THE IMPORTANT OF CLIENT RELATIONSHIP MARKETING PRACTICES IN OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to identify and examine the responsibilities of the sales representatives and customer service analysts in the oil and gas industry at different stages of the client relationship development process. A conceptual framework is proposed to analyse the single case study of this research. The relationship marketing practices of a global oil and gas firm were examined through twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews with key personnel. Seven client relationship marketing practices were identified. Whereas organising and attending social events, managing the communications or interactions process, managing the cross-selling, service recovery and other small little gestures are similar to the findings of Claycomb and Martin (2002), treating every client equally, and visiting customer were two practices that emerged from this study. Although the seven practices presented are essential in contributing to a successful client relationship, further research is needed to examine the effects of each practice and the quality of the client relationship. This article demonstrates that in order to succeed in the highly competitive marketplace, oil and gas firms need to understand not only the potential outcomes of each relationship marketing practice but also how to practice it systematically.

KEY WORDS: Client Relationship Marketing / Oil And Gas Industry

30 pages

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, business-to-business relationships have emerged as an important part of managerial practice and scholar inquiry (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006). The significance of relationships to the management of business is broadly supported in the researches (Jackson, 1985; Kanter, 1994; Gummesson, 1999). Relationship marketing practice is significant, particularly for the business-to-business industry, because the physical products in this industry have become quite similar. In this way, well-executed relationship marketing would be an outstanding way for a firm in the industry to differentiate itself from competitors (Evans & Laskin, 1994). If not, the emphasis would have to be on price cutting and much lesser profit margins. The intensifying of competition (Barr & McNeilly, 2003), a rapidly changing marketplace (Cravens & Piercy, 1994), globalization (Buttle, 1996), and increasing alternative energy sources, such as nuclear and renewable energy (Kong & Ohadi, 2010) have forced oil and gas firms to take relationship marketing more seriously.

It is generally agreed that relationship marketing is a customer centered approach whereby a firm seeks long-term business relations with prospective and existing customers (Bell and Zemke, 1992; Cannie and Caplin, 1991; Daniel, 1992; Farber and Wycoff, 1992; McKenna, 1992; Zeithaml et al., 1990). Buyer and seller would get mutual benefit from the relationship (Gounaris, 2005). The sellers benefit from increasing a firm's sales, growth, profitability and competitive position in the market, declining operating costs and positive word of mouth (Gilpin, 1996; Gronroos, 2000; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Woo & Leelapanyalert, 2014), while the buyers benefit from risk reduction in complex transactions (Hart & Hogg, 1998) and also have the ability to control, reduce and possibility eliminate transaction costs (Buttle, 1996). Various researchers have contributed to the buyer–seller relationship marketing literature by proposing several conceptual models. In order to identify relationship marketing practices by marketing specialists in this research sales representatives are interviewed and customer

service analysts at different stages of the customer relationship development process, this research revisited and carefully examine the relationship development process models of Woo & Leelapanyalert (2014). This model based on famous models (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Ford et al., 1998) that they all recognize that relationship marketing practice is not limited to marketing specialists but in fact also requires a commitment from analysts from departments other than the marketing department who have direct contact with clients. This explains why this article focuses not only on relationship marketing practices by sales representatives but also includes customer service analysts in the research.

While there are many scholars examining what firms could and should be doing in relationship marketing practice (Alvarez, Casielles, & Martin, 2011; Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 2002; Claycomb & Martin, 2002; Gronroos, 2000; Huntley, 2006; Roberts, Varki, & Brodie, 2003; Sin, Tse, Yau, Lee, & Chow, 2002; Theron & Terblanche, 2010), little effort has been given to finding out how oil and gas firms actually implement relationship marketing in developing relationships with their clients at different stages in the relationship development process. This creates a gap in the current literature, as an understanding of relationship marketing practices presently in use is essential for energy firms to sustain and prosper in the highly competitive marketplace. Then the objective of this article is to identify customer relationship marketing practices used by these firms in order to establish and nurture relationships with customers in the oil and gas industry. In particular, it seeks to examine the responsibilities of sales representatives and customer service analysts at different stages of the relationship development process.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Importance of Relationship Marketing in the Business-to-Business Industry

Over recent years, relationship marketing, which perceives the significance of relationship building and management in doing business, has developed as a complex marketing practice. Relationship marketing has been considered by numerous researchers in an industrial marketing context (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Coote, Forrest, & Tam, 2003) and in a business-to-business industry context (Gounaris, 2005; Piercy 2006; Theron & Terblanche, 2010; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006). A paradigm change from the marketing mix approach toward relationship marketing has been watched (Gronroos, 1994; Holmlund & Kock, 1996; Levitt, 1983; Webster, 1992). This is on the grounds that the original marketing mix approach gives a fragmented picture of what happens in business markets (Ford et al., 1998) and does not adequately catch the greater part of the key components that must be defined in building and sustaining relationships (Christopher et al., 2002).

Currently, the concentration of marketing has developed from an unsophisticated idea of giving the clients what they need to building and maintaining commonly satisfying long-term relationships with customers and growing long-term strategies for client retention (Christopher et al., 2002; Reinartz & Kumar, 2003; Xu, Goedegebuure & Van der Heijden, 2006). This new paradigm affirms that buyer and seller are engaged in a mutual exchange situation in which both sides advantage from the relationship (Gounaris, 2005). Firms advantage from expanding sales and volumes, declining operating expenses, and positive word of mouth (WOM; Gilpin, 1996; Gronroos, 2000; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990), though clients advantage from risk reduction in complex transactions (Hart & Hogg, 1998) and can control, reduce, and potentially take out transaction costs (Buttle, 1996).

Due to the fact that increasingly companies in business-to-business marketing faces difficult options concerning their sales and marketing investments in customer relationships (Piercy, 2006). A firm with relationship marketing can utilize the total product concept and keep up stronger advantages (Evans & Laskin, 1994). Concurring to Levitt (1986), a generic product is a commodity; if customers feel a product is generic, they will purchase just on price. To be more competitive, firms need augmented products, which offer clients more than they think is required or have come to expect (Evans & Laskin, 1994). Authors further explained in the long run, competitors may duplicate tangible augmented product attibutes, therefore relationship marketing can give a more intangible, even so stronger, long-term customer advantage that may be hard to match.

The general target of relationship marketing is to build, maintain, and improve a long-term buyer–seller relationship (Woo & Leelapanyalert, 2014) with clients to acquire successful and proficient marketing which rise competitiveness (Harrigan et al., 2011), and make an exceptional and economical competitive advantage (Liang et al., 2009) because of competitors cannot duplicate or create homogeneous products and services (Buttle, 1996; Perrien & Richard, 1995). Unfaithful customers with no feeling of relationship can change their mind easily to competitors by exploiting the low prices, great promotion or other deals offered by other suppliers (Holmlund & Kock, 1996). Relationship marketing can convey the long-term financial benefits result from fickleness of customers. Relationship marketing is referred to two economic opinions: it is more costly to win another client than it is to hold a current client (Storbacka, Strandvik, & Gronroos, 1994); and the longer the relationship between an organization and a client, the more productive the relationship for the firm (Buttle, 1996). Gronroos (2000) argued that it is constantly less expensive to make a satisfied client buy again than to take a new customer through the customer relationship life cycle to the end of the purchase stage. At the end of the day, it is more productive to have as many profitable long-term customer relationships as possible.

2.2 Relationship Development Process Models Revisited

Numerous researchers have proposed several conceptual models of the relationship development process because numerous organizations utilize the relationship development process as a fundamental marketing strategy to accomplish their objective by creating long-term beneficial relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987; Ford et al., 1998; Wilson, 1995; Woo & Leelapanyalert, 2014). Four models have been characterized and clarified every phase of relationship process that move from transactional to relational exchange by utilizing conceptual models support as a part of social exchange theory (Dwyer et al., 1987), collaborative relational exchange (Wilson, 1995), the business markets (Ford et al., 1998) and sustainable relationship (Woo & Leelapanyalert, 2014). Dwyer et al. (1987) has proposed the relationship development process model which comprises five stages of buyer-seller relationship; awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment, and dissolution. Looking at acquisitions, mergers, and joint venture relationships, Wilson (1995) considered the relationship development process as embracing five stages as partner search and selection, defining purpose, boundary definition, creating relationship value, and hybrid stability. On the other hands, Ford et al.'s (1998) relationship development process model has four stages which are pre-relationship stage, exploratory stage, developing stage, and stable stage.

Based on these three concepts, Woo & Leelapanyalert (2014) conceptualized the relationship development process stages from part of customer relationship marketing; pre-relationship, exploratory, expansion, and stable stages. The pre-relationship stage is the early stage of the relationship development process where many uncertainties and very little trust between the buyer and seller happen. It requires two-way communication in order to evaluate the benefits of forming a relationship and to assess the investment and adaptation. Moreover, Dwyer et al (1987) assured external marketing efforts such as advertising and branding are necessary to generate customer awareness of the brand or service offerings of the company.

The second stage is the exploratory stage which concerns about negotiation and discussion about a possible purchase of a business product or service (Woo & Leelapanyalert, 2014). Then at this stage, the customer has high possible to trial purchase and the future relationship between company and customer which would be formed from the interaction. Blau (1964) explains that the customer satisfaction result of this

stage would describe from the ability and willingness of the seller to deliver satisfaction to the buyer.

The third stage is the expansion stage which occurs when the uncertainties of both parties about each other's ambitions and abilities have been decreased and the business is increasing in the optimistic way (Woo & Leelapanyalert, 2014). The expansion stage could take place by two key elements which are mutual considerations and interactions as quality of the relationship is judged by direct experience (Dwyer et al., 1987).

The last stage is the stable stage. This stage happens when products or services have been delivered to customer as daily operation. The relationship is growing because the trust was established (Woo & Leelapanyalert, 2014). Dwyer et al. (1987) defines this stage as "commitment" the most advanced stage in buyer-seller relationship in which exchange partners have reached a curtain level of satisfaction. Therefore it motivates both parties to stay in long-term relationship and could not easily change even another seller provides similar benefits. To summarize, these models obviously illustrate the process and the advantages of developing a buyer–seller relationship starting with one stage to another.

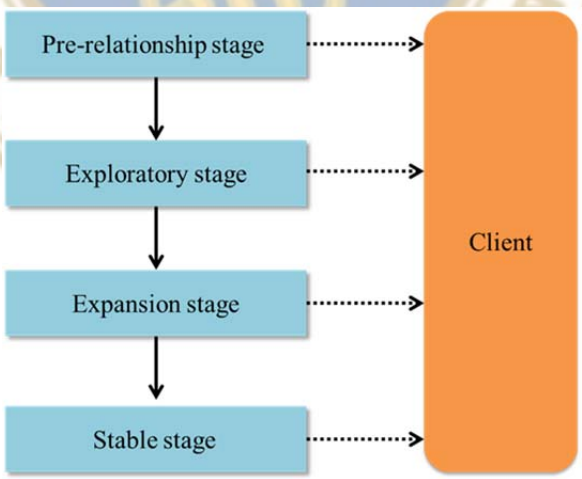

Figure 2.1 Client Relationship Marketing Conceptual frame work based on Woo & Leelapanyalert (2014)

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was based on qualitative research by using the case study approach and structure plus semi-structured interviews to enable an in-depth study of the practice of client relationship marketing in the oil and gas firm. Qualitative research was applied in this article because it allows researchers to explore the inner experience of interviewees (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). A case study strategy was conducted, since the question of how participants establish long-term client relationships with relationship marketing practices will be answered (Yin, 2003). Survey method may not discover detailed, valuable, and useful insights into a firm's client relationship marketing practice therefore conducting a case study will be the suitable option (Yin, 2003). In addition researcher has chance to interact with the interviewees (Harris & O'Malley, 2000), asking more detailed questions and exploring unexpected issues that arise during the data collection. In order to explore participants' own experiences, feelings, and opinions, in-depth interview method is selected (Denscombe, 2007; Lee & Lings, 2009a). Moreover, it allows the researcher to understand the information in depth; it could make understanding some point that the numbers or statistics could not clearly and thoroughly explain (Sinkovics, Penz, & Ghauri, 2005). This research adopted semi-structured approach because it creates a chance to ask further inquiries and check whether all information has been understood correctly Furthermore, A semi-structured approach allows interviewees to express more broadly and develop ideas on the researcher's issues (Denscombe, 2007). The interview includes open-ended questions and topic guides. The interview questions move from general to more specific in order to better understand the client relationship marketing practice in oil and gas industry.

The study of a firm's client relationship marketing practice and the client relationship development process are involved in this research. The oil and gas industry was chosen as a study subject because it is one of the world's largest industries and its revenues are large (American Petroleum Institute, 2015) and the increasing importance

of client relationship marketing practice in business-to-business industry. This study focused on a leading oil and gas firm in the world with the intention that the findings would be able to contribute to the literature relating to client relationship marketing practice in the oil and gas industry. Firm X was selected as a suitable firm to study. Firm X is one of the 10 largest oil and gas firms in the world as measured by income, generating revenues in excess of USD $300 billion in 2014 alone (Google Finance, 2015). The firm name is not disclosed for reasons of confidentiality. This paper aims to present informative and constructive findings and was not designed to represent the entire oil and gas industry. Hence, the investigation is limited to a single oil and gas firm.

This article collected in-depth data through three main sources: semi-structured interviews, observations, and secondary data. Secondary data collected included information from the firm's website, marketing brochures, online presence, and newspaper articles. During the interview, interviewees' reaction in answering the interview questions were observed and recorded. Based on triangulate the data (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010; Lee & Lings, 2009b), these observations were later studied with the secondary data gathered. This research adopted the triangulation approach to increase the validity (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010; Lee & Lings, 2009b) of this study. There are two types of semi-interviews which are face interviews and telephone interviews. It was quite difficult to conduct face-to-face interviews with sales representatives who always on the move therefore telephone interviews were utilized with some of them. Semi-structured interviews of approximately 30 min in length were conducted with 5 sales representatives in territory manager position, and persons in customer service function which are 2 order fulfillment analysts, 3 order fulfillment team leads and 2 order fulfillment supervisors, all of whom had to directly interact with clients. Numerous interviewees from different practice areas and positions were interviewed in order to confirm that client relationship marketing practices undertaken at different levels and positions were all included in the data collection. Before starting each interview, researcher would ask for audio-record interview approve. If they approve to do so the interview will audio-record and later fully transcript. However, if audio-record was not permitted, the extensive notes would be taken. To capture the idea and details of each interview, these notes were rearranged as soon as possible in a tidier format. During the analysis of data, verbatim quotations from interviewees were

given significant emphasis. This article does not disclose interviewees' identity in order to preserve the privacy of them.

Per Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested, this study conducted data analysis right away from the first interview, together with the data collection in order to get the research problem which the researcher can adjust to improve in next interview. To analyze the data, collected data is categorized in order to find the relevant between the data and the conceptual framework and consequently it could develop conceptual framework from the existing literature as Ghauri (2004) explained.

CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This study was conducted in order to identify practices used by sales representatives and customer service analysts in term of business-to-business at different stages of the relationship development process. In order to summarize the findings from the data collected, only an overview of the key issues is given. Besides, to avoid excessive quotation, this article presents only selective direct quotes from the interviewees that best present the phenomena under investigation in order to facilitate the analysis. Based on the data collected, client relationship marketing practices were identified. A previous study of relationship-building practices in the legal service providers by Woo and Leelapanyalert (2014) outlined five similar practices. Two out of the seven practices identified in this particular study are emerging client relationship marketing practices, namely, treating every client equally, and visiting customer.

4.1 Managing the Communications or Interactions Process

Managing the communications and interactions process between firm and clients is essential in order to foster client relationships. Interviewees expressed the belief that good interactions can build trust and increase clients' satisfaction toward the firm and its product offerings, which in turn will prolong the relationship. This view is supported by Sharma and Patterson (1999) and Selnes (1998). Sharma and Patterson stressed that clients who trust the competencies and abilities of their service providers will be happy to continue the relationship. In studying 177 institutional buyers of a food producer, Selnes found that satisfaction is the key variable when the decision relates to the continuity of the relationship.

Communications can be personal or nonpersonal (Claycomb & Martin, 2002). Nonpersonal forms of communication play an important role in initiating the client relationship. This includes sending clients marketing brochures, firm newsletters, and

articles to inform and update them about the firm's capabilities and new products offered. This helps to generate interest and construct a solid foundation for sales representative to strike up a conversation in order to move prospective clients to the exploratory stage and subsequently to the expansion stage in the relationship development process. This view was demonstrated by Woo & Leelapanyalert (2014) in their client relationship marketing conceptual frame work. Personal communications were recognised on three different levels: territory managers, customer service supervisors and customer service analysts. At the territory manager level, interviewees said that continuous communication is the key element in positioning the firm at the top of a client's mind. Their main concern is to maintain a strong client relationship at an owner level. Constant telephone calls to ensure that clients' needs are met or to identify any problems in their works and circumstances are necessary in enhancing the relationship. In addition, territory managers, customer service supervisors also take the initiative to give technical support to their prospective, existing, and former clients free of charge. Technical support refers to a meeting in which customer service supervisors support useful and pertinent business advice or technical solutions to their clients. This allows the customer service to have continuous communication with their clients, as clients are more receptive to this type of communication. The underlying logic is that the supports are free of charge and usually relate to clients' business.

Furthermore, as suggested by Gronroos (2000), positive perceived service quality is achieved when the "experienced quality" meets or exceeds the expectations of the customer. During the product delivery phase, customer service analysts are responsible for managing the process. Their responsibilities involve keeping clients updated about work progress, being responsive in answering calls and e-mails, and focusing on delivering exceptional products on time. The idea is essentially to eliminate competition by increasing the clients' satisfaction. It is based on the notion that it is more difficult for competitors to lure satisfied clients away. This finding is consistent with Ambrose, Hess, and Ganesan's (2007) argument that satisfaction is the key to building a sustainable relationship.

4.2 Other Small Little Gestures

Discussion with four out of 15 interviewees showed that there were some little gestures along the client relationship development process that enhanced the existing relationship—for example, happy New Year card or company calendar sent to greet a client for special occasion can positively enhance the relationship. Other considerations include saying thank you whenever there is an opportunity to do so. It can be a simple thank you email or call to clients thanking them for providing cooperation in the job. This view is supported by Claycomb and Martin (2002), who concluded that existing customers who received a thank you letter or call were more likely to repeat a purchase than those who had not been thanked. In addition, a customer service analyst suggested the following: "It would be great to add greeting words with clients such as have a nice day or ask about weather. I noticed that my client would take maternity leave so I called to congratulate her and her baby wishing them a great health."

Obviously, this is something clients do not necessarily expect but usually something they appreciate. This suggests that internal relationships within the firm are vital because it is beneficial to learn from other people's experiences.

4.3 Organising and Attending Social Events

Social events were frequently mentioned by most of the interviewees as an important interaction opportunity for sales representative and clients. These include one-to-one or group-type casual meetings. One-to-one meetings are often organised by territory managers and usually involve treating clients to a lunch or taking them out to dinner. The atmosphere is quite relaxed comparing to a meeting room. The underlying intention is not simply a free meal; it is about being visible, being in touch with the client's thinking, staying in touch with clients, and fostering the relationship. This type of meeting can occur in the exploratory, expansion and stable stage, when interaction is crucial in nurturing relationship.

Another type of social event is a meeting involving a larger group of people. Marketing specialists are responsible for organising this type of rally event. The rally event is organised to build contacts and generate clients' interest in the service offerings. It also serves as an opportunity for communication between customer service analysts

and clients. In addition, team members from both parties can get to know each other better. This facilitates a smoother ongoing client relationship during the entire expansion and stable stage.

Overall, the findings from this study reveal that different social events serve tactically different purposes. At the exploratory stage, they create a platform for both parties to exchange information, to get to know each other better, and to stay in touch. During the expansion and stable stage, they serve as an opportunity to strengthen client relationships, as customer service analysts often spend most of their time communicating with clients via e-mails and phone calls, not through face-to-face interactions. In addition, social events can also be utilised as a token of appreciation. For example, after business monthly meeting, sales representatives could take their client to a karaoke. On a broader scale, with the directors' involvement, the sale manager organise annual abroad trips to demonstrate a firm's appreciation of its core business clients. It is important to demonstrate that firm value clients, it increases the bonding and eventually it is hoped clients will commit even more. A territory manager concluded, ". . . Every year, we rank the top performance clients and give award which is abroad trip going with territory managers."

This finding is consistent with Claycomb and Martin's (2002) view of the importance of social events (which includes open houses for clients) in building buyer–seller relationships.

4.4 Visiting Customer

More than half of the interviewees, eight out of twelve, recognised the importance of visiting customer in the client relationship development process. The rationale for this is that customer visit is face-to-face communication. Being there in person can imply that clients are important and the discussing issue is worth both side times. Face to face meeting allows both sides to see and respond to people's reactions, for example, facial expressions and body language as well as their tone of voice. Sales representatives have the chance to show they care by asking probing questions and actively listening to understand the client's perspective. Moreover, sales representatives

are able to share strategy, explain it clearly, and answer questions honestly. Clients see how actions align with words, which enhances company's credibility and trust.

Sales representative normally visit clients every month. From time to time, they bring customer service analysts, technical staff and other related function to visit customer. Interacting directly with client, customer service analysts expand their network and establish shared experience that can enhance future communication. It also helps create relationship that is the basis of cooperation and success across the organization.

4.5 Service Recovery

The importance of service recovery was recognised by almost half of the interviewees (five out of twelve) as part of their client relationship marketing practices. Service recovery refers to the ability of a firm to correct its mistakes or errors before the dissatisfied client decides to terminate the service or to generate bad WOM (Claycomb & Martin, 2002). Considerable research has shown that negative WOM has more significant influence than positive WOM (Goldenberg, Libai, Moldovan, & Muller, 2007; Nam, Manchanda, & Chintagunta, 2010). This explains why, when mistakes occur or complaints are filed, Territory managers tend to immediately resolve the problem and ensure that it does not happen again. A quick follow-up action and resolution can strengthen the broken relationship. The underlying logic is that the client feels more satisfied when his or her complaint has been taken seriously and the problem has been resolved promptly. The findings also revealed that service recovery should not be neglected, even if the existing relationship has reached the stable stage. This is in line with Ford et al.'s (1998) argument that it is possible for one or both parties to revert back from any of the relationship stages (exploratory, developing, or stable stage) to the pre-relationship stage with another counterpart.

4.6 Managing the Cross-Selling

Cross-selling involves selling an additional service to an existing client, asdefined by Claycomb and Martin (2002). It can only be initiated within a solid existing client relationship. Theron and Terblanche (2010) stressed that good relationship

marketing practices at every point of client interaction are essential in building client relationships. As stressed by Gronroos (2000), the ability of the firm to take care of the customer's problems and to fulfil its promises will increase the customer's satisfaction. This in turn will potentially generate the possibility of cross-selling. Practitioners at all levels of the new product offering are required to understand the existing client relationship and to establish the client's expectations and requirements in order to better meet those needs. The way the new relationship is built, maintained, and enhanced not only will affect the perceived service quality provided by the new department but also will affect the firm's reputation.

Managing the cross-selling process effectively can accelerate business growth and increase a firm's profits. Perhaps this is why Buttle (1996) argued that the longer the association between a company and a customer, the more profitable the relationship for the firm. In addition, with a strong client relationship, selling an additional service to an existing client can be less challenging compared to generating a new client. A successful cross-selling process can also increase a client's commitment to the firm.

4.7 Treating Every Client Equally

Another key practice to maintaining a good client relationship is to treat every client equally. The firm seriously concerns about transparency. It will not give privilege to particular client instead it treat every client equally. If one client is treated differently, the other clients will not satisfy with this practice. A territory manager commented on this point: "I treat customer per contract and I try hard to support their business but everything is under company's rules and regulations"

Moreover, the company normally does job rotation every two or three years in order to avoid too close personal relationship between sales and clients. The underlying logic is that the company would like to retain good reputation and avoid bad WOM. A number of interviewees stressed that a leading oil and gas firm like Firm X could not afford to have bad WOM because a good reputation is essential in maintaining its position in the marketplace.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the relationship marketing practices used by sales representatives and customer service analysts in term of business-to-business at different stages in the relationship development process are a bit different. Marketing efforts by sales representatives are more geared toward initiating the relationship. They are playing a significant role in managing the communications and creating good interactions at the pre-relationship stage. They often visit customer to nurture relationship. Once the connection has been made, customer service analysts will involve the role of developing sustainable relationships with clients by motivating them and taking them through the rest of the stages in the relationship development process.

Sales representative is the focal point when client need any assist, he or she usually contacts the responsible territory manager. This is due to the fact that sales representatives will have a broader interface with clients than customer service analysts at the pre-relationship and exploratory stages. Customer service analysts' role will then be limited at pre-relationship stage.

Analysis of the interview data revealed that the 7 client relationship marketing practices outlined are a prerequisite for the formation of long-term profitable client relationships. In addition, the findings also demonstrate positioning the firm at the top of a client's mind, generating new businesses and cross-selling, increasing positive WOM, and consolidating the firm's market position as desired outcomes of practicing relationship marketing.

Conclusion, although social events create opportunities for interactions, it all comes down to managing the communications or interactions process, managing the cross-selling, and service recovery to generate client satisfaction. Only when visiting customer, treating every client equally and other small little gestures are all in place will the client relationship be fully effectively established. The data collected are summarised in figure 2 and table 1.

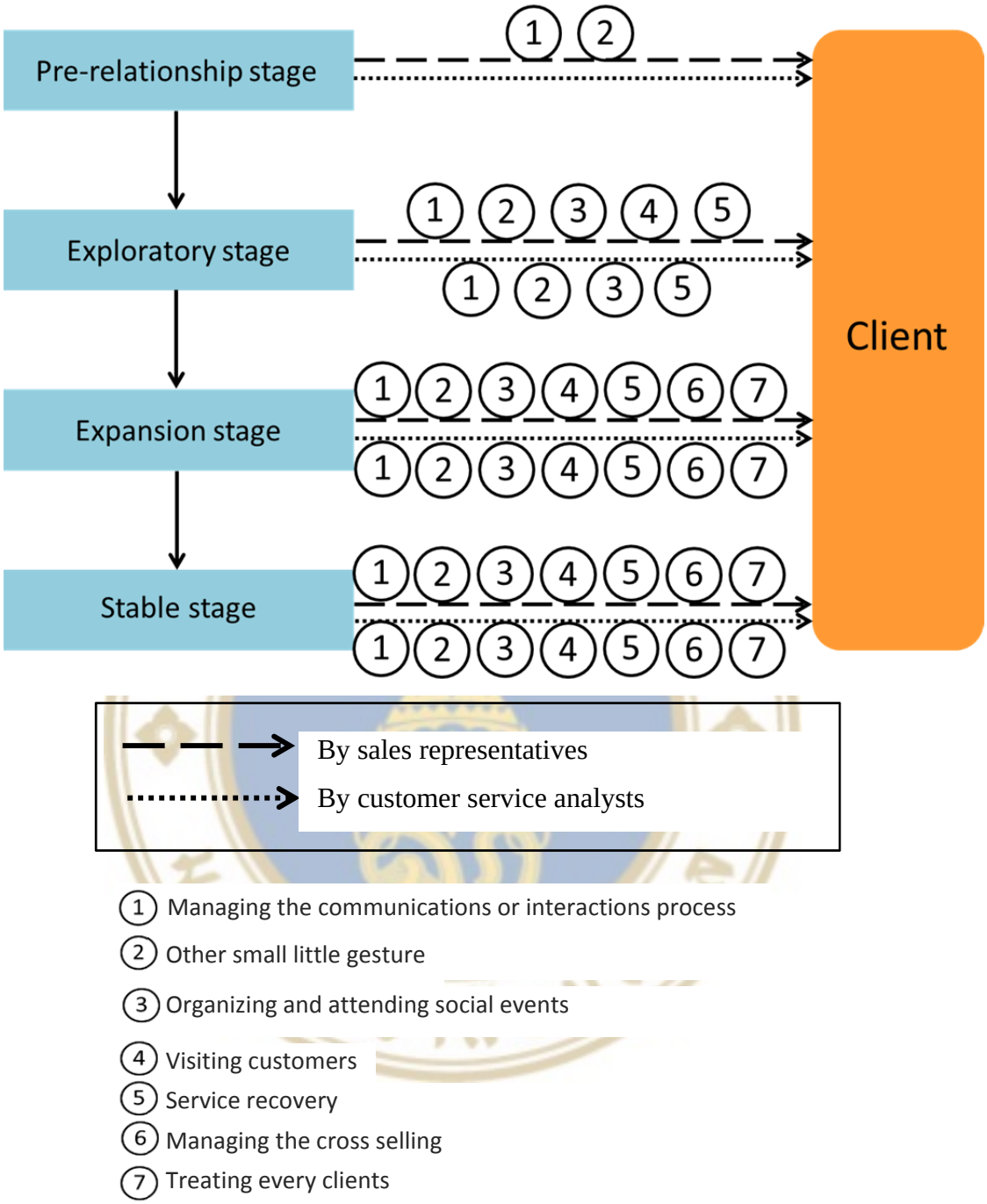

Figure 4.1 Client Relationship Marketing Practices at Different Stages of the Relationship Development Process. Based on Woo & Leelapanyalert (2014)

Table 4.1 Client Relationship Marketing Practices by Sales Representatives and Customer Service Analysts at different Stages of the relationship Development Process

Stage	Sales Representatives' Client Relationship Marketing Practices	Customer Service Analysts' Client Relationship Marketing Practices
Pre-relationship	- Managing the communications or interactions process - Other small little gestures	
Exploratory	- Managing the communications or interactions process - Other small little gestures - Organising and attending social events - Visiting customer - Service recovery	- Managing the communications or interactions process - Other small little gestures - Organising and attending social events - Service recovery
Expansion	- Managing the communications or interactions process - Other small little gestures - Organising and attending social events - Visiting customer - Service recovery - Managing the cross-selling - Treating every client equally	- Managing the communications or interactions process - Other small little gestures - Organising and attending social events - Visiting customer - Service recovery - Managing the cross-selling - Treating every client equally
Stable	- Managing the communications or interactions process - Other small little gestures - Organising and attending social events - Visiting customer - Service recovery - Managing the cross-selling - Treating every client equally	- Managing the communications or interactions process - Other small little gestures - Organising and attending social events - Visiting customer - Service recovery - Managing the cross-selling - Treating every client equally

CHAPTER V
RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this paper makes a positive contribution to the research area of how detailed client relationship marketing practices are carry out by sales representatives and customer service analysts at different stages of the relationship development process in the oil and gas industry. The objective of this article is to identify customer relationship marketing practices used by these firms in order to establish and nurture relationships with customers in the oil and gas industry. The findings have revealed 7 significant client relationship marketing practices utilized by one of the 10 largest oil and gas firms in the world. Other oil and gas firms of similar size and market position could benefit from these findings in defining their own client relationship marketing practice. In addition, a conceptual framework was revisited to highlight these practices by sales representatives and customer service analysts at each relationship development stage. Client relationship marketing has been seen as a vital management ideology in building, maintaining, and improving long-term client relationships. Indeed, a key conclusion of this article is that although the intensifying of market competition is unavoidable, it is clear that client relationship marketing practice should continuously be reconsidered, fine-tuned, and developed in order to certify superiority in a competitive and specialist industry.

5.1 Managerial Implications

This research has shown that the relationship development process with clients is far from straightforward and is complex in nature. Interviewees also revealed that there is no CRM software utilization in particular. The CRM software Inter-Action has been recognised as a very powerful marketing tool in client relationship marketing practice. It provides up to date contacts and monitors the development of the relationship. All dates, transactions, expenses, and attendees are logged into the system. This helps

determine who should be visited next, what complaints or issues happened recently and how cases and issues were solved. For example, customer service analysts utilize this tool to log complaints and keep track for improving purpose. Sales representative can revisited the recent issues before visiting customer to further discuss and find the preventive action. In addition, the business development budget can also be monitored and controlled. The CRM software not only helps in building the brand but also helps to ensure that everyone in the firm speaks with the same voice. It also plays a vital role in cross-selling. Client information must be shared across the firm in order to succeed in the cross-selling process.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

There is a theoretical implication for this area. The research discovered that treating every client equally is another key practice to maintain a good client relationship. Customers are at the center of company's strategy therefore priority is to provide them with good value products and quality service. To treat clients fairly and deliver high quality products and services which meet their reasonable expectations throughout relationship will result in customer's royalty and they may recommend the satisfied company to their families, friends and colleagues. The suggestion for future research is studies that focus on treating customer fairly in the client relationship marketing especially in business-to-business context. This type of research could contribute to the existing literature. It would be useful, if the effectiveness of treating customer fairly is identified as this is an area where it is quite hard to find sufficient information for the study.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Although strict research methods were implemented, the findings are not without limitations. First, as this is an in-depth case study looking specifically at a single oil and gas firm, the findings may not represent the entire oil and gas industry and might not be generalised to other related industries such as renewable energy industry. Nevertheless, they offer useful insight into client relationship marketing practices by a

leading oil and gas firm. Oil and gas firms of similar size and market position organising business-to-business context could greatly benefit from this study.

Second, the conceptual framework is proposed as a basis to study client relationship marketing practices in the oil and gas industry. It is important that future research explore the rationality of this conceptual framework. Multiple case studies will be needed to provide a full review of client relationship marketing practice for the entire oil and gas industry. This study was conducted from the firm's perspective; it would be useful to evaluate the 7 client relationship marketing practices outlined from the client's perspective. The findings are fruitful in helping company to fine-tune and enhance their existing practices. Although the 7 practices presented in this article are pivotal in contributing to a successful client relationship, the effects of each practice should also be assessed. Further research is needed to develop a study to measure these effects and the quality of the client relationship. The underlying intention is to find ways to apply the practices more effectively.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questions

Based on Woo and Leelapanyalert (2014)

Introduction

1. How long have you been working for this firm?

Part 1: To explore individual perceptions of client relationship marketing

2. In your opinion, is it important for your firm to practice client relationship marketing? How important is it and why?

3. How important are building and maintaining relationships with your clients?

Part 2: To understand client relationship marketing practices

4. How do you build relationships with your clients? Can you please give some examples?

5. How do you maintain relationships with your clients? Can you please give some examples?

6. What kind of activities would you normally do to build relationships with clients? Can you explain in detail?

Don't forget to find out at what stage it happens

7. What kind of activities would you normally do to maintain relationships with clients? Can you explain in detail?

Don't forget to find out at what stage it happens

8. Who is involved in building and maintaining relationships with clients? Can you please give some examples?

Tips: Find out why he or she said so

Don't forget to ask for examples

9. Can you tell me about the scope of your roles and responsibilities in the firm?

Try to extend the discussion in detail for each practice

Don't forget to ask for examples

Try to link each practice to different stages/phases by interpreting (e.g., "Would you say it happens during the initial phase?")

10. Do you work with other departments to build relationships with clients? If yes, how do you work with them in order to achieve better results?

Can you please give some examples?

If no, why do you think this is the case?

11. Do you work with other departments to maintain relationships with clients?

If yes, how do you work with them in order to achieve better results?

Can you please give some examples?

If no, why do you think this is the case?

12. Do you have any teams involved with maintaining relationships with clients? Can you explain in detail?

13. Is there any support or encouragement from the firm to build and maintain relationships with clients? Why do you think the firm is doing that?

14. Is there any other information you would like to add to our discussion?