InImpact: The Journal of Innovation Impact : ISSN 2051-6002 : http://inimpact.innovationkt.org
Special Edition on Innovation through Knowledge Transfer : Vol. 5 No.1 : pp.136 - 145 : inkt13-019

Client Relationship Management - A mechanism for more effective Knowledge Transfer?

Ms Suzanne Cass, Dr Jonathan Gorst

Sheffield Hallam University

Abstract

This paper describes the journey to date of Sheffield Business School in implementing a Client Relationship Management System and whether it is an effective method of managing Knowledge Transfer relationships. The paper will take the reader from the conception of a pilot study within the Business School, through to the benefits that are starting to be realised. The overall focus of the pilot project has been to change how people work and operate, rather than focusing on the technology that allows it to happen [1]. Therefore the underlying driver of the project is to move the Business School to a CRM approach of working with its clients.

Keywords - Client Relationship Management (CRM); Knowledge Transfer; Knowledge Exchange, Information Sharing

1 Introduction

This paper will explore whether a Client Relationship Management (CRM) system is an effective tool to assist in the management of various Knowledge Transfer (KT) issues. The case study looks at the work of Sheffield Business School in its quest to introduce a CRM system. CRM, as an approach, is widely adopted in business as a means of keeping track of clients and the current state of numerous relationships [1]. Various UK universities have in recent years also adopted this approach to how they keep track of clients and stakeholders. Examples include the universities of Teesside and Huddersfield [2].

Sheffield Hallam University has been pursuing the notion of introducing a CRM system to monitor corporate relationships for a number of years. Due to restrictions within operations, it was decided to postpone the introduction of such a system for a period of at least 12 months. The Business School, while understanding the reasoning, decided it needed to commence work on CRM sooner. Therefore, it opted to be a pilot for the whole University in its introduction of a 'CRM way of working'. To facilitate this, a cost effective, temporary, CRM system was required. This was procured through a normal tendering process and for the purposes of the paper will be referred to as the CRM system. The learning from the project will be used to make an eventual implementation of a cross university system as easy as possible. Support has been provided from the University's central Marketing and IT departments.

The pilot focussed on, 'the approach to a way of working', rather than the actual system employed. It is anticipated the University will purchase a more sophisticated CRM system at some future point. Corporate scoping is currently being undertaken. The system that is being used for the pilot has a number of limitations in how it handles data, and was chosen as a cost effective solution, rather than the answer to everyone's needs.

The initial project focus was to keep track of client data for Knowledge Transfer (KT) activities in its broadest sense, but not student information (current and potential), as this is handled by different systems. The project has looked to address issues including:

- Culture change and organisational behaviour
- Key account management
- Understanding our customers
- A focussed and targeted approach
- Change in working practices

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis was carried out to help identify the potential issues that needed to be addressed (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 - SWOT Analysis [3]

Strengths	**Weakness**
• Development of a mechanism to support KT • Wealth of data and contacts already exist within the Business School • Phased approach (KT staff first)	• Pilot project 'CRM System' application doesn't integrate with Outlook • Quality and age of data unknown • Silo approach – 'it's my contact' • Disparate systems not fit for purpose
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Power of coordinated approaches to KT clients • Better intelligence through combined resources • "Nurture" existing clients • Bigger bang for your buck • Coordinated approach • Visible leadership • Better / enhanced customer experience	• KT staff do not engage • Current KT processes potentially don't adapt to new CRM processes • Lose market share to other HEIs • Integrity of data (poor in some cases) • Business processes potentially don't adapt to new CRM processes • Implementation fails • Partial migration – other local systems continue to operate • Internal politics / change of priorities

It was initially identified that a CRM system can assist in 2 distinct areas:

- Central Business School database for marketing / mailing purposes
- An historic record of interactions with individual business contacts

This is the Business School's first attempt to have a formalised (and coordinated) approach to client engagement. It is providing an opportunity to influence and change organisational behaviour toward client engagement and KT opportunities. Learning from the project has started to inform and influence wider university thinking around the proposal to implement a corporate approach to CRM and a corporate CRM application.

The benefit and impact of the project has been to inform and influence future thinking at Faculty level and enhance how SBS manages its relationships with customers and clients. This project has, and will continue to inform and develop thinking around the Business School's, Business Engagement Strategy.

From the beginning of the project Senior Management buy-in and support was seen as essential if the project was to succeed [4]. To this end the project has been supported by the Faculty Executive, with initial communications coming from the Dean of the School, while the day-to-day champion was the Assistant Dean for Knowledge Transfer.

2 Data consolidation

The introduction of a CRM system has allowed numerous individual databases to be consolidated into one Business School database. The Business School was quite aware that individual / departments / research centres etc. required databases to enable them to do their job. However, the multitude of these databases was completely unknown, and the ability of the Business School to ensure quality was quite limited. In the initial attempt to bring these databases together, over 30 individual spread sheets, 'Access' databases, word documents, Outlook contacts and piles of business cards were brought together. These databases were standardised and cleaned to produce one set of data which would be used as the initial Business School dataset.

3 Implementation

Following the creation of the initial database and customisation of the software, a roll out plan was put together covering the different aspects of CRM implementation. The initial plan was for a wide scale rollout within the Business School. Training in the application took place with different staff groups with numerous staff receiving training.

3.1 Superusers \ Users

To distinguish between the different types of ‘User’ of the CRM system the following terminology is employed:

User - People who use the system as a tool to enable them to more effectively carry out their everyday job. They are able to:

- Add new records and amend existing records
- Search the database for individual records
- Make diary entries against individual records
- Make and view a selection of a particular type of records e.g. all companies in Doncaster, but not export this data for use in a mailing campaign

Superuser - People who can do all as above, but have further administrator rights. They are able to:

- Export selections for use in mailing / emailing campaigns
- Import / merge / de-duplicate new data sets
- Delete old records from the system
- Carry out regular maintenance tasks
- minor system modifications

3.2 Protocols

A series of protocols were written to provide guidance for Users. The protocols are separated into two discrete areas to protect the data provided by individuals and business units, and to ensure that the volume of emails sent to clients does not exceed predetermined levels. All new Users of the system are issued with the latest set of protocols at their training session. The protocols are reviewed regularly and updates issued to Users as necessary.

3.3 Communications Plan

A communications plan has been developed to ensure that all users are kept up to date with developments of the CRM system. Some of these communications have been in the form of emails from the Superusers, but on other occasions, messages have been sent from various members of the Business School to emphasise the importance of CRM and to try and ensure ‘buy-in’ from users. The approach and tone of these emails has been around encouragement of users to engage with the system. For the future, there is an on-going focus to demonstrate the "what’s in it for me" type benefits to users, for example, information sharing, business intelligence, a joined up approach etc. Managers of Users have also been asked to include use of CRM within the annual appraisal process.

3.4 Maintenance

A regular maintenance schedule has been drawn up to ensure that data within the system is kept up to date and as 'clean' as possible, while also allowing key performance monitoring type information to be pulled off and made available to management.

3.5 Local Champions

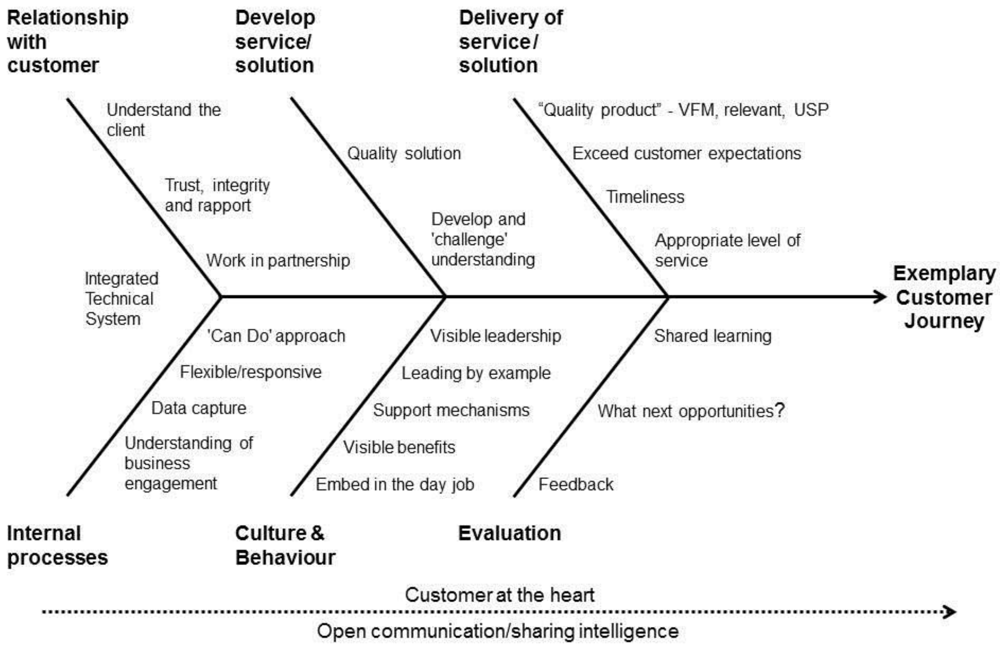
To ease the administrative burden on the central delivery team, local champions were identified throughout the individual Business School teams, and are able to provide a first point of contact for their respective teams.

4 Staff Opinion Survey

As the CRM system was rolled out, there was an opportunity to conduct a staff opinion survey with a group of key stakeholders associated to the CRM rollout. This opportunity came about through a personal development activity of one of the Superusers.

A staff opinion survey was conducted with a group of 12 staff members who were involved in the rollout in a number of different ways and it provided a snapshot for the period January to September 2011. A series of semi structured interviews were conducted providing insight into how colleagues managed their CRM activities and their future aspirations for CRM. The diagram in figure 2 details the perceived 'ideal' future state.

Figure 2 - Ishikawa Diagram - The 'ideal' future state



All respondents indicated they had a knowledge of the application, however there was little regular use of the system by those who viewed themselves as Users. Reasons for lack of engagement included lack of functionality, changes in working practices / routines and the chosen pilot application not being the long term solution.

It was identified that there was a need to change culture and behaviour to progress a CRM approach [4]. This included a strategic approach to business engagement, strong leadership, trust and openess as critical success factors to change culure and embed a CRM approach.

Respondents felt the experience of engaging with the pilot project has proved very useful and beneficial. It has gathered information and understanding of challenges and issues that exist. The overall view was that the pilot project had been a worthwhile activity, with dedicated resource producing insightful learning. From a systems perespective there was greater understanding of the requirements of such a system both in terms of the time taken to set up the system and subsequently manage it.

Various issues were identified which it was deemed would have made the initital experience better. These included:

- The choice of CRM application
- Resolving technical issues prior to User engagement with the application
- Communication and dissemination of information around core values and a CRM approach.

5 The Rollout - Reality

While originally conceived as a Business School wide project, the reality has been that the roll out has been managed in discrete areas. It was decided that the first area of the Business School to start using the system would be the Business Engagement Team, followed by Research Centres, the International Team and then the individual departments.

6 The Technology

The technology that has been implemented was chosen for its cost effectiveness and ease of use rather than having broad functionality. The system is basically 'an off the shelf', product that has received some customisation by the vendor prior and during implementation.

The standard User of the system accesses it through a web portal, but for security reasons, the User must be using a University computer, or logged into the University network through a Virtual Private Network (VPN). The administration team (Superuser's) access the system through a piece of client software installed on office computers. The data is held on University servers.

7 Challenges to using CRM for KT activity

As is to be expected, there have been a number of challenges rolling out a new CRM system and approach to working:

- Reluctance of some Users to share what they perceive as being 'their' data within the broader Business School community
- Ensuring that records are completed following customer interactions
- Keeping data current and up to date
- Agreeing standards for how the data will be stored e.g. what bandings will be used for number of employees
- Having the relevant people resources available

8 Benefits to KT activities

There have also been a number of benefits to adopting a CRM approach:

- Data is now stored in a standard format and is all in one place
- Makes cross selling of Business School services more straight forward
- Value for money application to demonstrate a CRM approach
- Responsive support from CRM system vendors and university IT services
- Starting to provide some client intelligence – and in the future it is envisaged that the Business School will be able to develop a picture of the customer journey
- Enhancing the quality of the data

- Provides a process / mechanism which ensures that mailing campaigns go out using the Dot mailer system which ensures:
  - Compliance with SHU marketing procedures
  - Valuable feedback on the outcome of the marketing campaign in terms of:
    - Number of hard bounces
    - Number of suppressions
    - Number of emails opened
    - Number of links followed within an email
- Better understanding of data requirements for the future

9 Impact

Various impacts have arisen from a coordinated approach to CRM. A large amount of the data below was already held within the Business School, the CRM system has allowed it all to be stored in one place.

9.1 Central Business School database for mailing purposes

Probably the biggest initial benefit to the Business School has been having one central database that can be used to invite people to various Business School events. The Business School works closely with the University's Central Marketing team to ensure that all mailings go out through the 'DotMailer' email system. All interactions are recorded within the Business School CRM system and any changes to data following the mailing (i.e. requests for suppressions, email address no longer valid etc.) are then automatically fed back into the CRM system and the data updated.

9.2 Historic record of interactions with individual Business School contacts

From a Business Engagement perspective, this is one of the most beneficial parts of the system. A historical record is now kept for each individual client as the relationship develops. The date and time of each interaction, along with a summary of the information of what was discussed is now completed following each meeting / telephone conversation or notable email. This information is then available to all Users of the CRM system.

9.3 Knowledge Transfer Project List

As each new potential project is put together, the Business School has a process to allocate a project number to the activity and to collect some basic information about what a project is proposing to do, who will be involved and any costing information etc. This information is now also stored on the CRM system, again as a way of allowing a user to determine, whether or not work has been carried out with a client previously, and if so what it involved, and some approximate monetary values.

9.4 Staff Information System

As a direct result of the work on the CRM system, it became apparent that a similar system that kept track of the academics within the Business School would equally be beneficial to pursue. A second project has now commenced which is collating together data from various university sources and the academics themselves, to build a complete picture. This database will then be used to help the Business School identify academic expertise when pursuing KT opportunities.

9.5 Learning to date

There has been a large amount of learning gathered from the roll out / implementation of the pilot study within the Business School. These key learning's are listed below [5]:

- Varied enthusiasm and engagement across business units – Some individuals have willingly engaged and have been keen to discuss the issues and find ways forward. Others have been less enthusiastic and objected to being asked to use the system, or try to find ways around difficulties
- Superusers have undertaken more of the initial operational / User tasks to try to gain User engagement (e.g. carried out basic data entry, diary entries etc)
- Selections – It was envisaged Users would carry out selections of data for mailing campaigns and then seek approval from Superusers who would ensure that data was been used in the accordance to the established protocols. In reality Superusers have been creating the selections
- There were initial issues in terms of the amount of resource that the Superusers were able to provide to the CRM system. The initial set-up of the database and the time between business units providing information and the actual availability of that data within the system, plus constraints around when business units have received training has led to the situation where the data was many months old before it could practically be used
- The scope and complexity of the project has meant that an amount of splitting and chunking has taken place to break the project up into more manageable pieces
- The Superusers feel that with hindsight that the Business School should have stated a 'Go-Live' date and worked to ensure everything was ready for this date
- The majority of technical issues and availability of data need to be resolved prior to allowing Users access
- It is felt that generic email addresses (info@... enquiries@... etc) are worthless for targeted approaches to named individuals. The protocols now require that a named email address is collected as a minimum data requirement
- The CRM system collates information by individuals, not by company to which individuals are attached. People, who work for the same company, are connected together through the ‘Company (1)’ field, but this relies on the information within this field being identical.
- The main purpose of a CRM approach is around the sharing of contacts across the Business School. The integrity of the individual Users of the system and their trust in each other and the system is vital for broader adoption and engagement. This requires a culture change to the way in which some people are used to working.
- The quality of the data is more important than quantity. The initial Business School data set started off with around 25,000 records. However, as the Business School has started to interrogate and use the data, it has

become clear that the main use of the data will be through email. This reduced the number of records to about 12,000. Further interrogation has found that a large number of records have generic info@..., enquiries@... etc email addresses. Therefore a safe universe has been created which removes these types of email addresses, from mailing campaigns. It also checks for suppressions. This initially reduced the database to around 9,000 usable email addresses. The approach adopted is now around small and good data, rather than larger data sets of dubious quality
- The focus of the project may be around a CRM approach, but Users view the Software as the entity that they have to engage with
- From the initial scoping of the project, the requirements have moved on and stopping project creep has at times been quite challenging

9.6 Lessons learned from other universities

From attending various CRM conferences and workshops, it would seem that the learning experienced at Sheffield Business School is the same, or very similar to other universities who have implemented CRM systems. The authors have collated comments from one panel session held at Teeside University in 2011. These can be seen below:

- Decide the structure for BDM's / customer data managers, support staff etc.
- Establish process first - Teesside say that they had to be very explicit and detailed
- Clean Data before loading and keep it clean
- Seek "Customer First" accreditation
- Proceed in small steps
- Get people on board

The above learning comments have very much been the experience at Sheffield Business School.
.

10 Conclusion

The SBS CRM project has looked to address the following issues:

- Culture change/organisational behaviour
- Key account management
- Understanding customers
- Knowing who are SHU's key customers
- Focussed approach not random
- Targeted approach
- Change in working practices

Some of the benefits of a coordinated CRM approach that were identified at the outset included:

- Consolidation and standardisation of 30+ data sets into a common repository
- Ability to share information easily and in a timely manner
- Making the job easier for SBS staff in business engagement roles
- Customer intelligence

The pilot project has provided the opportunity to identify the benefits and impacts of CRM, whilst assessing problems and issues that need to be addressed before wider university implementation to ensure that maximum benefits are gained, and minimum disruption occurs.

As the implementation has progressed other departments / teams have started to identify the benefits that they could derive by employing the system.

The pilot project continues to be supported by the Business School. The work so far is feeding into the central university corporate Business to Business scoping activity. This work has taken place during the winter of 2012/13.

The CRM work is on-going, and at the present time it is unknown how long the pilot will run for. A decision has yet to be made by the University about its timescales for implementing a university wide CRM system. When a decision is made, the wealth of knowledge that has been generated through the Business School pilot will be used to try and ensure that implementation of a CRM system across the University is a smooth as possible.

References

1. Chen, I.J. and Popovich, K. Understanding customer relationship management (CRM): People, process and technology Emerald 9 (2003)
2. Mitchell, K.. and Race, K. Online Handbook in CRM Good Practice JISC (2012)
3. Cass, S. Business Engagement Programme, Final Report (2011)
4. Langerak, F. and Verhoef, P.C. Strategically Embedding CRM Business Strategy Review, Vol. 14, Iss. 4 (2003)
5. SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY, Sheffield Business School, *A CRM Strategy* (2011)