resulted in better product quality, higher production throughput, reduction of overall costs, lower stock of inventory, better predictive ability of equipment, less unscheduled downtime, and improved overall availability (Persona et al., 2007).

Customers commonly look for cues about the firm's capabilities and quality (Berry and Clark, 1986). Physical evidences are heuristics of quality, including business cards, receipts, reports, employees' appearance, uniforms, and brochures (Bitner, 1992; Hoffman and Bateson, 2005). Research suggests that the physical settings may influence the customer's ultimate satisfaction with the service (e.g., Bitner 1990). Although services have been exhaustively studied in a B2B setting (e.g., Gounaris, 2005), researchers have omitted analyzing the importance of the final B2B technical report. The technical report is a document that usually includes data, analysis, results, conclusions, and an overall review of the whole service. We can infer from our practical knowledge that the report is an important issue in the B2B service-centric CX, but at least some theoretical support exists from the behavioral sciences. The service report is generally the last issue associated with any technical service developed in a B2B setting; then according to Chase and Dasu (2001), the report should have an important effect on the overall experience perceived by the customer.

Disposals represent a hazard to people and environment (Denham and Donnelly, 2015). Waste disposal has become less acceptable to communities and environmental agencies due to the decrease in the area available for landfills and the environmental risks associated with soil and water contamination (Garcia et al., 2014). From the internal perspective of the B2B customer, disposals can be a source of accidents, injuries or sickness for employees. All these possible outcomes have direct and indirect costs for the company. B2B customer disposal activities include: creation of waste, ease of disposal, health hazards, environmental hazards, transportation, removal cost, selling, reuse, recycling, and remanufacturing (Lee and Lam, 2012).

Savitz and Weber (2006) noted that sustainability means operating a business in a way that causes minimal harm to living creatures. The starting point for industrial sustainability is surprisingly simple: if everyone recognizes that ecosystems and natural resources are limited, economic decisions can be so oriented that the end products of economic actions are environmentally sustainable as well (Sharma et al., 2010). Green product (Bhat, 1993) and service development is found to be coupled with firms' performance (e.g., Lau, Tang, and Yam, 2010). Particularly, Chen et al. (2006) found that green product and green manufacturing process innovations are positively associated with corporate competitive advantage. Firms such as BMW, Honda, IDEO, Patagonia, and Timberland follow green practices in part due to end-consumer demand (Sisodia et al., 2007). Therefore, as end-users become "greener" and more health sensitive, the whole industrial supply chain will need to become more concerned about sustainability issues associated with their offerings and actions. Drawing from the literature review and our work on B2B CX during the last six years, in Table 3 we present a brief overview of activities related with each phase of the B2B CX.

Customer service

Business marketers cannot always provide flawless offerings or simply cannot control customer concerns and/or doubts. However, the way the firm responds to customer's service problems has a crucial bearing on customer retention and loyalty (Hutt and Speh, 2010). Durvasula et al. (2000) found in the freight-shipping industry that customers who expressed higher satisfaction with claims handling, complaint handling, and problem resolution have a higher level of overall satisfaction with the shipping line. This phenomenon is known as "Service recovery paradox" (McCollough and Bharadwaj, 1992) and is not without controversies (De Matos et al., 2007).

Customer service has been defined as those additional services provided to customers above and beyond the product's or service's basic benefits (Levenburg and Klein, 2006). These additional services are designed to enhance the total value proposition, and, therefore, add to customer value co-creation. According to Homburg et al. (2002), customer services "are designed to augment the core offering or add value rather than represent the core offering itself." The importance of customer service has arisen from theoretical links between customer service, customer loyalty and business profits (e.g., Narver and Slater, 1990; Rust et al., 1995; Piron, 2001; Homburg et al., 2002), and customer service, customer loyalty and market share (Sterling and Lambert, 1987).

Customer services involve personnel contact quality (Mentzer, Flint, and Hult, 2001). Company employees should possess knowledge that permits them to answer customer questions, properly handle customer problems, understand customer-specific needs, and address complaints in a courteous manner (Anderson et al., 1994). Generally, the large call volumes and frequent recurrence of the same requests enable customer service personnel to rely on well-practiced processes and leverage routinely used knowledge and skills (Jasmand et al., 2012). The service conversations are typically structured and partly scripted to ensure consistent quality and efficiency (Aksin et al., 2007; Deery et al., 2002).

Although customer services may be delivered face-to-face, they may also be delivered vis-à-vis internet technologies (Levenburg and Klein, 2006). For example, customer services delivered online, e-services, may include using email to communicate asynchronously with customers, using real-time and live chats and providing product ordering and tracking capabilities. In addition, Sousa and Voss (2006) proposed a framework for service quality comprising three components: virtual (e.g., website), physical (people-delivered), and integration quality (seamless service experience across contact channels).

Table 3: Brief overview of issues and activities related with each phase of B2B CX

Purchase	Delivery	Use/Execution	Supplements	Payment	Report	Maintenance	Disposals
Need characterization & specifications	Delivery time	Value-in-use/ value-in-execution	Obligated actions	Rate of consumptions	Due date	Internal maintenance	Quantity
Supplier's alternatives	Punctuality & accuracy	Ease of use	Accessories	Information requirements	Content	External maintenance	Format
Sales force calls & visits	N° of people & behavior	Operational continuity	Costs	Systems requirements	Language	N° of people & behavior	Movement and cost
Website searching	Packaging	Safety issues	Warranty	Invoice delivery	Grammar	Duration	Time of existence
Brochures	Formats	Ease of manipulation	Adjacent services	Invoice validation	Length	Frequency	Reuse
Demonstrations	Set-up	Downtime	Insurance	Payment methods	People receiving	Risks related	Health effects
Product trials	Assembly	Training	Legal requirements	Payment date	Digital appearance	Costs	Environmental effects
Estimates or biddings	Start-up	Customer involvement	Third parties		Physical appearance	Updating	Accumulation
Negotiations	Transportation	Service processes					Recycle
Contract or Purchase order	Storage	Environment conditions					Sale value

We have stated that customer service *starts* after the deal is closed formally. Then post-sale services are designed to keep the customer satisfied with the purchase; for example, failure handling and regular inspections (Frambach et al., 1997). Challagalla et al. (2009) defined key forms or dimensions of proactive post-sales services (PPS) in order to improve the customer service approach as: "(1) Proactive prevention: a supplier initiating contact with customers to check how its products are performing and taking action to preempt product failures. (2) Proactive education: a supplier initiating contact with customers to advise them how to derive more value from their product purchases. (3) Proactive feedback seeking: a supplier initiating contact with customers to solicit their feedback." They argued that PPS results in faster delivery of service than customer-initiated post-sales service, or reactive post-sales service (RPS).

The customer service will not necessarily be served by people specialized in assistance, but probably delivered by the sales representative or a group of diverse employees and systems of the supplier throughout the CX process. According to Chun et al. (2015), the difference between those who provide a positive experience and those that do not is whether or not every single person in the company is united by a common purpose; meaning that everybody knows, and feels passionate about, the brand values and is working within a company culture that rewards people for being exceptional and delivering a positive experience. In addition, Ulaga and Michel (2014) stated that B2B firms need to make sure that their own internal departments work together smoothly to create a seamless customer experience.

DMU and supplier’s team

Suppliers selling to business customers must identify the needs and preferences of different members of a buying center (Johnston and Bonoma, 1981) and the shifting roles they play over time (Challagalla et al., 2009). The structure of the buying center or DMU proposed by Bonoma (1982) includes six roles: initiator(s), decider, influencer(s), purchaser(s), gatekeeper(s), and user(s). We provide (Figure 3) an additional role from our practical experience and definitions to facilitate the understanding of the DMU. Many studies identify purchasing, engineering, and manufacturing as most influential in the buying center (e.g., Brand, 1972; Johnston and Bonoma, 1981; McQuiston, 1989). Each of these functions has specific and unique interests and expectations, and, thus, may use different criteria to judge a supplier and a particular solution (Sheth, 1973; Töllner et al., 2011). Wilson et al. (1991) found that common purchase situations in the B2B context (as modified rebuys and new tasks) generally require group interaction. In addition, role theory suggests the existence of potential differences between individuals who have different roles. Töllner et al. (2011) found that different criteria of an offering vary in their relevance across the roles in the buying center.

Table 4: Roles in DMU/buying center

Composition of the Decision Making Unit (DMU)	
Initiator(s)	Who recognize the problem or need
Authorizer(s)	Who authorize the budget or funding, before the decision is made
Gatekeeper(s)	Who control flows of information
Purchaser(s)	Who execute the buying action
Decision maker	Who finally chooses among suppliers and/or technologies
Influencer(s)	Who conduct the purchase, generally involved with technical issues and usage
User(s)	Who consume/use the purchased offering

As noted by Carù and Cova (2003), social relations shape the experience of consumption (Edgell et al., 1997). All elements of the DMU are “consuming” some aspects of the value propositions of a supplier in interaction with each other and people outside the DMU. Narayandas (2005) stated that the key to success, from a relational approach, is keeping in mind that each member of the buying center is usually

interested in only one benefit, and at most, a few benefits. We declare that the sought benefits are associated with the seven phases of the B2B CX life cycle map. In addition, personnel from the supplier will interact throughout the CX life cycle map with the different elements of the DMU. These social interactions in addition to virtual (non-human) interactions are mainly conceptualized through our perspective of the customer service layer in the model.

Expectations

Customers buy products and services to acquire specific benefits; and the ability of these offerings to deliver on these expected benefits influence their satisfaction level (e.g., Hofstede et al., 1999). Thus, these expectations of benefits are likely to be used as benchmarks when customers evaluate the outcomes of an experience that, in turn, influences overall satisfaction with the supplier (Ghosh et al., 2004). Additionally, Frow and Payne (2007) declared that expectations affect the evaluation of different experiences. Moreover, Puccinelli et al. (2009) stated that “customer’s goals determine the relative salience of products and retailer features.” Therefore, the desired CX and the customer’s evaluation of the actual experience depend on these goals (Lemke et al., 2011).

The key determinants of the industrial customer expectations are the conditions and specifications agreed by the supplier. However, according to Johnston and Kong (2011), while the operation may deliver to specification, this does not mean that what is perceived by the customer is satisfactory, since (1) his/her expectations will be influenced by a host of factors including their prior experience (Chandrashekar et al., 2007; Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Verhoef et al., 2009), the cost of the offering and reference price (Frow and Payne, 2007; Mazumdar et al., 2005), word-of-mouth (Kwortnik and Ross, 2007; Webster, 1991), advertising (Brakus et al., 2009; Park et al., 1988), brand (Berry et al., 2002, Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006; Palmer, 2010), and (2) perceptions are personal and idiosyncratic. The experience is perceived purely from the point of view of an individual (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and is inherently personal, existing only in the customer’s mind (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Thus, no two people can have the same experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). The latter is especially important due to the presence of multiple persons in the B2B CX. In addition to the previous factors of expectations, in a B2B context, we acknowledge the importance of cultural issues (Hall, 1976; Herbig and Kramer, 1992) and social media (Agnihotri et al., 2015); the former as a general issue of communications in a globalized industrial world, and the latter as a new (understudied) communication channel in a B2B setting. Finally, as a consequence for suppliers, marketing messages through the different channels should be based on a clear articulation of the value proposition (Payne et al., 2008), directing particular benefits to specific individuals participating in the B2B CX.

An empirical case

We represent (See Figure 3) the social interaction between the DMU and the supplier’s team in order to exemplify that not just criteria differ in the roles at the buying center but that they themselves participate just in some phases of the B2B CX life cycle map, and then the supplier’s team is flexible (varying) too. We use a case as an example that entails one of largest Asian vertically integrated seafood companies with headquarters in Hong Kong, and one of the largest industrial lubricant suppliers with headquarters in the United States. The case is focused on a specific factory of the customer in presence of headquarter’s influence. This information was gathered from a business meeting with one executive of each company in early 2015.

The case describes the B2B CX of the seafood plant that consumes lubricants primarily for its fleet. The interaction through time involves different elements of the DMU and the supplier team. We included the key roles of each phase and assumed that, at the customer service layer, there is virtual coverage by the suppliers’ systems. The individual expectations couldn’t be stated, but we recognize their presence. The

aggregate experience of the whole DMU represents the overall B2B CX of the seafood plant. The number of people intrinsically involved on the customer team (DMU) is a heuristic of the relative importance of each phase for the B2B customer.

Conclusions and managerial implications

The study and understanding of the customer experience is recognized as the *new way* for achieving and sustaining long-term customer loyalty (Homburg et al., 2015). We introduced the three layers B2B CX model in order to supplement the extant CX literature in an industrial setting. We suggested the continual interaction among the experience life-cycle map, customer service and expectations. The experience life cycle map permits managing the CX phases sequentially with time as the parameter. The order of the phases belonging to the first layer can change customer-to-customer, offering-to-offering, purchase-to-purchase, or segment-to-segment; nevertheless, the seven activities are representative of the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages noted by several authors (Homburg et al., 2015; Nasution et al., 2014; Neslin et al., 2006; Pozza, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2009). We have acknowledged the difference between the development of the B2B CX when it is product-centric versus service-centric, in contrast to previous research where products and services are considered conceptually different (Johnston and Kong, 2011; Lemke et al., 2011).

The creation of an extraordinary and memorable experience (e.g., Pine II and Gilmore, 1998) has been one of the key foundations for the diffusion of the concept, but, at the same time, it has been the main source of distortion of the concept. In this sense, Carù and Cova (2003) stated "each consumption experience is not necessarily memorable or unforgettable, as the supporters of the economy and experiential marketing would like." They also cited Schmitt (1999, p. 251), one of the initiators of experiential marketing, due to the fact that he admitted that most brands and marketing campaigns, most of the time, are unable to provide exceptional experiences, even temporarily; and argued that individuals have not been built to undergo intense, personality-shaking experiences all the time. In a B2B setting, a positive experience is not an exciting one, but one that is hassle-free (Pillai and George, 2015) and, thus, reassuring to those in charge (Meyer and Schwager, 2007). The participation of multiple persons, included in the DMU, makes the B2B CX unique. Every key participant of the DMU can be focused on different issues or benefits (Narayandas, 2005); then the relative importance of each phase in the experience life cycle map can be prioritized (Frow and Payne, 2007; Meyer and Schwager, 2007). Therefore, the individual experience and the overall B2B CX can vary throughout the phases until it is finally developed. Palmer (2010) goes in-depth, arguing that "attitude is likely to be not stable over time, and subsequent recall of an experience is likely to result in attitude being weighted towards selected elements of the overall experience. It is the attitude that pertains over time that is most likely to subsequently influence behavior." Hence, we propose that the process of value co-creation or the whole co-creation experience (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003 and 2004) should be conceptualized as the value-in-experience due to its phenomenological and processual characterization, potentially varying over time through the experience life cycle map (Lemke et al., 2011), and its broader scope in comparison with the value-in-use term (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). From the supplier's perspective, the possibility to identify the most relevant activities and the latent cost associated with the improvement or focus on these significant issues (Frow and Payne, 2007), drive them to be clear about which activities of the CX they should customize, and which aspects they can standardize (Ulaga and Michel, 2014).

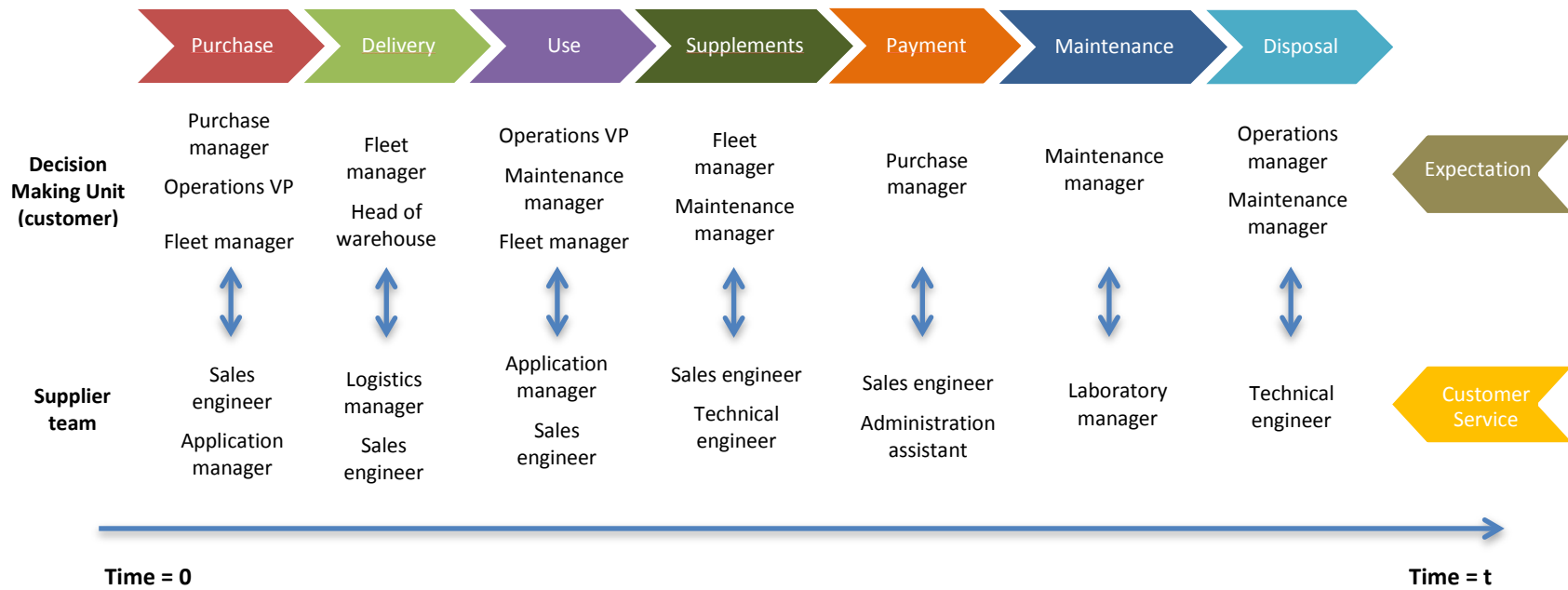


Figure 3: An empirical case of B2B CX

Marketers may stress the importance of transforming the firm's corporate culture into a CX mindset (Homburg et al., 2015), which stimulates all parts of the organization to have a role in delivering a satisfying customer experience (MacGillavry and Wilson, 2014). B2B vendors need to ensure coordination among internal departments in order to ensure every existent function plays its role in the creation's opportunity of the right CX. Therefore, CX is not a challenge isolated for the sales representative or the customer service department. In fact, CX does not improve until it becomes a top priority and a company's work processes, systems, and structure change to reflect that (Meyer and Schwager, 2007).

The communication between the supplier and the customer should allow both entities to coordinate their processes and practices in a way that helps customers to utilize resources better—both their own and those of the supplier (Payne et al., 2008). Therefore, communication channels need to be open and fully integrated, including human interface and virtual interface (Sousa and Voss, 2006).

The most relevant tasks for industrial suppliers are:

- understand which activities or aspects of the B2B customer life cycle are the most important,
- determine which customer's people is involved,
- evaluate how well articulated are our value propositions,
- assess how aligned is the present customer service, and
- compare how are we currently performing with individual and corporate customer expectations.

As a result, the total B2B CX needs to be consistent with the corporate brand positioning (Berry et al., 2002). Therefore, in order to succeed in this adventure, marketers need to abandon their headquarters' luxury suites and go where the business is running, probably in an uncomfortable factory or plant environment in a distant location, under safety requirements, unpleasant temperature, atmospheric pressure or humidity. These onsite customer visits (McQuarrie, 1991) often need the participation of technical, R&D and marketing personnel. The involvement in the customer's world and downstream will be determinant for practitioners, as customers become more and more dynamic and entails involvement in cryptic peer networks. In the present turbulent, competitive and globalized economy, a failure in the B2B CX, from the supplier's perspective, can lead to disastrous outcomes, such as a decreasing current share of customer wallet (SCW), breaking profitable relationships, lowering repeat purchase, diminishing number of referrals, increasing the amount of uncollectible, harming brand positioning, reducing brand equity; and as a linear consequence, eroding company's market value.

Finally, we hope that this research and proposed theoretical model contributes to the development of empirical studies and the establishment of a clear and accepted vision and conceptualization of the B2B CX as a complex, specific, serious and rewarding marketing issue. Therefore, practitioners and academics can adopt this knowledge in order to develop new questions and more advanced frameworks and theories, respectively, for the benefit of the industrial marketing science.

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