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Title	Customer Satisfaction in Business-to-Business Relationships: A Value Creation Perspective, Case: Oras Ltd		
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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to describe customer satisfaction in business-to-business relationships from the value creation perspective. The purpose of the study was further divided into sub-problems: 1) What is customer satisfaction and how does it form in business-to-business settings? 2) What kinds of elements are there involved in the process of effectively delivering value to b-to-b customers? 3) How customer satisfaction and value chain are linked to each other? The empirical part of the study concentrated around the fourth sub-problem: 4) What is the customer satisfaction level of b-to-b customers of Oras Ltd from the value creation perspective?

The theoretical frame of reference of the thesis was built on satisfaction and customer value research. The significance, outcomes and formation of customer satisfaction was discussed by reviewing the most commonly utilized theories and models. Value creation and value as concepts were approached from the customer's perspective. It is suggested that customers' expectations, customer-perceived performance and disconfirmation of expectations and performance outcomes form the basic constructs for customer satisfaction. The overall customer satisfaction is a complex phenomenon which, however, can be broken down into attribute components. Expectations in b-to-b relationships are derived from the goals and purposes that the customer firms have set. Customers compare their expectations and perceived performance throughout the value chain and thus customer satisfaction is achieved by delivering customer value. The process of creating and delivering customer value begins with identifying customers' needs. Successful value delivery is based on understanding and management of customers' interests and problems as well as efficient management and coordination of core processes of the firm's value chain.

In the empirical part the aim was to find out how the case company, Oras Ltd, a plumbing fixture manufacturer, has succeeded in its process of delivering value in its Finnish operations. The interest was in five customer segments: wholesalers, HPAC contractors and supplies, HPAC contractors, real estate management, and hardware stores. For the purposes of the study the model of the generic value chain was developed. The value chain was divided into five elements (design & development, production, logistics, marketing, service) which enabled the measurement of customers' expectations in terms of importance of the given attributes and the customer-perceived performance on the same attributes within these value chain elements. The approach was quantitative in the empirical part of the study and based on the disconfirmation theory and the gap model of importance and performance. The data was collected through a mail survey. The response rate was 29,5% (N=288). The quantitative data was analyzed by using SPSS for Windows version 10.1 and MS-Excel. The analysis is based on the averages of the given scores and the results are illustrated in various figures.

The results of the survey revealed that the expectations of the respondents stem from the core product and its availability. The lowest importance scores were given to customer magazines, EDI, and internet based services. The price related issues cause dissatisfaction. The brand, Oras, is clearly a strong asset for the company. Although the given performance ratings were generally good the results indicated that the company has to be aware of the possible threat coming from the competitors. The results revealed some notable gaps between expectations and performance. Also for example design issues caused some negative comments, which indicated that some of the customers are already looking for new innovative solutions.

Key words	customer satisfaction, business-to-business relationships, value creation
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