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# Key Success Factors for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Projects within SMEs

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**ABSTRACT**

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has emerged as a must-have capability for the modern firm irrespective of size and sector. The importance of CRM can be attributed to the need for today's businesses to be customer-centric or customer-focused. As a business strategy, CRM seeks to develop and improve relationships with targeted customers to optimize customer value, competitiveness, and corporate profitability. While CRM has a truly strong business case, approximately 70% of CRM implementation projects do not create the intended business value. With this in mind, this work has reviewed relevant literature and explored 8 CSFs that can guide SMEs wishing to successfully implement CRM projects. The 8 CSFs cover the people, technologies, and processes – the core elements of a CRM strategy. In particular, the 8 CSFs include senior leadership sponsorship, customer-oriented CRM strategy, effective change management, customer data quality and availability, human resource management, the right CRM technology, CRM implementation methodology, and systems integration. Future studies may consider ranking the significance of the 8 CSFs based on the findings of an empirical research.

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## Introduction

The forces of surging global competition, rapidly evolving enterprise-class technologies, and dynamic customer demands have put pressure on today's businesses to prioritize a customer-centric or customer-focused organizational strategy. Successful implementation of customer relationship management (CRM) capability is widely cited as one of the major enablers of the much-sought customer-centric strategy (Farhan, Abed, & Ellatif, 2018; Pandey & Pandey, 2013). With a successfully implemented CRM project, an organization stands to gain a competitive edge against its rivals through automated contact and account management, customer service and support, marketing and sales funnel, and analytics among other CRM capabilities (Farhan et al., 2018; Mallika, 2016). CRM is a strategic combination of people, technologies, and processes that businesses leverage to manage and optimize customer interactions and relationships during the entire customer lifecycle (Pandey & Pandey, 2013; Petrović, 2020; Shojaei, 2015; Tekin, 2013).

With CRM, a company can identify and target its most profitable customers to retain them for greater products or services. Moreover, CRM facilitates real-time personification and customization of product and service offerings based on unique customer needs and preferences. CRM could also help keep track of customers through multiple contact points and provide superior service or support across those points (Mallika, 2016). Importantly, CRM solutions can benefit companies in terms of enhanced customer satisfaction and retention, increased revenues, and reduced operational costs (Farhan et al., 2018; Petrović, 2020; Sanad, Fidler, & McBride, 2010). Therefore, an effective CRM system is a must-have resource for small to large organizations because it could provide strategic business and customer value to a company and its customers respectively.

Considering the compelling benefits of CRM, SMEs around the world consider CRM tools to be a strategic business capability. Nevertheless, between 70% and 80% of CRM implementation projects are improperly used or do not produce target results (Farhan et al., 2018; Shojaei, 2015). Existing studies have identified several causes of high rates of CRM project failure. The common causes include the following: lack of senior leadership sponsorship, poor change management, ineffective training, business strategy, CRM alignment, and improper integration of CRM with other enterprise systems (Papadopoulos, Ojiako, Chipulu, & Lee, 2012; Sanad et al., 2010).

In this review paper, it is posited that early identification of the CSFs could allow key CRM project stakeholders to focus on ingredients that are essential to successful CRM project delivery and accomplishment of the intended business and project objectives. These CSFs mainly revolve around the following areas: people, technology or infrastructure, and processes. The following CSFs are considered to be the most significant based on relevant existing studies: senior leadership sponsorship, customer-oriented CRM strategy, effective change management, customer data quality and availability, human resource management, the right CRM technology, CRM implementation methodology, and systems integration. If the outcomes in the key areas highlighted above are adequate or satisfactory, an organization's efforts to implement a CRM and accomplish the desired objectives would be successful.

The purpose of writing this review paper was to assess the key success factors for CRM in SME projects. there is limited literature in the context of SME projects and therefore, this review paper will help in adding a new perspective in the existing literature. Also, it will help the SMEs to understand how to use CRM for their benefit. this review paper will add new direction for the future research and will support the success of the SME in both short and long run. CRM is useful for success of any organization and SME are no different. therefore, this review will help in improving the efficiency of the SMEs.

## Discussion

## Key Success Factors for CRM Projects

Generally, CSFs may be perceived as the minimum capabilities that a business must have to achieve competitive performance and sustain it (Farhan et al., 2018; Sanad et al., 2010; Shojaei, 2015). Several studies have examined the key or critical factors that determine the success or failure of CRM projects in organizations. In the context of CRM projects, CSFs are the independent variables that stakeholders consider to increase the probability of CRM implementation success. The study of CSFs has been widely recognized as an effective approach to the success of information systems projects as noted by Garcia, Pacheco, and Martinez (2012) and Sanad et al. (2010). Among the commonly cited CSFs for CRM implementations include the following: top management sponsorship, organizational or corporate culture, customer involvement, human resource management,

knowledge management, CRM strategy and process, information quality, organizational infrastructure, system and service quality, customer orientation, staff motivation, business-IT alignment, sales and marketing automation, technology customization, communication, technological readiness, and inter-departmental and systems integration (Garcia et al., 2012; Sanad et al., 2010; Shojaei, 2015; Tekin, 2013; Vazifehdust, Shahnavazi, Jourshari, & Sharifi, 2012). Therefore, past studies have covered a wide range of CRM CSFs. What follows is an in-depth examination of 8 widely accepted CRM CSFs informed by existing literature.

## Senior Leadership Sponsorship

Senior leadership sponsorship entails the extent to which top management commits to and supports CRM initiatives. It focuses on the actual willingness of organizational leaders to provide necessary and adequate resources to support the CRM implementation process (Shojaei, 2015). Therefore, top leadership sponsorship should be pursued to ensure that CRM initiatives are adequately resourced toward successful implementation. Resourcing includes aspects of budget, technology, and budget to facilitate smooth CRM implementation (Sanad et al., 2010; Vazifehdust et al., 2012). Examples of top management roles include the following: CEO, CFO, CIO, Chief Operations Officer (COO), and Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO). Importantly, the CEO, CFO, and CIO among other top-level managers make strategic decisions on the overall direction of the company (Shojaei, 2015; Vazifehdust et al., 2012). In addition, senior managers influence lower-level staff to encourage them to participate in existing or planned CRM initiatives (Shojaei, 2015). Therefore, the commitment and support of top-level managers could play a crucial role in championing CRM activities. Nevertheless, it is important to build a strong business case to help allocate the right resources to CRM initiatives (Sanad et al., 2010).

Mallika (2016) argues that top leadership commitment and support could nurture the right organizational culture – a key factor in the implementation of a CRM strategy. The importance of organizational culture is underscored by the fact that the process of CRM strategy implementation falls across several organizational functions, including IT, customer service, and sales and marketing. Each of these domains is usually characterized by a distinct sub-culture. Pandey and Pandey (2013) argue that employees' perceptions of important things are informed by what executive leaders do. Moreover, the right leadership works through a combination of people and corporate culture (Pandey & Pandey, 2013). Unsurprisingly, executive leadership ensures that the corporate culture is clearly understood and fostered across the organization. Therefore, top leadership commitment and support could influence an organization-wide culture that promotes customer-centric practices enabled by a CRM strategy. Organizational leaders could also act as champions of team-oriented CRM initiatives, thus increasing the effectiveness of the CRM project implementation process.

## Customer-Oriented CRM Strategy

CRM is a business strategy aimed at enhancing customer relationships and satisfaction, growing revenues and profits, and reducing costs. The usefulness of a CRM system is underscored by better management of customer relationships, spanning customer service, sales and marketing, and other enterprise functions (Farhan et al., 2018). While purchasing a CRM system could take a company some steps toward accomplishing its intended goals, a clear CRM strategy is required to foster long-term competitive advantages through the optimal distribution of business and customer value (Esmaeilpour & Dashti, 2013; Garcia et al., 2012; Tekin, 2013). Tekin (2013) postulates that CRM should be conceived as a business strategy because of its organizational, technical, human, and process implications.

Sanad et al. (2010) assert that a clear CRM strategy will help build a customer-centric environment and enable smooth CRM implementation. Without a CRM strategy, it would be difficult for a company to plan how it will put its customers first (customer-centricity), increase revenues, and minimize costs through a technology-oriented CRM solution. Tekin (2013) claims that the CRM concept should be viewed as a business strategy to sustain long-term customer relationships – one of the primary goals of the modern firm. For instance, it would be difficult to determine the initiatives that need technology-driven improvements.

At the core of the CRM strategy is customer orientation, implying adequate understanding or awareness of customer profiles and requirements as the basis for offering them the greatest added value possible (Sanad et al., 2010). Customer orientation requires putting the needs, wants, preferences, buying behaviors, and price sensitivities of existing and prospective customers at the center of all organizational activities. The goal is to establish long-term customer relationships (Petrović, 2020; Shojaei, 2015; Vazifehdust et al., 2012). Pandey and Pandey (2013) assert that customers who are emotionally connected through personalized service experiences are


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more likely to spend more money than those who are merely satisfied.

Strongly customer-oriented companies are better placed to organize their human resources, business processes, and technologies better than their non-customer-oriented counterparts (Süphan, 2015). Consequently, customer orientation represents one of the key ingredients of CRM success. The customer should be viewed as a business asset – a resource to be carefully managed to realize long-term profitability (Vazifehdust et al., 2012). Every sale should be treated as the beginning of a long-term relationship rather than as the eventual win (Tekin, 2013). As such, today's CRM focuses on winning customers and maintaining them. Moreover, customers need to be managed as fundamental business assets.

According to Mallika (2016), the main enablers of a CRM strategy are people (employees, partners, and customers), budget, data, and infrastructure. A systematic approach to the definition and execution of the right CRM strategy is required. The approach should emphasize the need to perform a complete internal and external environment analysis to understand the core strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) concerning CRM implementation. The question guiding the SWOT analysis would be: what environmental factors support or challenge CRM adoption? Secondly, the CRM system goals should be defined as part of CRM strategy to maintain focus on the fundamental features relevant to a company and its bottom lines (Mallika, 2016). For instance, a company may intend to increase social media mentions by 40% by a certain date. Moreover, a company may plan to reduce the cost of acquiring a new customer by 20% by a certain date. Other strategic areas to focus on include: retention rates, customer satisfaction levels, sales revenues, and so on. Sanad et al. (2010) assert that CRM initiatives should be business-driven to align business and CRM project goals. The definition of measurable goals and metrics could play a critical role in evaluating the CRM project success.

Thirdly, it is imperative to consolidate clean customer-related data to foster a data-driven company. Fourthly, customer experiences should be personalized across all business functions and processes – from customer service to sales, marketing, and IT (Mallika, 2016). This way, a company can better understand and meet the needs and wants of its customers, drive revenues, and enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. With clean customer data, it would be possible to avoid the issue of "garbage-in garbage-out". Importantly, complete and clean data is the basis for performing the right customer segmentation and targeting (Sanad et al., 2010).

Lastly, the CRM strategy should focus on enhancing efficiencies and reducing costs through the automation of critical activities (Mallika, 2016). Examples of critical CRM activities include customer service and support, contacts and accounts management, and marketing and fulfillment. Fortunately, there are communication, collaboration, sales force automation, and database tools that can provide the technical features essential to automating most of these functions. Additionally, the team's performance should be periodically evaluated to ensure that the implemented CRM system is enabling the realization of the goals defined in the CRM strategy. The evaluation also helps identify potential problems and improvement opportunities (Esmaeilpour & Dashti, 2013). As such, a CRM strategy is a key requirement as it helps understand why certain CRM tools should be implemented and how those tools align with the company culture, overall business strategy, and CRM goals. Moreover, it can be argued that successful CRM implementation depends on how well a company's CRM strategy is defined and executed irrespective of the CRM tools used.

### Effective Change Management

The introduction of an integrated CRM system results in significant changes to organizational structures, technical infrastructure, business processes, and people. Therefore, CRM implementation transcends the conventional technical dimension to encompass organizational, strategic, and human factors (Beldi, Cheffi, & Dey, 2010). To execute the resultant complex organizational and technical changes successfully, it is imperative to establish an effective CRM change management strategy.

Statistics consistently reveal that approximately 70% of CRM projects do not accomplish their desired goals and objectives (Farhan et al., 2018; Sanad et al., 2010). The real problem could be that the key stakeholders often have different perceptions of CRM success or failure (Buttle & Maklan, 2015). For instance, C-suite executives and customer representatives may have different perceptions of what constitutes CRM project success or failure. For executives, success may be revenue gains, while representatives may be looking for faster responses to customer queries. Nevertheless, rather than total failure, some CRM projects may appear to have been "installed" in that they are inconsistent with the behaviors and expectations of some people who are directly or indirectly

affected by the resultant change. In such a case, the desired business value may not be realized.

Buttle and Maklan (2015) argue that an organization should work toward complete CRM implementation (rather than mere "installation") to realize the desired business value. The potential loss of business value is a strong case for effective change management. Therefore, organizations should focus on effective stakeholder engagement to bring all key stakeholders on board throughout the change process influenced by the CRM project. With effective change management supported by stakeholder engagement, CRM implementation will be accompanied by continuous commitment, support, and behavioral change among key stakeholders consistent with the new ways of working. Business process changes following the CRM implementation should be accompanied by proper removal or addition of new roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, user awareness and training constitutes one of the key enablers of smooth CRM deployment. It helps minimize potential resistance to change (Sanad et al. 2010).

Failure to meaningfully engage all stakeholders could result in complete resistance to CRM implementation or simply accepting the change without full commitment to it. There are many critical strategies for establishing better stakeholder engagement on CRM projects in decisions based on their needs, expectations, attitudes, interests, and possible impact. Süphan (2015) proposes a top-down approach that begins with the top management personnel promoting the CRM project. Top-level executives should leverage the assistance of the middle-level managers with the power to validate the CRM project with lower-level managers by communicating the goal and value brought about by the change. Upon bringing the middle-level and first-level managers on board, it is possible to obtain buy-in from the teams (Süphan, 2015). Therefore, CRM sponsorship should start from the top-level executives and flow through the middle-level managers to the lower-level managers until the project teams embrace and commit themselves to the change. Proper and timely communications should be established to ensure that all the stakeholders' requirements are met.

## Customer Data Quality and Availability

With appropriate CRM tools, a company can consolidate vast amounts of customer data captured from different channels, touchpoints, and contact points and channels. Internally, customer data may be collected from customer service, sales, marketing, and other departments. On the other hand, social media and online product reviews are common external sources of data (Garcia et al., 2012; Mallika, 2016). Therefore, customer data is often in diverse formats – structured, semi-structured, and unstructured formats as noted by Petrović (2020). A company should leverage CRM to make most of virtually all available customer data toward becoming a productive, data-driven firm. The quality of customer data or information is a key enabler of CRM success, mainly because it allows for better management of customer relationships (Petrović, 2020). As such, all departments should be provided with quality customer data to streamline communications. Moreover, the data should always be available to authorized or appropriate users when they need it.

Shojaei (2015) opines that quality customer data is fit for use to the advantage of business performance and effective customer service delivery. The key attributes of data quality include completeness, accuracy, timeliness, trustworthiness, and consistency (Petrović, 2020; Shojaei, 2015). Without quality data about customers' demographics, behaviors and psychographics, it would be difficult to execute accurate one-on-one communications and relationships with customers. For instance, organizations collect data about customers' demographics (such as gender, marital status, age, homeownership, and income level) in an attempt to reach them on a one-on-one basis with the highest accuracy levels possible. Quality behavioral and psychographic profiles based on data such as types of past purchases, payment methods, lifestyle, opinions, and personal values could be used to determine the life stages of various customers, personalize marketing communications, customize products, and improve customer relationships (Petrović, 2020).

Low-quality customer data can adversely affect CRM personnel's effectiveness and efficiency, customer service and satisfaction, operational costs, and decision-making capability. Moreover, customer data is continuously collected over time, which may complicate data quality management efforts (Petrović, 2020). For this reason, it is important to develop a systematic strategy for managing customer data quality before and after CRM implementation. Nevertheless, data quality management should be continuously performed to prevent low-quality data issues that would otherwise be challenging to address during the CRM lifecycle.

According to Mallika (2016), a centralized customer database should be implemented to serve as an organization's collective memory. A reliable customer

database is a basis for effective one-on-one communications and interactive marketing (Khlif, 2021; Shojaei, 2015). In addition, the customer database could help avoid data redundancy and eliminate the need for the repetitive collection of customer data. Excessive data redundancy could negatively affect the decision-making capability and CRM performance (Mallika, 2016). Therefore, organizations should strive to maintain the quality of their customers' data by collecting it from the right sources, integrating it, cleaning it, and storing it securely. In addition, to maintain data integrity and availability, it is important to implement strong controls relating to data modification and erasure. A common approach to the prevention of unauthorized modification and erasure is to implement strong user authentication and authorization controls.

Petrović (2020) highlights several data quality challenges that should be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of CRM initiatives. The challenges include decentralized data storage, duplication of data, poor integration of data from different sources, data defects, inconsistent input and storage practices, and potential deterioration of data quality over time. Open data and big data are other issues that should be addressed in the wake of increased volumes of structured, semi-structured, and unstructured data (Petrović, 2020). To remedy these challenges, Petrović (2020) proposes the following measures: automation of data collection and validation, continuous data inspection, a ranking of acceptable customer data quality, simplification of the customer database architecture, definition of appropriate data standards, cleaning of data from legacy systems before being transferred to the CRM system, and implementation of suitable error detection tools. Addressing customer data quality problems could make it easy for organizations to have a clear picture of their customers, make informed decisions concerning customer segmentation and targeting, and establish long-term relationship with the customers (Petrović, 2020; Sanad et al., 2010).

## Human Resource Management (HRM)

The human factor is a critical CRM success factor because organizations need people to implement necessary technologies, strategies, and business processes (Pandey & Pandey, 2013). Moreover, the relationship between employees and customers has a great impact on CRM strategy implementation (Shojaei, 2015). Staff recruitment, selection, and development are the key functions of an organization's human resource management (HRM) division or department. HRM is a major enabler of improved CRM. CRM implementation involves a variety of people, including the following: customer service representatives, frontline sales and marketing personnel, IT specialists, business analysts, and third-party service providers. All these people must work together to ensure that the CRM strategy is clearly defined and implemented (Pandey & Pandey, 2013). However, Pandey and Pandey (2013) postulate that all the employees, not just frontline sales personnel and marketers, assume the role of customer relationship management. Furthermore, human intelligence is needed to ensure that an organization improves processes through effective use of available information (Pandey & Pandey, 2013). Consequently, HR managers should create a framework that ensures that their organizations hire the talent with the right skills and attitudes to deliver superior and consistent customer experiences.

According to Pandey and Pandey (2013), human resources play a key role in CRM success in three ways. First, during recruitment and selection, the right fit of candidates should be sourced to get CRM tasks executed satisfactorily. With customer-centric strategy being the current business trend, candidate employees should have more empathy, compassion, and readiness to help others (Pandey & Pandey, 2013). Therefore, it would be a serious mistake to simply focus on the core technical capabilities of candidate employees, while ignoring the soft competences such as being empathetic and compassionate. Moreover, employees ought to share the philosophy of their organization's CRM practices, thus validating the need for a well-thought hiring process.

Secondly, it is important to train all employees on better customer empathy, understanding, handling, and service quality. Service quality is a significant enabler of customer satisfaction and loyalty. It takes three key dimensions, namely empathy, responsiveness or compassion, and assurance (Shojaei, 2015). The core CRM ideologies should be instilled through continuous training so that the organization's CRM philosophy reaches every staff (Kamalian, Ya'ghoubi, & Baharvand, 2013; Pandey & Pandey, 2013). Failure to focus on an organization-wide employee training and development program concerning the core customer-centric practices could lead to the loss of competitive advantage to rivals. This is consistent with the argument that all employees are direct or indirect customer relationship managers (Pandey & Pandey, 2013). As argued by Mallika (2016), people constitute the direct contact point of any company. Moreover, virtually every employee influences the customers' perception. If employees in one department fail in some way, the entire CRM process

may be challenged. Therefore, employee training could enable the realization of a customer-centric strategy enabled by well-ingrained CRM ideologies.

Lastly, employees should be provided with the right incentives to motivate them to practice new customer-oriented ideologies and practices internally (Pandey & Pandey, 2013). Other than selecting the right people and training them to expose them to the customer-centric concept, rewards should be provided for demonstrating exemplary customer service and relationships to nurture a lifelong customer-focused culture across an organization. Precisely, a lack of staff incentives could result in low CRM adoption rates (Pandey & Pandey, 2013). Consequently, the desired value of CRM cannot be fully realized. Moreover, retaining the best employees (in terms of delivery of quality customer service and maintaining strong customer relationships) could encourage profitable customers to become loyal. Therefore, it would be imperative to rely on skilled and experienced staff to build direct customer relationships.

## The Right CRM Technology

CRM is usually built around complex technological tools to enable organizations to acquire, retain, and satisfy their customers through efficient response to dynamic customer needs and preferences. CRM system implementations are aimed at instant response to customer desires, thus bolstering retention, minimizing marketing costs, and increasing revenues (Beldi et al., 2010). Studies (Farhan et al., 2018; Shojaei, 2015) show that about 70% of companies that implement CRM tools fail to achieve the desired business value. To a great extent, the high failure rate of CRM projects could be attributed to selecting and implementing the wrong CRM technology.

There are many successful and reliable CRM tools that organizations can leverage to execute their CRM strategies. Given the ever-increasing number of CRM technology offerings, it is important to carefully evaluate existing technology alternatives to ensure that the selected CRM tools align with organizational requirements, culture, and innovation capacity (Khlif, 2021). Sanad et al. (2010) argue that selecting the right CRM system and integrator could help minimize the need for excessive CRM solution customizations. With this in mind, out-of-the-box functionality should be leveraged to minimize customization.

## CRM Implementation Methodology

CRM implementation is a major undertaking that should be executed in a well-planned, phased, and prioritized approach to support an organization's goals and objectives. It is important to consider the full CRM project lifecycle – from inception to design, analysis, planning, deployment, and maintenance and support. The 'Big Bang' implementation approach should be avoided in favor of a phased approach (Sanad et al., 2010). Beldi et al. (2010) break down the CRM implementation process into three major phases - the planning, piloting, and roll-out phases. The complexity of CRM projects and the large number of affected or concerned employees require appropriate CRM change support for users during the planning, piloting, and roll-out project phases. As part of user support, communication and training strategies may be adopted (Beldi et al. (2010). According to Sanad et al. (2010), implementing the CRM project in phases could minimize the overall risk of failure, create adequate time for promoting user acceptance and awareness, and help get buy-in from key stakeholders on time.

Pandey and Pandey (2013) suggest that it is important to obtain user ownership because only convinced and satisfied users will work efficiently and effectively within a system. As a major investment, the reason for CRM implementation should be made clear to all stakeholders through a business case from the earliest project phases (Sanad et al., 2010). Therefore, a top-down communication approach should be adopted to ensure that everybody understands that the CRM initiative has the executive sponsorship, commitment, and support. Moreover, end-users should be involved throughout the CRM project to promote buy-in and actual adoption upon deployment.

From a project management perspective, Beldi et al. (2010) and Sanad et al. (2010) highlight the need for a skilled and experienced project manager to help meet the CRM project requirements, scope, timeline, and budget. Furthermore, expertise from external consultants and vendors is required to track and monitor the CRM implementation progress. CRM champions should be leveraged to overcome internal politics and resistance, thus paving way for the required changes. In addition, collaboration among staff and across key CRM project stakeholders is critical to CRM implementation success (Sanad et al., 2010). Beldi et al. (2010) argue that successful management of CRM implementations require a balanced, integrated approach. This entails appropriate CRM system selection, process re-engineering, and

reconfiguration organizational structures. Beldi et al. (2010) further recommends a "technochange methodology" to successfully achieve organizational change through technical CRM implementation. The effectiveness of the "technochange approach" is claimed to be determined by project team performance, close stakeholder collaboration, and technology efficiency.

### Systems Integration

CRM tools mainly support front office automation. However, an ERP system supports back-office automation. CRM automates customer relationships, covering opportunity and contact management, marketing, product knowledge, sales forecasting, sales force management, order fulfillment, and pre-sale and post-sale services through a unified view of each customer (AlQershi, Mokhtar, & Abas, 2020; Mallika, 2016). Contrastingly, an ERP automates business functions, including human resource, production, accounting and finance, warehousing, and order fulfillment among others by providing a unified view of the business (Mallika, 2016). Consequently, CRM and ERP capabilities are complementary. Consistent with this, it is imperative to integrate the two systems to complement information flow and business workflow across an organization. Importantly, integrating CRM with ERP could help a company provide enhanced customer service and support through enterprise-wide channels that seamlessly direct customer queries and issues to the right persons for quick resolution. For example, information regarding reported product quality problems may be fed into the research and development (R&D) module of the ERP to track and correct the underlying issues.

Sanad et al. (2010) suggest that organizations should strive to meet the timeline for integrating the CRM with other enterprise systems. Consequently, costly CRM project schedule overruns could be avoided. The negative impacts of schedule overruns could range from contractual violations to budget deficit and failure to achieve the intended goals in a timely manner.

## Conclusion

A CRM strategy revolves around three core elements, namely people, technology, and processes. All the three elements play a major role in CRM implementation. CRM is aimed at understanding, anticipating, managing, and personalizing the needs and preferences of a company's current and prospective customers. Ultimately, the goal of CRM is to promote customer satisfaction and loyalty, increase revenues, and minimize operational costs. However, close to 70% of CRM projects fail to deliver the intended business and customer value.

In this review, several CSFs for CRM implementations have been critically explored. Considering that the people, technology, and process aspects are considered to be extremely critical to successful CRM implementation, this research review has organized the CSFs and recommendations around the three CRM components. Nevertheless, a characteristic of the identified CSFs drawn from extant literature is that they are mostly well-known. Moreover, most of the CSFs are applicable to virtually all information system implementations. However, CRM implementation failure rates remain very high to date. As high as two out of three CRM projects are delivered late, beyond budget, or fail to deliver their intended benefits. Therefore, mere awareness of the CSFs for CRM does not guarantee CRM project success. Rather, organizations should systematically put the CSFs into practice.

Organizational management and staff should be fully committed to CRM implementation to create and improve relationships with targeted customers. Moreover, all employees should have the right skills and attitudes to serve the customer with empathy and compassion. The significance of people is underscored by their role in implementing CRM tools, strategies, and processes as well as their direct contact with customers. All the employees, not just customer service, sales, and marketing staff, are customer relationship managers. Furthermore, employees influence the customers' perception. Therefore, organizational human resources play a critical role in enhancing customer service, satisfaction, and loyalty. With effectively managed customer relationships, SMEs will be able to optimize customer value and profitability. When it comes to the technology element, SMEs should carefully determine the specific CRM initiatives that need technology-driven improvements. Then, the best CRM tools should be selected to automate and streamline the identified CRM initiatives. Moreover, SMEs should direct CRM automation to the right processes to optimize them. Business processes should be modified accordingly or replaced to pave way for a technology-driven CRM strategy. Failure to focus on all three components implies that an SME will face serious challenges when attempting to become customer-centric. Importantly, SMEs should treat CRM implementations as a customer-driven, cross-functional, and technology-integrated

strategy aimed at maximizing the value of customer relationships.

Using extant literature, this research review has explored several key success factors or CSFs for CRM implementation in the context of SMEs. The concept of CSFs has been widely used as an effective approach to the successful delivery of information systems projects, including those related to CRM. Therefore, this research review makes theoretical contributions to CRM success factors based on the CSFs concept that has been widely employed in the realm of information systems studies. In particular, the review has identified the following CSFs for CRM implementation: senior leadership sponsorship, customer-oriented CRM strategy, effective change management, customer data quality and availability, human resource management, the right CRM technology, CRM implementation methodology, and systems integration. However, no attempt has been made to prioritize the identified 8 CSFs. Therefore, it may be difficult for key SME stakeholders to understand the specific areas where they should focus their efforts based on the outcomes of this research review.

Considering that the selection of the key success factors highlighted above is based on past literature, it would be important to conduct a truly empirical study that assesses the relative importance of these variables. To a great extent, this research review may be considered to be the starting for future studies. Future research may entail conducting survey research in the context of SMEs that have implemented enterprise-class CRM systems. A survey questionnaire containing the 8 CSFs is recommended. Participants may be expected to state the significance of each CSF for CRM based on a Likert scale, preferably a five-point scale. Then, the mean values of those CSFs could be computed to determine and rank the CSFs' relative significance. Furthermore, future studies could attempt to investigate the inter-relationships between the 8 CSFs. This is primarily because there could be causal relationships between two or more CSFs. The outcomes of this empirical study could have greater practical implications for CRM implementation in the context of SMEs.

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