Speaking their language

Investigating the need for multilingual customer service in Sweden

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Abstract

Title: Speaking their language – *Investigating the need for multilingual customer service in Sweden.*

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Key words: Multilinguistics, Customer Service, Call Centre, Customer Relation Management (CRM), Outsourcing

Purpose: The main purpose is to increase the understanding of the need for multilingual customer service on the market and to determine how companies in Sweden deal with customers from ethnic minorities. A secondary purpose is to investigate business opportunities for a multilingual call centre solution.

Methodology: A qualitative method with a hypothetic-deductive and inductive reasoning has been utilized in this thesis. The interviews during our empirical study were semi-structured in order to obtain broad information on the specific areas of interest necessary for the purpose of the thesis.

Theoretical Perspectives: The theoretical framework that has been used contains primarily customer-based theories. These theories deal with Customer Relation Management, customer service, call centres, communication and multilinguistics. Further theory around outsourcing was used to help us fulfill our secondary purpose.

Empirical Foundation: The empirical study has been carried out in three phases. During phase one several interviews were conducted with representatives from our identified multilingual customer service supplier, MultiSpeak. The second phase engaged 30 companies from the household related sector in a market survey, and the third phase involved in-depth interviews with four companies that showed interest for a multilingual customer service solution.

Conclusions: We concluded that the immigrant market segment holds great potential but companies have just started to realize the need and value for multilingual customer service. Many traditionally Swedish organisations do not appear to reflect a multicultural society in their upper management, and some companies even show signs of ignorance. We claim that companies who have started to tap into this customer segment are off to a good start but still have a long way to go to get the concept right. Our empirical findings also support that there are business opportunities for a multilingual call centre solution.

Sammanfattning

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Syfte: Det primära syfte är att öka förståelsen för behovet av multilingvistisk kundservice på marknaden samt utreda hur olika företag i Sverige hanterar kunder med icke-svensk bakgrund. Vårt sekundära syfte är att undersöka affärsmöjligheter för ett multilingvistiskt call center.

Metod: En kvalitativ metod med en hypodeduktiv och induktiv ansats har använts i vår studie. Intervjuerna var semistrukturerade för att få djupare information gällande de intresseområden som var relevanta för att uppfylla uppsatsens syfte.

Teoretiska perspektiv: Det teoretiska ramverket består till övervägande del av kundbaserad teori. De teorier som har använts för att analysera de empiriska resultaten behandlar Customer Relation Management, kundservice, call centers, kommunikation och multilingvistik. Teorier kring outsourcing har använts som stöd för att kunna uppfylla vårt sekundära syfte.

Empiri: Den empiriska studien består av tre delmoment. I det första momentet intervjuade vi representanter från MultiSpeak, företaget med en multilingvistisk kundservice. Vidare genomförde vi en marknadsundersökning med 30 företag som befinner sig inom branschen för hushållsnära produkter och tjänster. I det sista delmomentet utförde vi djupintervjuer med fyra företag som visade intresse för MultiSpeaks multilingvistiska call center lösning.

Slutsatser: Invandrarsegmentet har en stor potential men företagen har just börjat inse betydelsen och värdet av multilingvistisk kundservice. Många svenska företag förefaller inte att reflektera ett multikulturellt samhälle i deras ledning och en del verkar t.o.m. ignoranta. De företag som aktivt strävar efter att tillgodose invandrarnas behov har gjort ett bra arbete men har långt kvar att gå. Vårt empiriska material indikerar även att det finns affärsmöjligheter för ett multilingvistiskt call centre.

Acknowledgements

1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter will lay the foundation of the thesis. Here the background to the subject is presented, followed by the discussion and definition of the problem where we verify the need for our research. From this background we present our purpose and research question. Further we elaborate on the restrictions we consider are necessary and finally this chapter ends in a presentation of the disposition.

1.1   Background

Have you ever felt mute? That time when you stood in a foreign country unable to comprehend the local language and culture? What would you have given for a friendly voice with your native tongue ready to help you? Now imagine living there and feeling misunderstood and unable to communicate every day. How much would one friendly voice in your native tongue be worth to you then?

Today the market climate is characterized by fierce competition where an ever extending number of players fight over market space (Bose, 2002). In general customers are more educated about the products and have a greater selection of goods to choose from, thereby becoming empowered and in control. For the companies it is all about trying to offer what the customers want in the way they want it (Sebor, 2007; O'Donnell, 2005; Bose, 2002). Barnes (2003) talks in general terms of the importance of building a relationship with the customer, and points out that there is a difference between mere convenience repeat purchases and a real relationship. In an effort to find a solution to this problem many companies have turned to Customer Relation Management (CRM) to create a tighter bond with their customers (Sebor, 2007, O'Donnell, 2005). The goal for CRM is to be able to deliver customized support for every customer in a way the company anticipates that the individual would like to be dealt with (Smith, 2006). An important argument from organisations is that CRM is a win-win situation for both the company and the customer (O'Donnell, 2005).

A study performed by Cummings (2006) shows that all 30 companies in her survey believed that they were only in sync with 2/3 of their customers. Van Raaij (2005) points out that it is vital to understand that different customer groups not only want but also have to be targeted in different ways. If the positioning is wrong or inadequate, trying to have a relationship with a customer on those premises can turn out to be very costly. Bose (2002) states that in the past people had to compromise due to the fact that companies made products and delivered services for customer *groups* not *individual* customers.

A large and important part of CRM is customer service, usually offering support via telephone or internet (Smith, 2006). It is therefore vital that customer service is speedy and involves no queuing and reconnecting, because delivering customer value is always the key point (Chen & Quester, 2005). Call centres are a growing force in motion, i.e. in the UK call centre operations have grown with 45 % in the last three years (Hood, 2006).

The world is becoming more and more global and migration between countries has increased rapidly. According to the latest statistics people born abroad account for 16,7 % in Sweden (www.scb.se extracted 15/05/2007). For instance there has been a lot of movement of the working force between countries within the European Union since regulations has softened (www.europarl.europa.eu extracted 20/05/2007). Statistics show that 2006 had an all time high migration to Sweden with 96 000 new immigrants (www.scb.se extracted 15/05/2007). There is a general preference to live in the big cities with an average of 18 % of the population being born abroad, which holds in comparison to a mere 9 % proportion being born abroad for the rest of Sweden (ibid).

Different languages harbour different cultures which are likely to remain within a person and might still shine through in their actions and beliefs years after they left their home country (Green, 2005). The author emphasize that selling services to immigrants is a complex task that holds a lot greater difficulties than just language barriers, where understanding the culture behind the language is the key to success. To exemplify, an intriguing challenge when selling life insurance to an immigrant from China is to never

mention the word death as this is very disrespectful. There is a preference for talking to a person of similar cultural background, even if they do not speak the same language (Pio & Kwan, 2006; Green, 2005).

According to Kónya (2007) sharing a culture increases efficiency in the interaction between people and therefore he believes that it is important for immigrants to assimilate into the culture in the new country. Further Kónya (2007) points out that there is a difference in how to communicate with immigrants who wish to assimilate and those that do not.

There are a few companies that try to assist their customers in their own tongue by specializing in having many languages available (www.techteam.com extracted 15/04/2007; www.call-for-europe.com extracted 15/04/2007; Yorgey, 2000; Barron, 1995). One company in the USA takes it even further and when you phone in an automated voice will speak in the same dialect as you (Robbens Gentry, 2006).

For a company to attain a specialist competence outsourcing is here believed to be the cheapest and fastest way to go according to Rasmusson (2000), however Turek (2000) points out that by outsourcing you loose touch with customers and that that may prove harmful for a trusting relationship between the parties. Some companies have discontinued their outsourcing events mainly due to unsatisfied customers, while most companies state that they will expand more offshore, only a small portion of companies report that they will not pursue this type of venture again (Hood, 2006; McGee-Smith, 2006; Sauer, 2006). Fleischer (2006) has another take on the debate and claims that the issue is not whether outsourcing is good or bad, but how to make it profitable, and claims that context is everything.

When companies realize that they do not have the relevant or adequate capability themselves to communicate and work with ethnic and cultural minorities to unlock potential business opportunities, they must develop a strategy for the venture either in-house or via outsourcing (O'Shea, 2006; Reed, 2003). However when it comes to the

topic of the need and proceedings of multilingual call centres there are very few scientific reports. Yet a multitude of debating articles in non scientific journals talk about the potential need and necessity of serving customers in their own language. The lack of scientific reports in this area, together with the non scientific articles we conclude that this is due to the fact that this is a recent event in a young business. This argument is supported by the fact that there is hardly any literature that dates prior to the 21st century regarding the developments in call centres. In fact the shortage of theories and equally the need for theories regarding call centre business has been pointed out by Norling (2001). Hence it is our conviction that this area is indeed a hotspot and that the emergence of multilingual call centres is a highly current topic to investigate in a proper scientific manner. Just like Norling concluded before us, we were unable to find any existing theorises that fully emphasize the variables that would bring clarity and strength to this type of study. Therefore a customized model was designed. Constructing a theoretical framework is a very fundamental building block for the understanding of our thesis. It will serve as a platform for the construction of our interview guides etc. Therefore we conclude that it would be reasonable to introduce this chapter directly after the introduction.

1.2   Problem discussion

The thesis started of with a hypothetical scenario that is familiar to all of us. Everybody can relate to the awkwardness we feel when we cannot communicate abroad, even if it is just for a few minutes, the feeling can stay with you for a long time. Those few initial lines poetically contain the essence of the problem. The inability to communicate is the underlying element and the source of the problem as well as the dormant possibility for companies wishing to expand their horizon. It is commonly believed that to solve an enigma you must go to the root of it. It is reasonable to assume that a company must first understand the peculiarities of the new potential customer before being able to build a relationship with him or her. The next step is how to build a relationship.

This is where it potentially could become academically interesting from a strategic

management point of view. The needs of the new customer can probably be pinpointed in a rather detailed picture but this information is probably only icing on the cake for the company. It is now that the tedious process of trying to create what the customer wants begins, and it has to be done in a time and money efficient style.

The introduction clearly states that previous research is ambiguous about whether companies are doing their outermost to serve every person in the way he or she prefers. However the background indicates that there is a perceived need for customization and that some organisations try to accommodate it. In addition to this information Anderson Consulting (1998) reported about all the segments that organisations selling new technology devices miss out on since these gadgets are only available in English versions. Chamon and Belge (2005) point blank states that the majority of companies (i.e. banks in Sweden) ignore the potential customer segment of people living in Sweden and that are unable to or uncomfortable with speaking Swedish. Dhir (2005) goes as far as to suggest that the competitive advantage in language knowledge is so important that a company should look upon it like any other investment portfolio.

With this in mind we ask the rhetorical question what are organisations in Sweden are doing today, have they perceived a need for additional languages and if so, what course of action have they embarked on to solve the lingual issue? This question was our guiding light in the development of our thesis. The focal point of this thesis will manifest itself by looking carefully at the different routes companies in Sweden take to offer service to immigrants, guest workers or foreigners in general. We will try to determine to what degree organisations trading in household related products and services in Sweden have perceived a need for multilingual customer service.

First of all we wish to establish a general idea about how different organisations perceive language barriers. Afterwards the focal point shifts to see if they have developed a particular strategy for dealing with the language issue. In doing so, it is our hope that this thesis will contribute to the field of business science by determining if a classical theoretical framework will offer support to the nature of a multilingual call centre

solution. Especially interesting we believe the household related sector to be, due to the fact that companies from this sector apply to the whole population and every person living in Sweden has to have more or less contact with them.

Viewed in the light of this initial introduction, given that multilinguistic issues appear to hold many fascinating elements and ambiguous opinions we conclude that there is a need for this thesis. Against this background the purpose below emerged.

1.3 Purpose

Our purpose with this thesis is *to increase the understanding of the need for multilingual customer service on the market and to determine how companies in Sweden deal with customers from ethnic minorities. A secondary purpose is to investigate business opportunities for a multilingual call centre solution.*

1.4 Research question

Is there today a clear need for multilingual customer service in the market of household related products and services?

1.5 Restrictions

As already mentioned we have restricted our area of investigation to the household related sector. There are reasons to believe that companies within this sector are most exposed to immigrant customers since the products and services offered by them are more or less necessities for all people living in Sweden.

In its theoretical approach this thesis will solely focus on the path and possibilities of outsourcing, since this is a way that can be explored by companies in the same way and offers a lot of theoretical references. The option to keep and develop customer service in-

house is not as appealing to this study since it appear more fragmented and less stereotyped due to many different solutions. The empirical research focus a great deal on outsourcing and how companies think about this stigmatized course of action.

1.6   Disposition

Our second chapter in this thesis is the theoretical framework. The ambition of the theoretical framework is to establish what prior theories in the field of strategic management will aid to our research. Further it strives to bring clarity in why the selected theories are particularly helpful when investigating the nature of the call centre business, and why they are particularly important when studying the need for multilingual customer service on the market. At the end of this chapter a brief summary with a model is presented to give the reader a better overview and extend the understanding of our theoretical framework.

The outline continues with a section regarding the methodology which has been used in this thesis. It will take the reader through the different steps of the construction process of our study. It also visualizes how both the theoretical and empirical data was collected and how the different phases in the research evolved.

Further follows the presentation of the results from our empirical study. The ambition with this section is to present the results as unbiased and untangled as possible so that every reader can reach their own conclusions without being tainted by our beliefs.

In the fifth chapter we analyse our empirical finding against the theoretical framework. The ambition with this chapter was to select the most significant elements that illuminate the purpose of our thesis.

The final chapter is a section with our conclusions and a discussion of the results. Here we will summarize and reflect upon the significant findings in our thesis, and also conclude whether or not we have fulfilled our purpose. Finally we discuss and suggest further research topics in this area.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter we present and describe our theories for this study. To begin with, theory about Customer Relation Management and customer service is presented, followed by a description of call centres as an important customer contact channel, and the need for multilinguistics within these operations. Finally theory around outsourcing is explained and the chapter ends with a brief summary and illustration of our theoretical framework.

To illuminate the ever increasing importance of customer orientation we describe Customer Relationship Management (CRM) as management tool applied by companies to develop vital resources and capabilities to extend their lifetime in the harsh market climate of today. Within CRM, customer service is understood as a significant differentiating factor for companies to develop competitive advantages.

2.1 Customer Relationship Management

With the increased global competition many organisations have identified the need to become more customer oriented. As a consequence, CRM has risen to the agenda of many organisational strategies (Harvey and Griffin, 2002; Bull, 2003; Javalgi et al., 2006). CRM has generally been assumed to create competitiveness for an organisation, as well as to have a positive impact on organisational performance (Sin et al., 2006). Thus definitions of CRM and CRM systems are wide ranging, there is still much debate over what exactly constitutes CRM. Nevin (1995) notes that the term has become a buzzword and that the concept has been used to reflect a number of differing themes or perspectives.

Originally, CRM was defined as a strategic relationship management process that combines the best business practices, resources, knowledge and appropriate CRM software in a company to better serve the personalized needs of its customers and to increase customer loyalty. The goal for customer support is to assist customer so that they can gain maximum value from their purchase (Smith, 2006). According to this, CRM

mainly revolves around marketing and begins with a deep analysis of customer behaviour. More specifically, CRM involves acquisition, analysis and use of knowledge about customers in order to sell more goods or services and to do it more efficiently (Bose, 2003). CRM includes IT technologies to gather data, which can be used to develop information required to create a more personal interaction with customers. In the long run, it produces a method of continuous analysis and refinement, in order to enhance customers' lifetime value with the firm (Bose, 2002). Wells et al. (1999) pointed out that both marketing and IT need to work together with a high level of coordination to produce a seamless process of interaction, and CRM appears to be an integration of technologies and business processes used to satisfy the needs of a customer during any given interaction (ibid).

In the literature, the terms CRM and relationship marketing are used almost interchangeably, but Sin et al. (2006) stressed some important differences between those two approaches. The authors pointed out that relationship marketing is relatively more strategic in nature, whilst CRM is used in a more tactical sense. According to the authors, CRM is more managerial per se, focusing on how the management can make substantial efforts in attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relations. In contrast to relationship marketing, which is more focused on building relationships on a very broad scale, i.e. with suppliers, stakeholders, employees, CRM is more dedicated to build relationships with key customers (Sin et al. 2006).

As CRM reaches into many parts of the business it has been suggested that organisations should adopt a holistic approach that places CRM at the heart of the organisation with customer orientated business processes and the integration of CRM systems (Smith, 2006). However, there is no theoretical, integrative framework to describe how the CRM concept can be properly translated into a comprehensive set of concrete organisational activities. A definition suggested by Sin et al. (2005) could be seen as a guideline. According to the authors CRM is "a comprehensive strategy and process that enables an organisation to identify, acquire, retain, and nurture profitable customers by building and maintaining long-term relationships with them" (ibid, p.1266).

As pointed out by Bull (2003) holistic approaches to CRM help organisations to coordinate and effectively maintain the growth of various customer contact points. According to Smith (2006), if an effective CRM strategy involves the integration of all customer contact points, the implementation of the most effective technology components are a key enabler of a company's marketing plan. Thus, technology has long been used to manage individual customer's contact channels, including call centres, remote sales offices and the Web, CRM will not succeed if it is not clearly understood and properly practiced by managers and employees who directly interact with customers on the "front line" (ibid). Pointing out that "strategy, people, technology, and processes are all vitally important to CRM, but that it is the individual employees who build blocks of customer relations" Sin et al. (2006, p.1268) emphasizes the importance of customer service.

2.2 Customer service

Viewing the customer welfare as the ultimate goal has until recent been the main issue for marketing strategies, particularly for those companies whose profits from product sales were decreasing. Many organisations have started to adopt "service-centred logic" strategies where customers' needs and wishes are seen as business opportunities, in contrast to "industrial logic" where cost minimisation was the focus (Nordin, 2005). Customer service appears to be an important strategic goal for any organisation interested in creating growth and can be a source of significant differentiation between companies. Each service interaction forms in fact the basis of a customer's perception of the overall quality of an organisation. How well an organisation is able to manage and deliver the customer service process has a direct effect on the retention of existing clients, and can have a significant impact on attracting new ones. Attracting new customers is also more expensive than retaining present ones (Evenson et al., 1999). According to this, customer service appears to be the single biggest differentiator for businesses and has to be considered as a source of competitive advantage.

Many attempts have been made to define customer service. Most definitions emphasis the organisation as the central, focusing on how well an organisation is able to constantly and consistently exceed the needs of the customer. Steneker and Steneker (2007) suggested an interesting extension of the customer service definition towards a more customer centreed view, in which they put the customer ahead of the organisation. According to the authors a customer defines good customer service as how she perceives that an organisation has delighted her, by exceeding to meet her needs.

Improving customer service involves making a commitment to learn what customers' needs and wants are, and developing action plans that implement customer friendly processes. In order to compete in a truly customer-driven manner, a company must integrate its entire range of business functions around satisfying the needs of individual customers. This does not involve just marketing, customer service and sales but also production logistics and financial measurement and metrics, i.e. the whole management strategy (Ward, 2007; Stenker and Stenker, 2007). No business, whatever size it is, can today afford to take customers for granted (Bose, 2002). To succeed, a business must give its customers what they really want, not what the business thinks they want. Customer-centred business processes should reach every part of the organisation. Each and every employee should respect the customer and do all they can to preserve the customers' trust. Those with direct customer contact, i.e. call centre employees, represent the company and consequently have a special responsibility. These people must be trained and encouraged to think and act always with the customers' well being and long-term relations in mind. The organisation must support these relationships by planning around customer's wants and needs, not around company goals (Bolton, 2003).

A fundamental aspect of the customer service process is the direct verbal communication, and consequently the use of needed languages to get the message across to the customer. With the disability to serve customers in their preferred language companies fail to help their customer in the best possible way, or there are even reasons to believe that they miss out on large customer groups. Speaking a customer's language is not only important for

understanding each other but there is also a cultural aspect to it that yields a lot of confidence and trust to the conversation. With the theory presented below we stress the need of communication in the work of customer service, and explain the effects of cultural differences (Burgers 2000; Dhir 2005; Javalgi 2006).

2.3   Communication

One of our basic human needs is to be understood. This understanding forms the foundation upon which relationships are built (Kunyk and Olsson, 2001). Given the growth and strategic importance of relationships, understanding the underlying role of communication is an important issue (Harvey and Griffith, 2002). In the customer service practice there are employees who are professionally interacting with other human beings in order to "know and understand customers, to treat them as they expect to be treated, to anticipate their needs and respond positively to their actions" (Bolton, 2003, p.46). Such emphasis requires understanding and exploiting customer's behaviour, in particularly verifying the effectiveness of customer communication.

The purpose of communication is to get a message across to others clearly and unambiguously. Doing this involves effort from both the sender of the message and the receiver. When this is not detected, it can cause remarkable confusion, wasted effort and missed opportunity. In fact, communication is only successful when both the sender and the receiver understand the same information as a result of the communication. The main concern of the communication process is transferring the information into a form that can be sent and correctly decoded at the other end, i.e. using a language that is common and understood by both sides involved in the communication process (Ellis and Hunt, 1993).

As global competition intensifies, organisations need a way to understand and improve global intercultural communication. Failure to effectively communicate in intercultural relationships, whether with ones' employees, interorganisational partners or customers can hamper relationships development. A major obstacle to successful global

relationships appears to be cultural distance (Harvey and Griffith, 2002). It is frequently held that when individuals encounter cultural differences in their interactions, they tend to view people from different cultures as strangers, i.e. unknown people who belong to different groups. While communicating, the two diverse cultural viewpoints may accentuate misinterpretations of specific intercultural communications, which increases the probability of conflict among the individuals (ibid).

Corporations and other organized communities such as nations or groups of people commonly seek improved efficiency in communication through a standardized language adopted as their official working language (Dhir, 2005). The availability of a common language minimizes uncertainty and loss of information and integrates diverse members of the organisation into a single, cohesive and effective corporate body. However, attempts to impose a common corporate language might, in fact, hinder or alter information flow, knowledge transfer and communication (ibid). Schick (2002) argued that the process that constrains a company to a standard language may actually create a culture of isolation that ignores the real problems of managing multilingualism. According to Dhir (2005) diversity of culture represented and languages spoken by employees may offer opportunities to an organisation not available to its competitors.

Considering communication services companies seek to introduce self-service technologies in purpose to cut human resource expenses. However, self-service technology should be seen as complementary, rather than alternative, to human agents (Bagnara, 2000). No matter the advances in technology, there may always be a need for the person-to-person contact provided through traditional telephone support. In an increasingly crowded customer service market, with service providers likely to start overlapping into one another's market segment, the human touch-point could become an even more valuable aspect of the whole service chain (O'Shea, 2006).

Even though call centre employees represent the whole company when dealing with customers, they conduct the relationship with the customer alone (Bagnara, 2000). Since a large part of the customer service delivery is represented by the employee/customer interaction (Javalgi, 2006), the attention in this theoretical framework will be turned towards the major contact channel for serving customers, i.e. call centres. (Evenson, 1999).

2.4 Call centres

A call centre may be defined as a physical or virtual operation in which a managed group of people spend most of their time doing business by telephone, usually working in a computer-automated environment (Bagnara, 2000). Taylor and Bain (1999) defined that a call centre has three essential elements. First, a call centre is a dedicated operation with employees focusing entirely on the customer service function. Second, those employees are using telephones and computers simultaneously, and third, the calls are processed and controlled by a predictive dialing system or what is known today as automatic call distribution (ACD). Taylor et al. (2002) later discussed the heterogeneity of call centres and noted that the definition could be applied to a range of call centre types. For example, it can be a call centre where relatively low skilled and low paid service workers are responding to customer requests within a tightly controlled, heavily monitored and time restricted system. In contrast, the definition can also be applied to a call centre where highly skilled, highly paid knowledge workers respond to calls from business key customers (De Grip et al., 2006).

Research and surveys alike confirm that human resources form the strategic factor that makes all the difference in managing the customer relationship. The customer-focused culture is the main asset when seeking competitiveness and getting the most out of the customer relation. Thus customer services are heavily dependent on information technology and software development (Smith, 2006), technology can support, but never

replace, human resources skilled in communications, problem-solving and caring (Bagnara, 2000).

According to Burgers et al. (2000) call centres become more important for CRM and call centre employees become increasingly important for the link between companies and customers. It has frequently happened that customers view the service quality of the organisation as a whole based on their interaction with the call centre. For consumers the evaluation of a service often depends on evaluation of the "service encounter". Therefore, firms have to pay particular attention to consumers' perceptions of the service process (ibid).

As stressed by Batt and Moynihan (2002) it is most likely that call centres will be the organisational nodes controlling relationships with customers. Agents will be knowledge workers who manipulate internal and external knowledge in purpose to solve often unexpected problems and control long-lasting dynamic relationships and processes. The evolution of call centre functions is making the skills and competencies of agents more relevant (ibid).

For firms that actively develop CRM, call centres are becoming an increasingly popular channel to enable and streamline the management of such relationship (Huang et al. 2005). Barnes (2003) points out the clarity of communication, whether various messages grounded in words, conversation and talk, sent by a company to its customers are received and understood as intended (ibid). This statement stresses a tremendous effort put on call centre employees, i.e. to overcome a simple act that we humans take for granted – speech and language understanding (Antipolis, 1998).

As pointed out by Burgers et al. (2000) call centre employees must posses the required knowledge about the company's products or services, but also the skills to perform the multiple tasks that are required to execute the job. Typical skills that an employee must

possess are a pleasant voice on the telephone and the ability to perform multiple activities at once, e.g. listening to the customer while at the same time searching and registering information in a database (ibid).

2.5   Multilinguistics

As ethnic diversity in Europe increased because of immigration, so did the number of languages spoken. With more people speaking different languages there is a demand for call centres to cater to this segment of the population (Turek, 2000; Read, 2003; Ruffini, 2006). Language skilled people are essential if customer service is to become proactive and successful. The employee answering the phone appears to be an important differentiating factor. If the language skills are not up to par, the customer will not call a call centre twice (ibid). Organisations seeking to tap the ever expanding global marketplace will therefore need to find a way to speak the customers' language. To create competitive advantages with customer service today, companies need to do more with less. According to Dhir (2005) the problem of language choice and acquisition has to be treated as a strategic issue for an organisation, as well as the language audit could be made a part of the routine strategic evaluation of an organisation's strength and weaknesses.

There is a significant backlash in the call centre industry today from complaints regarding call centre employees (further on referred to as agents) with poor language skills (Ruffini, 2006). One way to resolve this situation is to categorize the call centre employees' linguistic capabilities by primary or native languages, followed by additional languages. In multilingual call centres, agents are often required to be almost bilingual, if not multilingual in order to communicate with clients on both a linguistic and cultural level. In addition, communicating efficiently over the phone requires more skills than a face-to-face situation (ibid). As there is little other contact then verbal language, customers are dependent on the agent and must take the agent literally at his or her words (Burgers et al. 2000). Therefore, wherever it is possible, call centres should route calls to an agent

whose native language matches that one of the caller. This matching creates additional complexities in the call routing infrastructure, but often it is a customer driven requirement as well as it reduces the risk of miscommunication between customers and companies (Read, 2003).

According to Ringwood (2003) the goal for multilingual call centres should be diversity and enabling communication in the language preferred by the customer. Thus, many customers posses proficiency in the domestic language, they may prefer to speak their native tongue when communicating complex ideas, for which they do not have the vocabulary to express themselves (ibid). Schick (2002) points out that many companies pin their hopes to the domestic language, creating a culture of isolation that ignores the real problems of managing multilingualism. As mentioned before, the language as well as multilingualism appears to be an economic issue. If all companies just stuck with the domestic language, they would be losing out on some markets. The reality of this pushes companies to become cosmopolitan (ibid).

If it is not possible for in-house departments to assist their customers in their preferred languages, the easiest and cheapest way to approach the language issue is to hire people that already possess the required skills (Dhir, 2005). In this case outsourcing to an external provider that already possesses the required capabilities can be an option (Turek, 2000).

Outsourcing has developed into a large trend among companies all over the world. It is today a widely accepted business strategy, especially when it comes to outsourcing customer services. Outsourcing could be an option for companies that do not house an own multilingual customer service solution, by sourcing it from an external service supplier. The theory presented below describes and explains this phenomenon and the different aspects of it that are important for the reader to be familiar with.

2.6   Outsourcing

Few management practices have attracted as much attention as outsourcing is enjoying at present time (Lonsdale and Cox, 2000). For a concept that has had such a huge impact on so many organisations across the globe, the phenomena outsourcing is notoriously difficult to pin down. Thus, scholars and practitioners have agreed that the two most important drivers for outsourcing have been cost efficiency and production reorganisation (Franceschini et al., 2003). According to research done by Lonsdale and Cox (2000) it is clear that outsourcing is not just another passing management fad applied primarily as a cost minimisation tool. The traditional perception of outsourcing influenced by the global competitive pressure that firms are facing today, has gone far beyond the view mentioned above. Hence outsourcing will be a natural outgrowth of globalization and fast-changing IT technology for many companies in the world. For those who anticipate and manage these changes strategically the gains can be enormous and offer innumerable opportunities to increase profits (Zhu et al., 2001).

2.6.1   Why outsourcing?

In its simplest form, outsourcing involves the use of resources outside of the organisation to perform routine tasks (Stefanic, 2004; Nag, 2004). Outsourcing is also referred to by scholars as a management approach that allows delegating operational responsibility for processes or services to an external agent (Franceschini et al., 2003). Outsourcing is considered traditional if a process not considered "critical" for the organisation is outsourced. This is the case for activities that do not require specific competencies by the supplier, like canteen and cleaning service (Franceschini et al., 2003) or basic services like installation and repair (Nordin, 2005). The two main actors of the outsourcing process are the "outsourced" and the "outsourcer". The first outsources his processes, while the second delivers outsourced services (the terms supplier or vendor are also used for this actor). The process owner is the organisational interface of the two companies during all the outsourcing activities (Franceschini, 2003).

While cost saving has been identified as the primary motive behind outsourcing initiatives, there is more to outsourcing than just cost savings. In a survey referred by Zhu et al. (2001), cost saving was identified as the top reason why businesses choose to outsource, but improvement of services, the ability to focus on core business and the ability to access outside expertise were also identified as important factors. This result seems to reflect the fundamental changes in today's business environment and points to the strategic role of outsourcing in improving the competitiveness of a business (ibid).

It shows that the concept of outsourcing has experienced a radical change becoming a top management, not an operating, issue. Many authors (Zhu et al., 2001; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2000; Jiang and Qureshi, 2006) refers that outsourcing has become one of the most recent management strategies to emerge in response to demands for more efficient ways to achieve organisational competitiveness. As a consequence, the decision on whether and how to outsource is steadily moving up in the organisation to the chief levels.

2.6.2   Strategic outsourcing

During the last decade scholars and practitioners have pointed out rapid development of the IT sector, increased risk and search for flexibility, emphasis on core activity and globalization as the main factors accelerating competition on the market and widening the scope of outsourcing (Zhu et al., 2001; Nag, 2004; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2000).
The recent 10-years period also showed an evolution in viewing the outsourcing process from traditional to strategic. The strategic outsourcing literature suggests that the reason for outsourcing has changed from primarily cost minimisation to strategic re-positioning, i.e. developing strategic long-term partnerships to bring up enhanced results (Gonzales et al., 2005; Zhu et al., 2001; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2000). According to Beebe and Mayers (1999) outsourcing has moved markedly from performing a single operation more efficiently to reconfiguring the whole process in new ways, looking at results in addition to function. When managers strategically evaluate functions on the basis of whether internal staff or external suppliers can perform them most effectively, strategic outsourcing may be result. Consequently, organisations are more likely to select

outsourcing on the basis of who can deliver more effective results for a specific function or capability, than on whether it brings a cost-cutting effect (Beebe and Meyers, 1999). Emphasizing the role of specialized capabilities as a potential source of value creation also provides more meaningful understanding to strategic outsourcing in influencing relationships between firms.

Already during the 1990s the global competitive pressure has positioned large companies to adopt greater market discipline, reduce their product range and loose their vertical links in the production process (Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2000). The traditional concept of a firm, in which the different value chain activities are carried out internally is being replaced by the idea of a network organisation or even a virtual organisation, in which fewer and fewer operations are performed within the firm (Gonzales et al., 2005). Firms today seem to outsource an ever expanding set of activities, ranging from product design to assembly, from research and development to marketing, distribution, and after-sale service. Some firms have gone as far as to become "virtual" manufactures, owning designs for products but making almost nothing themselves (Grossman and Helpman, 2005).

As indicated above the scope of outsourcing was widened dramatically in recent time. Thus, it would never have taken place without the advantages currently offered by the information technology (IT). At this stage it is important to point out that the following theories around IT and business process outsourcing (BPO) are not central to our thesis, but are presented to enhance our theoretical reasoning to enrich the overall view and understanding for the reader.

2.6.3   *The role of information technology (IT)*

In considering how CRM should be implemented, information technology has an important role to play in enabling companies to maximize profitability through more precise targeting of market segments and the micro segments within them. We are now in a new era of technology-enabled marketing which involves leveraging customer

relationships through the use of technology (Payne, 2006). Powerful new technological approaches involving the use of data bases, data warehouses, data mining and phone support systems are now assisting organisations to increase customer value and their own profitability. In business-consumer organisations who are dealing with a large number of customers, a critical issue will be increasing the quality of customer contact through tools such as sophisticated call centres and electronics commerce (ibid).

IT outsourcing occurs when an organisation contracts a service provider to perform an IT function instead of performing this function itself (Kannisto, 2004; Braun and Winter, 2005). It has been suggested that a firm would consider outsourcing when in-house performance falls below the performance provided by the external supplier. Thus, in order to achieve competitiveness a company should purchase services from suppliers that have the required facilities and knowledge (Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2000). Many types of IT services can be outsourced, and examples of such business processes include payroll accounting, order processing or credit card payments (Braun and Winter, 2005).

Although the key strategic factors that influence the decision to outsource the IT function still centres around costs, the technological innovation, knowledge enhancement and in particularly the service improvement are now becoming predominant concerns for outsourcing decisions. Increasingly, many scholars and practitioners started to see IT outsourcing more from a value-added than cost reduction perspective (Kannisto, 2004; Gonzales et al., 2005; Braun and Winter, 2005).

Companies who entered IT outsourcing arrangements often found that external suppliers offered additional value-added services, such as improved quality of service, more flexible implementation of IT systems or better access to properly skilled staff. IT outsourcing suppliers are now looking beyond running IT operations to running business processes, in which they also take over functions as billing, cheque processing and accounting. Specialist suppliers in such areas as networks, desktops, data centres or call centres combine IT outsourcing with support or consulting for business functions (Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2000; Gonzales et al., 2005).

2.6.4 Business process outsourcing (BPO)

As referred to above, an organisation can choose to outsource only a selected IT service or to offload the entire business function to be performed and managed away from the location of the company (Nag, 2004). Today not only IT services are outsourced but business processes as well. This is known as business process outsourcing (BPO). The classic definition says that BPO is the transfer of non-core processes to third-party providers for whom the processes become core business. In return, the third-party provides process and technology improvement, training, best practice, cost reduction and performance management that a company can not perform on its own because it lacks resources, expertise or capital (Kops, 2003). This type of outsourcing deals with identifying complete business functions, i.e. office paper work and documents handling, for an outside provider. Conducting BPO depends on engagement in many different activities, although the business processes involved in it are heavily based on IT services. According to Kops (2003) BPO appears to be a multi-process collection of different solutions that have been transitioned over to the third-party. Because BPO focuses on processes rather than the performance of a task, adopting it requires an intensive level of transition, education and change management that is not necessary by outsourcing of single services (ibid).

Two categories can be identified in BPO – back office outsourcing, which includes internal business functions as billing and purchasing, and front office outsourcing, which includes customer-related services such as marketing and technology support (Nag, 2004). When BPO services include direct contact with customers or clients, i.e. call centre operations, the skill requirements increase dramatically as the success of a deal depends on excellent communication and knowledge of the issue concerned, as well as the customer's mindset. From offering a single IT service BPO has come a long way and now covers an array of operations from finance, banking, insurance, human resources development and training, mortgage and credit card services to customer care, sales and marketing and web-related services (Nag, 2004).

2.7   Summary of the theoretical framework

The graphic model below visualizes our theoretical framework and the following summary explains how the different theories that we have dealt with connect with each other. This framework is in its entirety developed by us authors from pre-existing theories. We consider these to be essential for the understanding of the reality concerning our research. Further this model has been the foundation when constructing our interview guides.
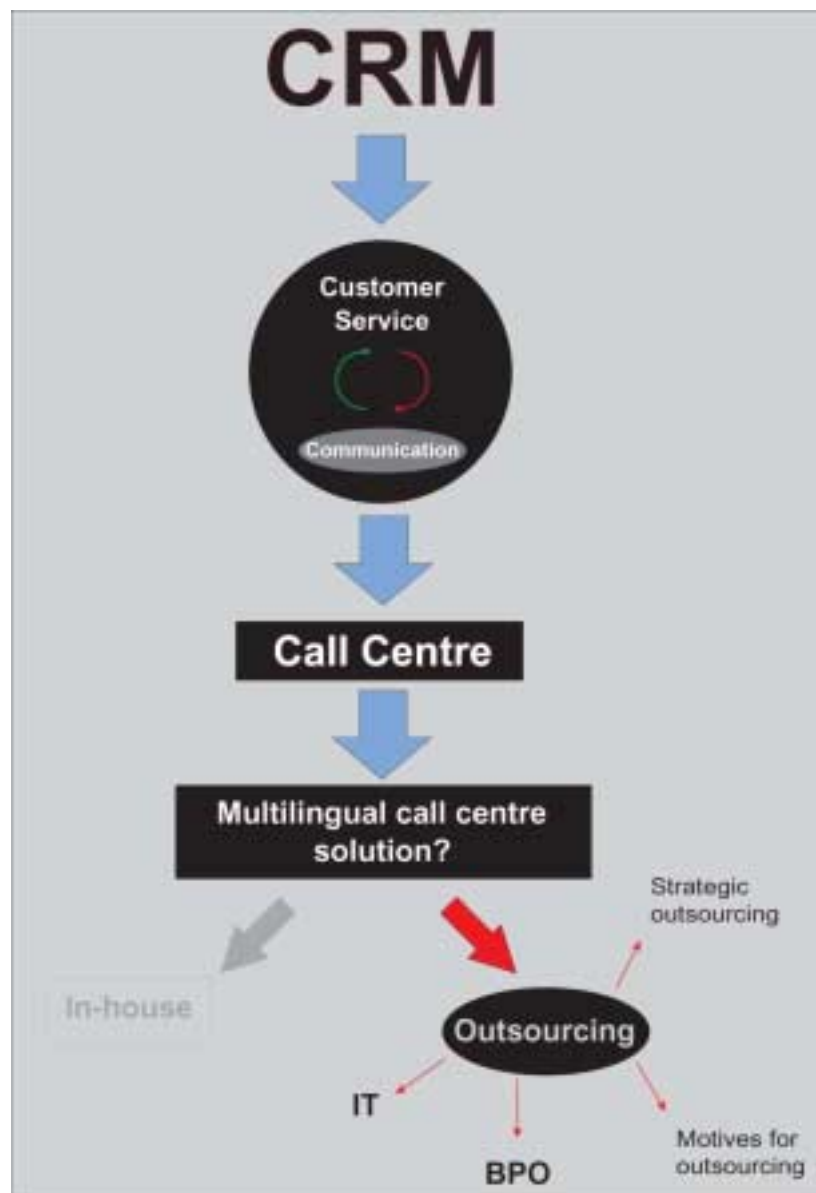
The business environment of today is characterised by increasing customer orientation. *Customer relationship management* (**first stage in the model**) is considered by scholars and practitioners as an efficient management tool applied by companies to develop competitive advantages on the market. CRM applies IT technologies to gather data, which can be used to develop information required to create a more personal interaction with customers. Within CRM emphasis has been put on *customer service* (**second stage**) as the front line of customer interaction. It appears to be an important strategic goal for any organisation interested in creating growth and can be a source of significant differentiation between companies.

Since a fundamental aspect of customer service is the direct verbal *communication* (**second stage**), the need to serve and communicate with customers on both a linguistic and cultural level has been stressed. For organisations that actively develop CRM, *call centres* (**third stage**) are becoming an increasingly popular channel for customer service, and a place where companies can enable and streamline the management of customer relations. With increased ethnic diversity through immigration and more people speaking different languages, there is a demand for *multilingual call centres* (**fourth stage**) to serve this segment of the population. Within the customer oriented market the concept of outsourcing has been presented as a management strategy to achieve organisational competitiveness. It has been noted that organisations are more likely to select outsourcing strategically on the basis of who can deliver more effective results for a specific function than on whether it brings a cost-cutting effect.

Outsourcing (**fifth stage**) of customer services to an external provider has been discussed as an option for companies that do not house the required language capabilities, and are therefore not able to assist their customers in the preferred languages. Thus many organisations have few alternatives but to outsource a significant proportion of their CRM solutions, as they lack the resources to develop those themselves, the importance of information technology as a necessary condition for outsourcing has been outlined. Finally business processes outsourcing (BPO) which focuses on entire processes rather than the performance of a single service has been presented.

As already mentioned in the section 1.5 *Restrictions* we have solely focused on the path and possibilities of outsourcing as a way for companies to acquire multilingual capabilities from an external provider. This is why the path of developing this capability in-house is not of our interest and a shadowed option in the model presented above.

3 METHODOLOGY

Initially this chapter explains the choice of topic. Further it provides the reader with information about the techniques we have used to approach our research, what restrictions we have had and how both the theoretical and empirical data was collected. We end the chapter by evaluating the quality of our research.

3.1 Choice of topic

The reason to explore the customer service business was that we find it very challenging and motivating to study such a young industry with broad development opportunities. The idea to focus on multilingual customer service was rather spontaneous and born from our observations that Sweden in its entirety, and especially some regions of the country, has a large immigrant population. This prevailing situation can also be observed in other countries of the western world. Many of the foreigners have language difficulties and limited abilities to communicate in the domestic tongue. Some of them do not speak the language at all. This disability does not change the fact that these people are customers to various companies on the market, and in the same need of customer service as everyone else. The need becomes even clearer when it comes to household related products and services. Consequently it was highly interesting for us to investigate weather companies on the Swedish market had noticed this group of people and understood the importance and business value of multilingual customer service solutions.

3.2 Research Design

Here we would like to present the plan of our methodological approach during this thesis. The model below shows the different moments during our work process. First, within our group we *developed a hypothesis* that concerns the subject of our interest. As a next step we have tried to find the appropriate theoretical information that could confirm our hypothesis and develop the *initial theoretical framework*. Due to the absence of published studies concerning our particular subject we were not able to do such confirmation,

instead we decided to search for it directly on the market. By ambition and determination we managed to identify an actor that possessed the qualities which we found significant and helpful (*Identification of a multilingual call centre solution*). This medium-sized company had a well developed call centre business with the ability to provide customer service in approximately 25 languages. Their experience within multilingual customer service enabled us to better understand the market and strengthen our hypothesis. Due to the request from the management to maintain an anonymous profile, the company is referred to as MultiSpeak.
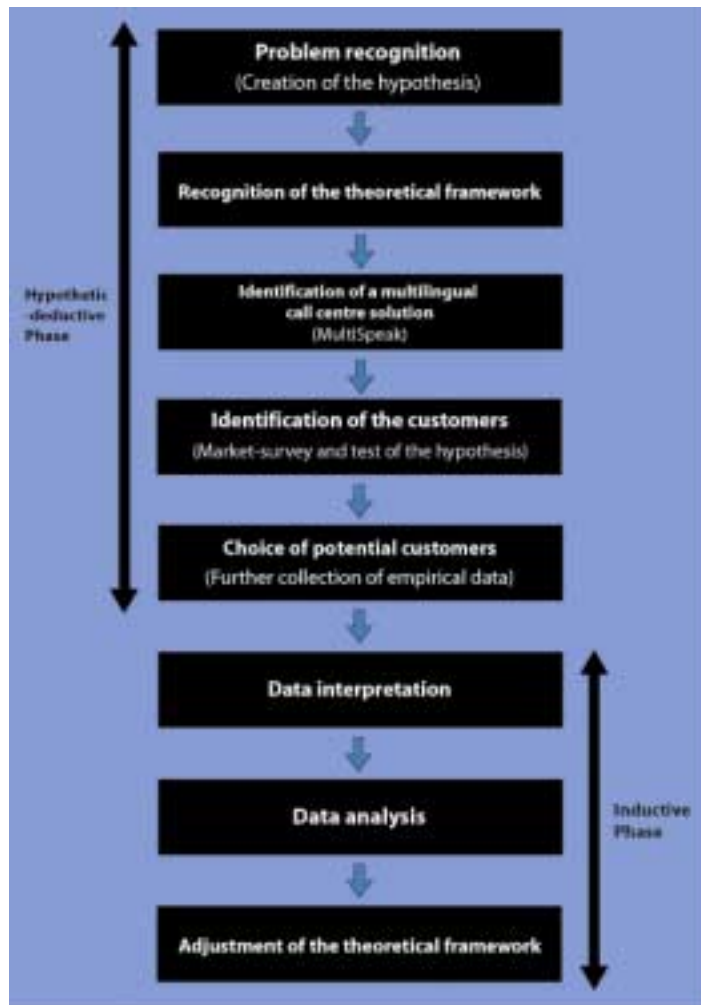
Afterwards we were ready to test our hypothesis. This was done by conducting a market survey (*Identification of the customers*). From the market survey we identified companies which we engaged in further investigation (*Choice of potential customers*). After we conducted the last empirical research we transcribed all the empirical data and started the process of *data interpretation*. Further steps were devoted for the *analysis* and this finally resulted in some adjustments *of our theoretical framework*.

3.2.1   Hypothetic-deductive and inductive reasoning

The hypothetic-deductive method formulates premises as a hypothesis, and the validity of the hypothesis can be tested. Through deduction a conclusion about the reality is drawn and this conclusion is empirically tested. This way you unite the reality with logic (Eriksson and Wiedersheim, 1997). The methodological reasoning during the large part of the thesis could be identified as a hypothetic-deductive.

Our initial premise was formulated in the hypothesis *that there is a need for an external multilingual call centre solution among companies*. This hypothetical assumption was mainly established on our individual believes that were based on social observations. Due to the lack of former studies on the subject we were not able to find any theoretical support for our hypothesis. Instead we instinctively decided to turn the focus to the market where MultiSpeak, the company which we managed to engage for the initial stage of our empirical study, enabled us to strength our premise. In order to test our hypothesis we conducted a market survey. During this phase we took a very broad scope making short semi-structured telephone interviews with over 30 different companies and governmental authorities, all involved in household related products or services. Nine companies from the market survey approved our hypothesis.

The progression of our empirical study helped us to look at the theory with a broaden mindset. When we realized that the outcome of our thesis would have a significant input to existing theory our reasoning in the later stages of the work process turned out to be rather inductive (Bryman and Bell 2003).

3.3   Information gathering

In this section our process of data collection is presented under two categories; secondary and primary data.

Secondary data collection

Our secondary data collection started with a broad scan of previous research that was published on the area of our interest. Important for us was to get familiar with the overall

nature and trends within the call centre industry. Noteworthy was to see how customer service were utilized in recent years and why there was so much attention around it. Such an approach allowed us not only to get a grip of the main industry characteristics but also gave us a better understanding to the purpose of our thesis. Due to the absence of specific literature on our subject we studied a broader scope of scientific articles. In order to get the most accurate and updated information the internet, mainly the Electronic Library Information Navigator (ELIN), has been used. The information we found there helped us to get a wider view on the call centre industry in general and clarify the trends within outsourcing. The problem associated with using this type of source is that the information there has already been interpreted by someone else and there is the risk that some significant facts might have been overlooked in its content. Thus the quality of the source is unknown (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Since we focused on scientific journals and managed to collect and go through a very broad collection we think that we significantly minimized this kind of problem.

Primary data collection

"But at bottom, we have to face the fact that numbers and words are both needed if we are to understand the world"

(Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, p. 40)

The quote pretty much recaps our thinking concerning the approach we utilized in the thesis. To be able to fulfil the purpose of our thesis we needed to be open to all types of new information and be prepared to use different techniques for information gathering (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The primary source of data during all three phases was interviews. That gave our study a qualitative character (Bryman and Bell 2003). The primary data collection was divided into three phases. This was done in order to facilitate a profound understanding for the reader to the different courses of action that were taken during the empirical study. Each phase had a diverse input to our thesis and will be discussed separately. The interview guides were carefully customized for each phase. A general weakness of the qualitative

research with interviews as a data collecting tool is the fact that it is very difficult to avoid bias (Yin, 2003). This problem was handled differently during each phase.

Phase 1: Multilingual customer service supplier

MultiSpeak, our initially identified multilingual service supplier, was from the beginning subject to a deep and detailed examination, known as qualitative research (Jacobsen, 2002). We agreed that this would be the most suitable approach in order to get a profound understanding of the company. Further the lack of any established theories concerning the topic of multilingual call centres provided additional arguments for our qualitative choice (Bryman and Bell 2003). During the first company meeting we had the opportunity to speak both with the company CEO and the head of Human Resources. The intention with the meeting was to get an overall picture of their business, which is why an unstructured interview was conducted in order to give the interviewees enough space to speak freely (Bryman and Bell, 2003). The following interviews were of a more semi-structured character and were aimed individually to the head of Operations, head of Business Development and the head of Human Resources. To avoid the risk of bias in the answers we put great attention into the process of preparation for the interviews. The interview guide was carefully structured after our theoretical framework and the relevance of the questions was additionally discussed within the group.

Further each interview was recorded in order to avoid loosing significant information and to minimize any misinterpretations. By using recorder we were also able to maintain eye contact and a more natural form of conversation. To record interviews may however to some extent negatively influence the level of honesty and restrict the answers of the respondent (Jacobsen, 2002). Even if such risk exists we did not notice that it occurred. Moreover we were asking for permission to record and offered the respondent to send him or her transcribed materials for approval. These interviews lasted approximately one hour. For the complete interview guide from this phase please view **Appendix 1**.

Phase 2: Market survey

Here a broad market scan among 30 companies from the household related sector was made via telephone and email. To obtain credible information we were exact about to interview respondents with significant knowledge and equal positions within all the interviewed companies. Our aim was to get hold of either the chief of Operations or the chief of Information, which both normally posses extended knowledge about customer service operations within their companies. We consider that conducting interviews with representatives from the mentioned positions gave more credible results.

Our interviews at this stage focused on customer service operations within a broad range of organisations, stretching from government agencies to housing providers, and also included big consumer electronic retailers, telecommunication companies as well as banks and insurance companies (see **Appendix 4**). Since we at that point did not know if there was a demand for multilingual customer service, the search was made with a very wide scope to get the necessary information from as many actors as possible (Jacobsen, 2002). During this stage we had a quantitatively aimed approach with the ambition to study relations between different sets of collected facts (Bell, 1993). The majority of the questions were formulated in a way to receive precise quantifiable answers, which consequently minimize the risk of bias in the answers (Bryman and Bell 2003). Typical questions asked were about opening hours, numeric significance rating of worker qualities and weather the company housed multilingual capabilities, as well as if they considered the language barriers to be a problem in any way (see **Appendix 2**). The phone interviews lasted approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

Our biggest concern during this phase of empirical data collection was the fact that the interviews were done over the telephone. In many cases the respondents did not have time to think and reflect over their answers. On the other hand, the questions we asked were very straight forward and did not require any particular preparations from the respondent.

Phase 3: Potential customers

Our last stage of the primary data collection had a more explorative disposition (Yin, 2003). The selected companies from the market survey were conducted in to the process of in-depth qualitative analysis (Jacobsen, 2002). From the market survey nine companies approved our hypothesis that there is a need for multilingual call centre solutions on the market. Out of these we finally managed to engage four companies from different types of business areas for further study. Such an outcome gave us the ability to receive a more realistic and general picture of the considered market (Yin, 2003). The main purpose with the in-depth interviews was to get a deeper understanding about how these companies handle their foreign customers and if they have any particular solutions to meet their linguistic needs. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to let the respondents speak openly and reflectively about the questions, and gave us a possibility to attach some follow up questions (Bryman and Bell 2003). Similarly to the first phase, to avoid or minimize the risk of subjective answers we put great precaution into the preparation of the interview guide.

The interviews were booked in advance and took place at the respondent's facility. Each interview was recorded and lasted approximately one hour.

3.4 Identification of the theoretical framework

The theories were selected to enable the reader's understanding of relevant aspects to why companies would prosper from a multilingual customer service. In order to clearly point out the importance of customer orientation we utilized customer-based theories. We also focused on theories that describe the significance of communication and cultural aspects within customer service. The last parts of our framework deal with outsourcing since this phenomenon has to be a widely accepted business strategy to even consider investigating potential business opportunities for a multilingual call centre solution.

3.5   Managing the empirical data & analysis methodology

All recorded interviews were transcribed in order to visualise the findings and make it easier for us to scan after significant information (Bryman and Bell, 2003). The empirical data that we collected is further presented under three separate phases in the chapter "Empirical findings" in the same chronological order as the interviews were conducted. Our intention was to present the information in an objective way, which is why we have abandoned own indications and judgements and presented the data purely as it was received. The empirical data had significant input and served as foundation for the analytical phase of the thesis.

The analytical phase is divided in to four topics developed after the main themes of our theoretical framework: *CRM and customer service*, *call centre*, *multilinguistics* and *outsourcing*. The first category will be devoted to the subject of how companies within household related products and services presently serve their customers on the front line and what they do to maintain god relations with them. Secondly under the section *call centre* we will analyze the companies' present call centre/customer service solutions and how they manage and develop them. Further under *multilinguistics* we will broadly discuss the consequences of cultural diversification on the market and how our target companies adapt to these changes. Finally we analyse the companies' attitudes towards outsourcing and what role it would play in acquiring additional language skills.

3.6   Validity and reliability

The reliability and validity determine the quality of a study (Bryman and Bell 2003). No matter which method is used researchers always need to do a critical evaluation of their work process.

3.6.1 Validity

Bryman et al (2003) defines validity as the capability to measure that what was intended to be measured.

Internal validity

The internal validity according to Bryman and Bell (2003) measures how the empirical findings connect and relate to the theoretical framework. Evaluating our study we can say that we managed to obtain a high level of validity. Our carefully designed theoretical frame was the basis for the development of our interview guides, which we further used during the different phases of empirical data collection. The questions were formulated after the main themes identified in the theory chapter; customer service, multilinguistics, call centre and outsourcing. These in turn were selected in order to fulfil the purpose of the thesis.

External validity

The external validity measures to what extent the overall results of the study can be generalized across social settings (Bryman and Bell, 2003). The delimitations which we have in our thesis resulted in an investigation of the need for multilingual call centre solutions among companies engaged in household related products and services. That of course has limited the ability to generalize our results across other industries.
Further we think that there is a very large research potential on this particular subject and we hope that our results can be valuable input for further research in this field.

3.6.2 Reliability

Reliability measures to what extent an instrument or procedure generates the same result in different occasions but under the same circumstances (Bell, 1993). The main question concerning reliability is weather other researchers would come to the same result following the same methodological approach (Eriksson and Wiedersheim, 1997). This criterion is very difficult to evaluate in a qualitative research because it is very

dependable on present social settings and actual circumstances that concern the object that has been interviewed (Bryman and Bell 2003).

In general we can suspect that some respondents might have answered our questions protectively by denying to the fact that they have difficulties to communicate with their clients. Such attitude might have been brought on by the fact that they were wanted to maintain politically accurate image about such a delicate subject as immigrants. On the other hand our reliability during all three phase of the empirical research is strengthened by the fact that all respondents appeared to understand and interpret our questions in a similar way.

The reliability concerning both phase 1 and 3 of our empirical study can be estimated as rather high. The in-depth interviews were booked in advanced and were conducted at the facility of the respondent. In contrast to the market survey, at this point the interviewed person had full comfort of choosing the time and place for the meeting, which we assume made him secured and credible during the interviews (Jacobson, 2002).

During the market survey we did not have any particular influence on whether the person was phoned in a suitable moment for an interview. Several times we were asked to call back later when the time was better or we were directed to a more suitable person to talk to. In other cases we were asked to leave a number to be contacted on later or to send the questions via mail. We think that such an outcome minimized the risk of receiving unreliable answers. The general impression which we hade during the interviews was that the respondents were focused and fully engage in the interviews.

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter presents the empirical results from our market survey and in-depth interviews. The results are presented in the same chronological order as we conducted our interviews.

4.1 Phase 1: Multilingual customer service supplier

This first phase of the empirical chapter will focus on MultiSpeak. It will tell the story of the company's extraordinary customer service skills. The reader will learn how strengths, weaknesses and future ambitions are embedded in the company.

4.1.1 MultiSpeak

The MultiSpeak group is an Irish company that was established in 1981. The company offers a range of Global Consumer Payments, Global Corporate Payments and Business Services. The core business of the MultiSpeak group is the instant and quick money transfer service of a global leader in money transfer services that operates through a network of approximately 300,000 agent locations in over 200 countries and territories. Within minutes this service allows people to electronically send and receive money worldwide

MultiSpeak Nordic is the nordic subsidiary of the MultiSpeak group and has its seat in Trelleborg, Sweden. The company serves as an agent in Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway for a global leading money transfer company. During the last decade the company has developed an extensive agent location network, with over 1200 locations in the Nordic region. This network enables customers to send money home from a wide range of convenient locations offering extended opening hours.

Multilingual call centre

The most interesting part of MultiSpeak and the main reason why the company was involved in our study is its call centre. MultiSpeak has successfully managed to form a highly multilingual and multicultural call centre that offers support to its customers in about 25 different languages. On a daily basis they guarantee to serve customers in at least seven of the most frequent languages. The working hours are between 8am and 8pm every day of the year and about 50 people work in the call centre.

The call centre handles approximately 1500-2000 errands per day that come through three different contact channels: telephone, fax and email. There are two main reasons that contributed to the development of MultiSpeak's multilingual call centre. The first reason was the large foreign migration to the Scandinavian countries. Many immigrants have difficulties speaking the Nordic languages such as Swedish, Danish and Norwegian and others are unable to communicate in the mentioned tongues. These people are the most frequent users of the money transfer service provided by MultiSpeak when sending money as financial support to their families, relatives and friends in their home countries. The second reason is that many of the agent locations are owned and operated by people with an ethnic background. To deliver better customer service MultiSpeak early understood that they had to form a call centre that would better reflect their customer base.

MultiSpeak considers their multilingual call centre to be a unique and competitive resource. To maintain this resource it is important to continuously coach, evaluate and give feedback to the call centre agents about their work. It is also crucial that every agent is updated about the latest information concerning computer programs, rules and regulations. "Finding new technological solutions and computer programs could also help us to win time and get rid of the last bottle-necks", says the head of Operations. He further states that you can never be satisfied but has to constantly improve and be one step ahead of the customer's demands.

Customer service

At MultiSpeak it is important that every call centre agent is able to handle all kinds of incoming errands. This requires that there is only one educational level and all new call centre employees get the same kind of education. The wide base of knowledge that every employee has to posses requires a relatively long training period in comparison to the average call centre job. The educational program is about 3 weeks long and follows a certain schedule. The training period ends with a written test to see whether the person is ready to start working independently.

"A positive thing with different educational levels is the shorter training time" says the head of Operations. In this way new employees could be ready to start working independently much earlier when only having to assist customers in some errands. On the other side the overall service level is higher when each employee can solve all types of incoming errands without having to reroute the calls to someone else.

When working with instant money transfers, where there often is a receiver that is in urgent need of the money, it is especially important that the errands are handled quickly and smoothly. It is necessary to be efficient, objective, give out the correct information and foremost to be accessible. According to the company the most important factor in a successful call centre is the availability. MultiSpeak also stresses the importance of serving customers in a competent and kind way because of the fact that the call centre workers are the company's face outwards and the first impression is very important within customer interactions.

Concerning the call centre MultiSpeak is most satisfied with the employees and the high level of knowledge they posses to perform their work. But something that the company is constantly struggling with is the placement of its resources at the right place and at the right time. Flexibility is a key word when it comes to the ability to adjust the call centre capacity to the fluctuations in incoming calls, or "to try to live with the current" as MultiSpeak expresses it. This is on the other hand hard to achieve with an internal call

centre because schedules and working hours are agreed upon and settled in advance, and you can not ask people to go home when there is over-capacity.

MultiSpeak says that each day means new situations but also new surprises concerning the work-load. Today the company tries to solve this problem by studying historical patterns to be able to estimate the call centre capacity needed from day to day. MultiSpeak is also investigating new technological solutions that would help them forecast situations by simulating different scenarios and acting after the most realistic one. This is a solution that already exists within the MultiSpeak group and has proven to be very successful.

To improve their customer service MultiSpeak is constantly analysing all the work routines to identify those that are inefficient or time consuming, and try to find new ones that are more flexible. "It is not enough to give a 100 percent service two times out of 10 and a 50 percent service the remaining times. Then we all know what the average result will be, and then you have potentially eight dissatisfied customers out of 10!" Thus they stress the importance of holding a high and even level of customer service. The company also continuously investigates extended service solutions for its customers and the company website is developed regularly.

Origin and cultural differences play an important role in how people perceive good customer service. The head of Operations claims that the demand on customer service is constantly increasing and customers increasingly expect to be treated as kings.

Employees

The company has an explicit policy to meet the demand for the languages that are necessary in the communication with the company's agents and customers. The head of Human Resources says that language skills are thus prioritized by the recruitment process, but other factors such as personality, cultural background, education and former experience with customer service are also highly valued.

The head of Operations considers that there is a high demand on the knowledge that every call centre agent has to possess. This is due to the complexity of the work and all the rules and regulations around the business that every employee has to be familiar with and follow. The head of Operations also claims that call centre work is demanding and challenging and requires a certain type of person that is able to handle the stressful atmosphere. At the same time he or she constantly has to be friendly and positive when serving the customers over the phone.

Business development

The head of Business Development considers that their multilingual call centre unlocks possibilities for further services and business developments. They have reasons to believe that other companies could be interested to take part of their multilingual service and that other business areas would most certainly also profit from their broad language library.

The company is very proud of their call centre, and states that it takes years to build up a functioning unit like it. They point out that the high level of existing competence and knowledge combined with the fact that the work assignments are already more complex and complicated than in an average call centre, should be a good starting point for developing their business to other areas than money transfers. This is also the ambition for the future. "It is just a matter of time before we will offer a new service apart from our present one, and with the potential we have, we should diversify ourselves", says the head of Operations.

4.2   Phase 2: Market survey

In the first wide market scan all 30 organisations of interests both from the government and private sector agreed that offering regular telephone support to their customer is an important aspect of customer service.

4.2.1   Government sector

The government sector in this research includes 6 organisations that all concluded outsourcing of their call centre business as rather difficult to the specific nature of their business. These organisations require very specialized knowledge from their workers combined with a long and extensive education. The transfer of a whole process to an external provider would be too expensive. This is why they consider internal solutions to be most suitable. Furthermore they did not show any interest to our hypothetical assumption concerning the need of multilingual customer service. Some government agencies did not consider language barriers as a problem at all. If a situation requires additional language skills they have their own solutions. "Today, if necessary we solve all language barriers via an interpreter" says the head of customer service at Försäkringskassan. The table shows how different companies from the government sector value the attributes of a co-worker from their customer service unit. The result clearly shows that the language skills are considered less important. The main focus among these agencies is set to the high level of customer interactions and the specialized knowledge of co-workers.

GOVERNMENT SECTOR				
(1- not important: 7 – very important)				
Company/organisation	Efficiency	Specialized knowledge	Language skills	Customer interaction
Försäkringskassan	7	6	5	7
Bolagsverket	6	6	3	7
Skatteverket	7	6	3	7
PRV	5	7	5	7
Skånetrafiken	6	6	2	7
Vattenfall	6	6	4	7
Average	**6,2**	**6,2**	**3,7**	**7,0**

Since there were no federal or governmental agencies that appeared to be convinced about having a need for an external multilingual call centre solution we decided not to pursue this segment further in this thesis.

4.2.2   Private sector

In the private sector the results varied a lot, there was even a great discrepancy within the different businesses. This is why we present empirical findings separately for each business area.

Consumer electronics

The companies within the customer electronic business were more open to the idea of outsourcing. Both SIBA and ONOFF outsource their customer services to external providers. An interesting result from that group was how differently they perceived the aspect of multilingual customer service. SIBA for instance, who has approximately 20 % customers with a foreign background, says that there is great need for the ability to serve their customers in more languages and the external multilingual call centre solution is worth to explore. Parallel to this ONOFF, with a 15 % share of foreign customers, did not at all perceive that there was a need or request for multilingual customer service. Similar to the government sector, companies from this business area have not put much attention to the level of language skills of their employees.

Consumer electronics				
(1- not important: 7 – very important)				
Company/organisation	Efficiency	Specialized knowledge	Language skills	Customer interaction
SIBA	5	6	4	7
ONOFF	5	5	2	7
ELGIGANTEN	7	3	3	7
Average	5,7	4,7	3,0	7,0

Utilities

The utility companies did not consider outsourcing of customer service as any solution which would bring them any significant profits. They are presently able to solve all issues

that customer have with in-house resources. When asked if they had any problems to communicate with immigrants they responded that this happens rather seldom and that they are capable of managing these rare situations. By analyzing the table below we can clearly see that all companies from that group valued all the attributes of co-workers high. Posten was the only respondent from this group who considered exploring the subject of a external multilingual call centre solution.

Utilities				
(1- not important: 7 – very important)				
Company/organisation	Efficiency	Specialized knowledge	Language skills	Customer interaction
Posten	7	6	7	7
Apoteket	5	6	5	6
E-on	5	6	6	7
Average	5,7	6,0	6,0	6,7

Consumer goods

The companies within the consumer goods business maintain their call centre units in-house. The ability to communicate with customers in other languages than the domestic has not been perceived as a necessity in their business area. We rarely experience the need for additional languages in our call centre and it is as seldom as 2-3 times per year that people with language difficulties call us" says ICA.

Consumer goods				
(1- not important: 7 – very important)				
Company/organisation	Efficiency	Specialized knowledge	Language skills	Customer interaction
IKEA	7	6	2	7
ICA	5	7	5	7
Average	6	6,5	3,5	7

Telecom companies

The companies from the telecom business had clearly established opinions on the subject of whether to outsource or keep the business in-house. Both Bredbandbolaget and ComHem exploit advantages from both internal and external solutions, while Tele2

outsources their entire customer service to an external provider. All companies from that sector, with the exception of ComHem, pointed at the importance of multilingual communication. Bredbandbolaget, with approximately 30 % clients with a foreign background, valued co-worker language skills highest within the group.

Telecom				
(1- not important: 7 – very important)				
Company/organisation	**Efficiency**	**Specialized knowledge**	**Language skills**	**Customer interaction**
Bredbandbolaget	7	5	7	7
ComHem	6	7	2	7
Tele 2	7	5	5	7
Telenor	no response			
Average	**6,7**	**5,7**	**4,7**	**7,0**

Insurance companies

From all the insurance companies we talked to, only Skandia had outsourced their call centre, while the remaining companies preferred to have it in-house. The interest for multilingual customer service was very high among all insurance companies, especially Länsfösäkringar Skåne, Trygg-Hansa and Skandia. Those were already working on possible solutions to solve language barriers. The call centre director at Trygg-Hansa explains: "when we recruit new personnel to our call centre unit we try to select individuals with multilingual skills"

Insurance companies				
(1- not important: 7 – very important)				
Company/organisation	**Efficiency**	**Specialized knowledge**	**Language skills**	**Customer interaction**
Länsförsäkringar Skåne	7	4	3	7
Trygg-Hansa	4	6	7	7
IF	6	2	3	7
Skandia	5	7	2	7
Folksam	no response			
Average	**5,5**	**4,8**	**3,8**	**7,0**

Banking

Within the banking sector all actors maintain their call centre units internally. Both Nordea and SEB evaluate their present language capabilities as high. These banks already have multilingual solutions in form of language pools and are currently able to offer customer service in 10 respectively 22 languages. None of the responding banks were able to estimate the share of customers with a foreign background. In average all banks valued the co-worker capabilities as relatively high.

Banking				
(1- not important: 7 – very important)				
Company/organisation	Efficiency	Specialized knowledge	Language skills	Customer interaction
Nordea	7	7	7	7
SEB	7	7	7	7
Swedbank	7	6	4	7
Handelsbanken	5	6	4	7
Average	6,5	6,5	5,5	7

Mail order companies

When investigating the mail order business we were able to get in contact with only one company. Within this company the customer service units are located both internally and externally. The present language skills among co-workers were determined as low. The company had a positive response on the idea of broadening their present language capabilities and showed an interest in an external multilingual call centre solution.

Mail order companies				
(1- not important: 7 – very important)				
Company/organisation	Efficiency	Specialized knowledge	Language skills	Customer interaction
MailorderCo	6	6	3	7

Housing providers

None of the municipal housing providers we manage to contact have a conventional call centre. Instead they provide direct personal contact through their landlords. Malmös Kommunala Bostadsbolag (MKB) evaluate their language capabilities as rather medium due to the fact that they already supply their tenants with multilingual support in the areas where immigrants account for a very large number. Göteborgs Stads Bostads AB (GSB) communicates only on the domestic language with its tenants. Stockholms Kooperativa Bostadsförening (SKB) has not perceived problems at all and claims that all tenants with a foreign background speak understandable Swedish or at least English. The company representative from SKB explains that the multilingual solution would not adjust in their case and states that "It is more trouble than it is worth". On the contrary both MKB and GSB had realized the importance of multilingual customer service and were interested in an external multilingual call centre solution.

Housing providers				
(1- not important: 7 – very important)				
Company/organisation	Efficiency	Specialized knowledge	Language skills	Customer interaction
MKB	6	6	5	7
GSB	5	4	2	7
SKB	5	6	2	7
Average	5,3	5,3	3,0	7,0

Market survey outcome

By scanning the market we were able to allocate within which businesses areas multilingual customer service might be a valuable solution. From our results we managed to identify nine companies that had detected the importance of additional languages within their customer service business and showed interest for an outsourced multilingual call centre solution. From those companies we succeeded to engage four of them in further discussion about the topic.

4.3 Phase 3: Potential customers

The four companies which were engaged in the last phase of the empirical data collection had all understood the need for multilingual customer service. They were already involved in some projects to uncover the potential that immigrant customers hold and showed an interested in multilingual call centre solutions in general.

4.3.1 Länsförsäkringar Skåne

Länsförsäkringar Skåne is one of 24 independent and regionally diversified insurance companies. Together they build the Länsförsäkringar group. The activities of Länsförsäkringar Skåne are divided into two business areas: banking and insurance. Within each area the company provides service for private, business and agricultural clients. The company is a mutual organisation where customers also are co-owners. (www.lansforsakringar.se/Skane, extracted 23/05/2007)

CRM & customer service

The business strategy of Länsförsäkringar is very customer oriented. Their main competitive advantage comes from that fact that they provide their service very locally. They know customer needs and understand their problems, in other words "they speak their dialect", says the director. The very local profile with highly developed IT-systems enables them to offer better guidance and support for their clients.

Call centre

Länsförsäkringar does not currently have a call centre in a conventional way. Within the organisation there are instead several channels through which communication can take place. All those solutions are managed in-house in order to preserve a high level of motivation and quality. If customers have any questions regarding products and services or need general information about insurance they can call an agent directly at the local office. The opening hours are weekdays between 8am and 5pm. The district of Länsförsäkringar Skåne presently has 400 agents from which over 200 constantly are in contact with customers via telephone and sale the company products and services. The

second link to the company is through the damage department which is a separate unit where clients call when they have a claim for compensation. The opening hours for this service are between 8am and 5pm Monday to Friday and for emergencies there is a SOS-number which is open at all times.

Länsförsäkringar Skåne is considered a pioneer within the Länsförsäkringar group and works with new models and ways of educating the staff. Recently the company developed a new selling system called VIS. The idea with the system is to improve customer service by creating a customer database. Each customer profile was introduced to the system which consequently helps the agents to tailor solutions for individual customers. Their workforce has a high average age (55-60) which results in a high loyalty, but sometimes the older people have been reluctant to adapt to new technologies and working routines.

Multilinguistics

The multilingual customer support was an issue on which the Länsförsäkringar group already had focused on. The inconsistent nature of the organisation made it noticeable that different regions perceived the problem to a higher extent. At the time when we contacted Länsförsäkringar Skåne they had already made some steps toward defining the solution. "We launched a project where we mapped out expectations from minority groups and our capabilities to interact with people of a foreign background" says the director at Länsförsäkringar Skåne.

They were aware of the fact that they did not pay attention to minority groups and that is why they today have an under representation of this segment. Since recent years have showed further growth of the foreign population, the need to improve the understanding of this group of potential customers became vital.

Länsförsäkringar Skåne did an extensive study regarding this so far dormant business opportunity. The study focused on how to accommodate and communicate over cultural barriers. It was brought to their attention that this segment of potential customers often does not have insurance or even understands why it is crucial to have in Sweden. Many

of them come from countries where it is not possible to insure property against damage. Further results showed that immigrants were not in fact as price sensitive to insurance services as they had believed. Instead they would appreciate that someone with a foreign background would assist them on the phone.

The need of facing the cultural minorities became much more obvious after the research, but it had a different level of urgency depending on region. The general solution which the Länsförsäkringar group developed was a language pool. The language pool was managed through an intranet, where each of the 24 companies within the Länsförsäkringar group reported which languages they currently housed. The language pool is presently believed to include 20-25 languages. Länsförsäkringar Skåne had further implications to adjust to their market situation. Last year they started a trainee program with the direct aim to increase the diversity of their work force. This project involves 10 people with foreign background that either have a university diploma or have worked within the insurance business before. The intention was to train each of them during a one year period and hopefully keep them in the organisation afterwards. Six people from the trainee program are now working within the Länsförsäkringar group in different locations, and the remaining one are still applying for jobs within the organisation. This has been a strategic issue for the whole group and Länsförsäkringar Skåne has pursued it consistently. Due to this initiative the company has managed to reach new customer segments. Recently Länsfösäkringar Skåne has had a semi-informative and semi-selling approach in Malmo by contacting different ethnic associations and giving them information on the importance of having an insurance in Sweden, of course with the underlying intension to increase sales.

Outsourcing

Länsförsäkringar Skåne believes that their competitive advantage is that they are local and close to its customers, therefore they can not consider outsourcing at this point in time. Once they had an outsourced call centre that did outbound calls, but the operation was cancelled and everything is done in-house today. The reason for this was clear, they wanted to handle all operations concerning image creation and direct customer contact

with own personnel. The disadvantage they experienced with outsourcing the call centre to an external provider was that they lost control over this unit. External workers were also less flexible to customer requests. They followed a resolute protocol and when the customer came with a question that went beyond it they were not able to help.

4.3.2   MailorderCo

MailorderCo has been the largest mail order company in Sweden for a many decades. Initially the core business of MailorderCo was to sell clothing via mail order. Today the company has subsidiaries in Finland, Norway and Denmark and supply clients with products and services within several different areas: clothing, interior design, electronics, film, music and travel. (Source withheld)

CRM and customer service

MailorderCo has been in Sweden for almost 60 years and have experienced many market transitions. They are now trying to modernize and to a certain extent reposition the brands to reach out to younger customers, since a large part of the current customer base is ageing.

A topical issue right now is to try to bring more value to each customer. Prior focus has mainly been process oriented and to minimize costs. MailorderCo states that being more attentive to each customer will cost more but also result in additional purchases. The company still wish to keep costs down but is now looking into becoming more personal with each individual. This could probably be an attainable goal since the company has good insights in the profile and purchasing preferences of each customer, despite the fact that they currently have several million customers.

The company believes that they have a great potential to maintain their leading position on the market. They possess great knowledge in developing their product range and state

to have a great logistics system. MailorderCo therefore concludes that if they manage and develop these crucial elements well they will stay ahead in the market.

The head of call centre operations personally believes that there is a dormant potential in immigrants and the customization of advertisement to this segment. MailorderCo however points out that they have no way of knowing how to do this, since a foreign surname gives very little clues of what language the customer would prefer to receive advertising in, and cannot at this point in time see a solution to this problem.

Call centre

The call centre has extensive opening hours and is opened to nine in the evening on weekdays and closes at five on Saturdays. Around 350-400 people deal with the direct customer contact on the Scandinavian market but the solutions for this operation vary greatly and the customer service is described as a fragmented picture.

The employees of the in-house operation have a relatively high average age compared to call centres in general, with most of them being in their fifties and having an average age of 51. These people have been with the company for a very long time and the staff turnover is very low. It is important to note that the call centre operation at MailorderCo is not considered a strategic operation but is regarded as an expense account. The director states "that nevertheless we have had a clear strategy for good quality in the call centre".

A lot of focus has therefore been put on efficiency, which they believe to be one of their competitive advantages. How to conduct oneself with a customer is a very fine tuned and clear procedure. The staff deals with every customer in a fast and efficient way and reports show that customers are very satisfied with the level of service. However MailorderCo confesses that further education of the employees could be somewhat higher, and has acknowledged it as an area for improvement.

In the call centre two clear trends have emerged. The first one is that less and less calls are coming in and the use of internet is rising fast from only a small percentage a few years back to half of all errands being handled via the internet today. All the internet support is housed and it has proved to be a new challenge to handle all the incoming emails. The second trend is a result of the first, which has generated that the main part of incoming calls today are more complex than they used to be. Today the errands concern claims for compensation, payment problems etc, due to the fact that customers prefer to use the convenience of the internet for simple tasks and only accept to wait in line for help when having delicate matters.

Multilinguistics

A couple of years ago MailorderCo was engaged in a project with the aim to stimulate multitude in their customer base. The project was called *Towns together* and looked at what immigrant customers expect from companies and the mission was to hire people with a foreign background at the next recruitment occasion.

Unfortunately the project came to a full stop due to budget cuts and lack of resources. Further the head of call centre operations says "that MailorderCo has quite some work to do to convey a message that says *multitude welcome*". He simply illustrated this by showing the cover of their latest catalogue that unmistakably sent the message of a typical blue eyed and blond Swedish family. In addition to this the call centre only offers support in Swedish. This is the only language specified as required at present time. Despite this the director believes that MailorderCo's clientele is a cross section of the Swedish population and the main argument for this being that the company has a very large customer base.

MailorderCo have not perceived that there is a current problem with a lot of their customers being unable to communicate in the domestic language. The director says: "We know for a fact that if an immigrant customer has problems speaking the language his or her relatives will call on their behalf".

Outsourcing

Today the company has both an internal and external call centre solution. Off-shoring is used when they can find the Scandinavian languages abroad in low cost countries, i.e. Finnish is presently off-shored to the Baltic countries. MailorderCo is today outsourcing its customer service to several different suppliers and half of the operations in Sweden are outsourced. The company believes that outsourcing is a good strategy which works well when it is implemented with regulations and stipulations about the obligations concerning both parties. There are detailed rules that every supplier has to follow and if someone misbehaves they will be replaced, which has happened in the past.

"If we will expand our call centre operations further in the future it will be done through an external provider" says the director. The only reason why they would not consider this would be if they required a particular specialist competence to be kept in-house. What this specialist competence would be was not specified.

MailorderCo states that outsourcing enables important flexibility. Since the amount of incoming calls varies over the year they can regulate the needed capacity of workers through their sourcing partners. This saves a lot of costs compared to being forced to maintain an overcapacity in-house to accommodate for brief peaks in the call pattern. In order for this to work MailorderCo sends detailed forecasts to their suppliers every week stating how many calls the supplier is expected to answer within every fifteen minute interval.

MailorderCo appear to have a very professional attitude to outsourcing and they claim that the key to make outsourcing work is to thoroughly ponder on the specific needs for the company and then to state the demands to the supplier very clearly and in great detail. Those need could i.e. be what kind of education, maximal queue time etc they demand from the supplier. What speaks to their advantage as well is the fact that MailorderCo brings big volumes which makes them an important customer.

The director says: "The validation process can be summarized into four very explicit questions that we ask any potential external service supplier:

- Is it the right price?
- Is it the right quality?
- Is it the right capacity?
- Can the partner help us to create new ideas and develop the business process?"

If the answer to these four questions is *yes*, then MailorderCo's answer to a potential cooperation is also *yes*. But even after this initial face MailorderCo requires to perform continuous quality checks. If a multilingual call centre solution would fit the profile MailorderCo could see a possible future partner. The demands on an external partner are very high and according to MailorderCo this is the reason why customers calling the company can not tell weather they have reached the internal or external customer service.

4.3.3 Göteborgs Stads Bostads AB

GSB is a municipal housing provider company established in 1945 in the city of Gothenburg, Sweden. The company is a landlord with over 22 700 apartments available for its customers and one of the biggest housing provider in the city. (www.bostadsbolaget.se, extracted 23/05/2007)

CRM and customer service

GSB's all-embracing mission is to support and develop Gothenburg by supplying the city with all different types of housing, places where people can feel secluded in the comfort of their own home but still remain included in the greater context of the surrounding city. As a municipal agency it is their mission to offer housing to all kinds of different people like students, senior citizens, young families and immigrants. The director states: "GSB

actively works against all types of segregation and discrimination".

They try to convey a new image in the company where the main focus is no longer that "we build houses" but instead they want to be perceived as a service company. The director further states that "the entire housing business suffers from the affliction of not realizing that they have and need customers". GSB believes that being local is crucial and strives to be as close to the customers as possible. The company has deliberately worked on becoming more visible towards their tenants in all aspects and considers every employee as a representative for the company. As a municipal company they do very little advertising and put their present tenants first. To find a suitable home the recommended place to look is a webpage that the company shares with all the other housing providers in the region, municipal as well as private ones.

GSB's opinion is that a good customer service will generate happy tenants. The director said: "Since our customers are easily located, they are in fact in our houses, we have concluded that it is also where we should be". In general they believe that a perfect customer service will be a competitive advantage.

Call centre

GSB does not in current time have a call centre in a conventional meaning but has in stead several small offices locally in each neighbourhood. Opening hours are between 8am and 4pm Monday to Friday, and a hotline for emergencies is available at all times. Even though it is common for the employees to speak English when needed, GSB officially only provides assistance in Swedish.

The company used to have a call centre that dealt with all customer inquiries via their head office, but realized that the tenants preferred that help was close by. GSB makes an annual poll and the main wish from tenants is accessibility and the possibility of being able to voice their opinion, preferably within close proximity of where they live. This is why they now have decentralized. Each district is self-sufficient and there are six local offices, each hosting between 4-6 employees answering questions directly over the

counter or via telephone. In addition to this they have a total of 70 landlords, each just serving a few houses. The landlord is usually the first person a tenant contacts, but when the landlord is unavailable the tenants can turn to their local GSB office.

This new system is believed to bring better support and understanding for the tenants' situation since the GSB employees share the same local environment. The decentralization is very recent and therefore the director is unable to pinpoint any drawbacks with the new system. He speculates that maybe communication within GSB may deteriorate and hence a caller might not get in contact with the preferred person because the overall view that existed before may be lost.

Regarding the work process a lot of the work concerning logging complaints and customer service in general is still done manually in the company. This will probably change in the future as GSB themselves recognize that they are latecomers in this aspect.

Multilinguistics

As mentioned previously GSB, as a municipal agency, has a high profile in questions regarding aiding integration and preventing segregation, and consequently counteracting class differences in the Gothenburg area. This does not only concern racial segregation but also all other types of segregation as age, financial status etc.

As mentioned above the company has 22 700 apartments and approximately 40 000 tenants. Highly interesting about GSB is that 45 % of their customers are people with a foreign background that are estimated to speak 42 different languages. This has been the case for quite some time and the share is still rising. Because of this we had the privilege to learn some details about the problems the company has encountered in the past regarding language and culture barriers. For instance they encountered an unforeseen issue when they hired a Bosnian landlord in a multicultural area. It was initially done since GSB believed that this would be appreciated in the neighbourhood to have a foreign landlord that the immigrant tenants could identify themselves with. However this lead to

that the Bosnian tenants were constantly expecting special favours, i.e. new kitchen supplies etc, since they were countrymen. The non-Bosnian tenants were envious that their language and cultural needs were not catered for. The director states that the situation grew unsustainable and labelled it as a hostage situation for the landlord. It eventually got to the stage where the landlord had to be assigned to another area.

As a parallel to the interview with Länsförsäkringar Skåne, GSB also found it to be a problem that many of their immigrant tenants do not have home insurance. What the director believes to be a problem at the moment is the fact that there are misunderstandings when tenants report problems in the apartments. Awkward situations arise and embarrassing misunderstandings occur due to language barriers. For instance when a tenant reports a problem there has been grave misunderstandings and the landlord shows up with a new toilet when in fact is was a broken fridge. These mistakes may seem amusing but in fact are not only embarrassing but also time consuming. Even worse would be if there is a misunderstanding about a potential hazardous gas or water leakage or a malfunctioning fire detector. "When there are serious language problems in the communication interpreters are made available, but this is only done in critical situations and usually at that stage the social services are already involved" says the director.

Parallel to this GSB explains that when they have been in contact with immigrant interest groups these report that offering service in Swedish should be adequate, since they believe that it is important for their countrymen to actually learn a sensible amount of Swedish. According to them this is a vital part to the integration of each individual.

Outsourcing

Despite the fact that GSB has never considered outsourcing, the interviewee showed an interest when the multilingual call centre solution was mentioned. He believes that this may be an opportunity for helping customers with language difficulties. Immediately he jumped to the conclusion that such a call centre could function as an intermediary and receive the errands in the native tongue and then register them in Swedish and finally

forward them to GSB.

Sorting out the language barriers via outsourcing could be especially important since the director claims that "GSB has an assignment to make sure that no individual is discriminated in any way and that everybody should have the same possibility to express their opinions". The company has currently no in-house capacity to cater for the estimated 42 languages that their tenants speak.

The director then perceives that if someone is being served in a language they cannot comprehend, it could potentially be considered as a form of discrimination of the individual's right to adequate information. Further he believes that some controversies and disputes would be avoided if explanations could be properly conveyed in the native tongues of their tenants. It would also simplify matters if immigrants could talk to someone who understood their cultural background as well as being able to thoroughly inform them of how things are carried out in Sweden.

4.3.4 SIBA

SIBA is a leading company on the Swedish market within consumer electronics. The company is a family business which was established in 1950 in the city of Gothenburg. SIBA offers a wide range of electronic products to private and corporation customers. The company runs home electronic department stores in Sweden, Norway and Denmark and has departments for industrial trade in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Copenhagen (www.SIBA.se, extracted 23/05/2007).

CRM & customer service

SIBA is a company that has understood that time is a very valuable factor for its customers, and this is why they have focused on developing their customer service in a way that makes it possible for customers to save time.

To do the shopping process more efficient and less time consuming for people they stress the importance of doing complete sales. For instance, when customers buy a printer it is very important to inform them that things like ink cartridges and paper are not included, or when they decide to buy a flat screen TV the salesman should ask the customer if he or she would like to put the TV on the wall, and that this would require a wall mount which is sold separately. In this way you prevent customers finding themselves at home without the necessary accessories, which would make them have to go back to the store.

Within SIBA's customer service strategy it is important that the company's call centre is not only seen as a cost centre but also as a profit centre. This is why the call centre employees should not only assist their customers with different questions and inquiries but also act with sales in mind. The intention is not to be an annoying and pushing telemarketer, it is rather a way to make the customers more satisfied and guide them to the right purchase. Performing this purchase over the phone will also save the customers a lot of valuable time, and this consequently leads to better customer service.

"If the customers are our kings today they will be our emperors tomorrow" the service director says. The customers are more and more demanding because of the fact that they can inform themselves in such a good way with help from the Internet and other sources. SIBA is constantly trying to improve its customer service and to come up with new more efficient solutions. The number of incoming calls to the call centre is de facto decreasing, but this can mainly be explained by the company website, which is extended regularly, and where customers can find much of the information that they had to contact the call centre about before. New customer service solutions, which currently are explored by SIBA, are support through a chat function on their website and a selectable call back service when calling the call centre.

"Considering all the high expenses from marketing and operating a call centre, it would not be illogical to ask every customer to pay for services like free telephone support since there are examples of companies that in fact charge for this service" says the market director. SIBA states however that they are very aware of the fact that those are services

customers expect to get for free in the extremely competitive market of today. Otherwise they have the total freedom to migrate to one of the countless competitors that could offer them more for less and meet their demands in a better way.

Call Centre

SIBA is outsourcing its call centre operations to a company called Teleresurs. Teleresurs is a pure external service supplier that is also sourced by several other companies which operate within totally different business lines. SIBA realised the need for a call centre 6-7 years ago when they only offered telephone support via their stores. The answering rate at that time was as low as 15 percent. In retrospect SIBA points out that this is a bad solution because customers visiting the stores are always given priority to the ones calling, and there are never enough employees in the stores to serve both groups.

1999 SIBA started to engage in a call centre operation which initially covered four of its stores. This operation has constantly developed since then and today the call centre serves all SIBA stores, both in Sweden and Norway. The results considering the level of customer service have been very positive and today 82-85 percent of the incoming calls are answered. "This number is as high as 93-94 percent when you count the customers that hang up and then call back later" says the market representative. The average waiting time on the line is about two minutes. 10-15 percent of the calls are pure questions about the opening times and where SIBA stores can be found, 20 percent are related to service and repair and the remaining questions are about the products.

On a daily basis there are about 10-15 employees at Teleresurs answering the phones in the name of SIBA, and the opening hours in the call centre are 9am to 7pm weekdays. SIBA now also considers offering its customers telephone support on weekends, mainly because most of their closest competitors already offer this service.

New employees working at SIBA's call centre are educated about the products and trained to always try to help the customer in the optimal way, and when this can not be

done from the call centre customers should be directed in a way that is the most convenient and efficient for them. An important request from SIBA is also that the agents answering their calls are very tolerant and able to identify the true problem when an upset customer is yelling at them. SIBA says that on these matters they are very satisfied with the performance of the call centre agents. According to the company the agents serving their customers are very customer friendly and succeed to take very good care of them, and the overall complaints on the customer service are relatively low. One thing though that SIBA would like to improve is that the call centre should act more as a profit centre. The agents should get better at mapping the customer's needs and improve their ability to be a selling customer service, which would save the customers a lot of their valuable time.

To have a call centre of this type cost a lot of money, but once again SIBA stresses the importance of it. "Our call centre is seen as a competitive resource that should constantly be maintained and developed. Not doing this would have devastating consequences for the whole business" states the director.

Multilinguistics

According to SIBA their customer base pretty much reflects the Swedish population of today. This means that immigrants born abroad account for approximately 17 percent of their customers. This number could be even higher though, SIBA estimates that immigrants and people with a foreign background in general is a group with great purchasing power when it comes to consumer electronics. This would mean that about every fifth person of SIBA's customers is born abroad.

This is something that SIBA is aware of and they have taken some actions to adjust themselves to the prevailing situation. Lately they have had a policy to recruit women with foreign backgrounds to their stores. The purpose has partly been to increase the number of female employees working in the stores, but also to employ people with a foreign background to better be able to communicate and understand their foreign

customers. SIBA has also printed advertisement leaflets with "Christmas sale" written on the most common languages spoken by foreigners in Sweden. Any further organisational actions in this direction have not been taken by the company. In the future the company would also like to adjust their leaflets after regional differences to be able to reach out to more people, i.e. foreigners.

The language requirements for the agents working in the call centre are so far Swedish and the capability to communicate with Norwegian customers. In the close future SIBA also wants to make English a standard requirement, but this is something that has to be negotiated with Teleresurs. According to SIBA, some of the agents working at Teleresurs have and foreign background and already posses some of the needed language skills. When a communication problem arises they try to do their best to help the customer with the existing language resources. In the worst case scenario customers are directed to the stores where body language can facilitate the communication process.

So far SIBA has not taken any strategic decisions about multilingual customer service or expressed any demands about this to their external service supplier Teleresurs. The company has thought about the great business value they could earn by being able to assist their customers in their native tongues, but they have never taken the additional step to realize it. SIBA also points out that it would be difficult to have a broad composition of language skills and cultural backgrounds when their call centre work force only consist of 10-15 people.

SIBA's director claims that "the business concept is to satisfy our customer's needs of consumer electronics in the best possible way within the regions where we can be found". He then elaborates "When immigrants account for up to one third of the people in some regions, our organisation has to better reflect this situation, otherwise we can not live up to our business concept".

Outsourcing

SIBA is a company well familiar with outsourcing. As mentioned above they have been outsourcing its customer service since 1999 to Teleresurs, an external service supplier with its business situated in the city of Helsingborg.

The reason for outsourcing the customer service instead of keeping it in-house is clear and simple for SIBA: flexibility. To meet fluctuations in the number of incoming calls it is vital for their company to be able to adjust the capacity needed in the call centre. This can according to SIBA only be done using an external customer service supplier.

SIBA has throughout the years had a lot of discussion about the outsourcing of its customer service, and they have examined it from many different perspectives. They say that the biggest thing you miss out on when outsourcing customer service is the company spirit within the employees. This is why SIBA constantly tries to convey this spirit to Teleresurs, so that the customers calling really feel that they have called SIBA and not Teleresurs. In addition to that all important SIBA managers visit the call centre several times a year to see how work is proceeding, and also to make the call centre agents feel important. They are as a matter of fact doing a very valuable and important job for the company. "Without the call centre the stores would never manage to serve all the customers" says the market representative.

A project started by SIBA showed that it is harder than they thought for a call centre to posses the required SIBA-knowledge. It is difficult for the agents to learn the broad range of questions and inquiries that they might be exposed to, and besides that, the agents have to be sales oriented when answering the phone.

SIBA could however consider a multilingual call centre solution that would be able to assist their customers in more languages. But then it is very important that all the other requirements follow. Those are requirements like the right price, right education, the possibility for SIBA to have an influence, and the necessity for the employees to embrace

the SIBA spirit so that the customers calling really feel as if they have called the company.

4.4 Present customer service solutions against our theoretical framework

Below in a modified model of our theoretical framework we have included the interviewed companies. This was done to better clarify how their current customer service solutions are positioned against our theoretical framework.

5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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In this chapter will analyze our empirical data against the theoretical framework presented in chapter two. The analysis is subdivided similarly to the previous chapter into the four main areas of interest: CRM and customer service, call centre, multilinguistics and outsourcing. Discussion will be carried out by looking at the CRM visions that the different organisations harbour today, as well as analyzing the present order of their call centre solutions and their attitude towards multilingual customer service and outsourcing. Finally, business opportunities for MultiSpeak will be discussed.

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By way of introduction we would like to draw the reader's attention to a few particularly interesting findings that could have impact on our theoretical framework. In our empirical findings there were some statements that evoked particular interest. These are listed below.

- Organizations and institutions within the government sector showed considerably less interest in extending their language skills than companies within the private sector.

- There are clear differences between, and even within, particular business areas in how companies perceive the need of multilingual customer service.

- MultiSpeak is the only company that sees its call centre as a strategic and profitable business unit. This is why all the other companies from the in-depth interviews except MultiSpeak violate the concept of our theoretical framework.

- Länsförsäkringar Skåne has clearly decided to follow the path of in-house development of linguistic capabilities. Even though they have developed a language pool with over 20 languages, the company does not communicate this valuable capability to its customers.

- MailorderCo has no physical stores. This is why their contact with customers only occurs through channels like telephone and internet. Despite this the call centre operation at the company is considered to be an expense account without any

strategic purpose.

- GSB who actively works for integration still believes that multilingual customer support would be good. This could be considered as a paradox?

- The studied companies show signs of ignorance and sloth concerning the implementation of strategies in order to exploit the business opportunity that immigrants hold.

In our analysis we will include these statements in order to study how they violate our theoretical framework, and to penetrate the facts and find the reasons behind them.

5.1   *CRM and customer service*

The interviews conducted during the market survey brought us a large number of differentiated opinions and facts concerning how the need for multilingual customer service has been recognized on the market. We had limited our study to companies involved in household related products and services because this business area applies to the whole population, independent of cultural background or financial status. This is also why many of the interviewed companies believe that their customer base reflects the current structure of the Swedish population. Companies that provide products and services to such a diversified group of customers need to be correctly aware of what their expectations and demands are. Proper communication and customer orientation is the key to success and according to Bose (2002) this is highly significant for companies in times when more and more players compete in the harsh market climate of today.

The group of companies which we manage to study during the market survey was in general very convinced of the need of regular customer support, no matter if that support was managed via an external service provider, in-house or a combination of both. All companies agreed that clients need to have a link to the company. As stressed by Burgers et al. (2000) these links on the other hand need to be managed within the organisation with the highest concern because they can be sources of differentiation and generate vital

competitiveness for an organisation. The importance of sending a positive image through communication channels like call centres turns out to be even more significant when companies realize that these channels are the company's face outward to the market. In line with Barnes (2002) research it is the human capital and its particular attributes and capabilities that decide how well a company handles the communication with its customers. Not unexpected one attribute was valued highest; the co-workers ability to interact with customers. All 30 companies from our study seemed to be well aware of the fact that this is the element which decides how a company is perceived by their client, which further confirms Barnes (2003) research on the subject. Consequently customer service operations, i.e. call centres, evolve to the stage where they come to play a very significant role in a company's overall CRM.

Our in-depth interviews with the five companies revealed that organisations have quite different thoughts on their CRM visions. They all have clear visions about what they want to accomplish for their customers, and shortly it could be put as followed:

MultiSpeak   – *we offer fast service in the customer's language*
Länsförsäkringar   – *being local is everything*
MailorderCo   – *we sell clothing just for you*
Göteborg stads bostads AB   – *we are where the customer is*
SIBA   – *a family business that tries to save customers' time*

These punch lines capture the essence of each company's strategy, and agree with Smith's (2006) thoughts on giving the customer maximum value with each purchase or service. From the interviews all companies appear to have, to a greater or lesser extent, adapted to what they know or believe that their customers need and want. This holds in direct comparison to what prior research has concluded on the CRM matter (Harvey and Griffin, 2002; Bull, 2003; Javalgi et al., 2006). CRM has further been put forward as a competitive tool in markets with increased competition (Sin et al., 2006) and all our companies report that they are now exposed to competition in a much larger extent. Still there are great discrepancies. Länsförsäkringar Skåne reports that times are very good

and they fear that contentment, when not carefully dealt with, could get the better of them. GSB is in a similar situation as Länsförsäkringar Skåne since housing is a very good business to be in today. But they know from own experience that when times get tough in their business, they get very tough. In contrast SIBA revealed that times in consumer electronics are very hard and margins are squeezed to the max, in fact the stores generate very little profit. The main part of their income today comes from purchases done by instalments.

From the in-depth interviews we got the impression that all companies have in recent time put effort on developing their CRM strategies. Länsförsäkringar Skåne have their new trainee program, while GSB just decided to abandon their traditional call centre, despite the fact that call centre operations have experienced an unparallel growth in recent years (Hood, 2006). SIBA has many creative ideas on how to reach new customer segments and pursue to attract more female buyers as well as immigrants. This has mainly been a venture they have pursued so far by customizing the staff in the actual stores to better reflect the customer groups they want to reach. MailorderCo, despite having a very cost oriented approach to their customer service, they pursue new solutions to constantly improve and rationalize business processes.

This way of actively applying CRM we derive to be one of the reasons why these companies first and foremost on their own have discovered the business opportunity that immigrants hold. Secondly it is important to point out that GSB stands apart from the other companies by the fact that foreigners presently account for as much as 45 % of their tenants. While the other companies wish to increase profits by attracting immigrant customer, GSB is rather forced to find a solution that would facilitate their daily work routines and help existing ones in a more efficient way. Like Evenson et al. (1999) points out attracting new customers is much more expensive than retaining present ones, and making sure that the ones you have are satisfied is the best way to keep them. At this point it is important to point out that GSB's high share of immigrant customers is circumstantial, due to the nature of their municipal housing business, and not a result from a particular strategy to attract immigrants.

Theory clearly says that IT is one of the basic conditions for CRM, and IT technologies help companies to map and gather data about their customers (Braun and Winter, 2005; Bose, 2002; Wells et al., 1999). This information is used to create a more personal interaction with customers and to better satisfy their individual needs. Paradoxically GSB which is the company that seems to be most successful in this area is at the same time the *least* computerized one of the studied companies. For instance they can pinpoint which immigrant groups are dominant in particular areas, they know that their tenants speak 42 languages altogether and have also become familiar with several of the problems concerning their foreign tenants, i.e. their lack of home insurances. At the same time, SIBA and MailorderCo, that both use more developed IT technologies, can see a problem in how to map and categorize their potential immigrant customers. This shows a clear difference between GSB and the other companies. Even though GSB is remarkably less computerized in their work processes they have managed to gather more detailed information about their customers than the other companies. This can be a sign of ignorance and sloth at SIBA and MailorderCO, which even though they have the right technology, have not bothered to develop methods of information gathering about their customers. The reason for this could be that GSB is dependant on the information to better be able to cater for their existing customers, while SIBA and MailorderCo perceive it as yet another segment and have not bothered enough to explore it further.

5.2 Call centre

Regarding our five studied companies their current customer service solutions varied. MultiSpeak appears to have a state of the art call centre facility, where constant improvements are carried out. What is intriguing is that Länsförsäkringar Skåne currently states that they can offer support in about 20 languages through their language pool. Yet this information is nowhere to be found on their homepage. This fact left us a bit hesitant, since during the interview the company clearly stated that a vision of theirs is to increase the amount of immigrant customers. It can be considered illogic to possess such a valuable resource but not to take the full advantage of it. This seems to go against the basic rules of communication that prior research has established (Bolton, 2003; Ellis and

Hunt, 1993; Bose, 2002; Harvey and Griffith, 2002).

What is truly interesting regarding call centre solutions is that the companies have very different opinions about it. Länsförsäkringar Skåne with their abandoned outsourcing venture on one hand and SIBA with a totally outsourced venture on the other, while GSB has gone from having a centralized call centre unit to splitting it up into several local customer service offices. The reasons for this inconsistency might be related to a couple of reasons. First this quite accurately reflects the CRM strategy chosen by each company (Ward, 2007; Stenker and Stenker, 2007; Bolton, 2003). Secondly it also depends on the type of business and if a centralized call centre is a suitable solution for customer service or not. In some cases, as in GSB's case, their solution to be locally available and close when serious problems occur can be vital. In such a situation a centralized call centre situated far away would have a restricted function. Meanwhile other businesses are much better suited for call centre operations, and can profit immensely from it. Those are often companies like SIBA, Länsförsäkringar Skåne and MailorderCo, for which handling errands through the telephone or email is not only possible but also the quickest and most efficient solution for both the company and the caller.

Another reason for the inconsistencies is that the companies put different amounts of value and importance to their call centre operations. This difference is most obvious when comparing MultiSpeak and MailorderCo. MultiSpeak sees its call centre as a strategic and profitable resource that gives the company an important competitive edge and possibilities for extended market opportunities. MailorderCo on the other hand confirms that their call centre operation is *not* a strategic division and considered to be an expense account from a managerial point of view. When asked about it, MailorderCo admitted that the call centre worked on improving what gets measured. Instead focus is put on improving and rationalizing business processes. Even though CRM theory clearly states that efficient processes are an important part of CRM (Sin et al., 2006, Nordin, 2005) MailorderCo could be considered to have a narrow minded view on their CRM when not developing their customer service into a strategic business unit. For this company, who's only way to interact with customers is the call centre, it should be highly

important to develop a CRM strategy where the call centre is considered a profit unit and source of valuable differentiation. This is strengthen by the fact that MailorderCo has no physical stores where face-to-face interaction with customers can occur, which further raises the demands and expectations on their call centre.

Regarding the skill and knowledge level among call centre agents that De Grip et al. (2006) and Taylor et al. (2002) discuss, there are indications that these are rather high amongst the agents at MultiSpeak and Länsförsäkringar Skåne. The call centres at these companies deal with complex tasks and the education for new employees is pretty extensive. The educational program for new call centre agents at Teleresurs that work in the name of SIBA is much shorter. SIBA however recently discovered that it was in fact much harder for the staff to possess the required SIBA-knowledge than the company initially believed, and not being able to serve the customers in the best way may result in lost value for the customer (Smith, 2006). Meanwhile MailorderCo and GSB conclude that the main part of their telephone calls could be considered routine calls which do not require any extensive knowledge, and consequently no longer education.

5.3 Multilinguistics

According to our market survey all 30 responding companies seem to be very customer oriented, all valuing the treatment of the customer as the most important attribute within customer service. But this co-worker attribute is not the only essential one today, and as several authors (Turek, 2000; Read, 2003; Ruffini, 2006) state, when markets grow to be culturally diversified companies have to focus on additional attributes like language skills. According to Dhir (2005) as soon as the customer base becomes more multicultural, the natural reaction from companies with well developed CRM solutions should be that they expand their multicultural perception.

Unpredictably our empirical findings visualize that the majority of companies do not fully understand the idea behind successful customer orientation. It is hard to agree when companies who have over 10 % immigrant customers provide customer service only in

the domestic tongue, and proudly state to be fully costumer oriented. For instance ONOFF, a company within the customer electronics business, says to have 15 % immigrant customers but does not at all value language skills as an important attribute among co-workers. Furthermore they say that they have never experienced situations when they could have overlooked or misinterpreted any customer.

The denial of language barriers may be brought on by the fact that companies are unwilling to admit to an external caller that they are experiencing any communication difficulties, since they do not want the information to be misinterpreted and drawn false conclusions upon. The reason can also be that they want to appear politically correct regarding the controversies related to this delicate subject. By answering protectively they skip misinterpretations and avoid the risk of being accused for ignoring the special needs of immigrant customers. Further, even though some of the companies stated that multilingual skills were not essential nor requested, it is our conviction that this is actually in some cases a sign of ignorance of market potential. Here a sign of laziness or so called sloth is reoccurring, where companies seem to be satisfied with their present condition showing no interest in the immigrant customer segment.

Something to think about is whose responsibility it actually is to adjust their language skills, the company's or the customer's? GSB for instance, who actively works for integration, at the same time believes that multilingual customer service would be a valuable solution and actually work in favour for integration. Being able to successfully communicate all the information to tenants in their home languages, instead of only fragments of the information in Swedish, is much better from an integrational point of view.

The negative attitude towards the idea of an external multilingual call centre solution was a predominant trend among the 30 companies that we interviewed in the market survey. This trend was particularly apparent in the government sector, where none of the organizations expressed a need for an external customer service solution. We presume that a contributing fact to this is the lack of competition and budgets allowing usage of

external interpreters when needed. When companies do not face competition they often do not develop strategic thinking to adjust their offerings after customers' needs and expectations.

As an exception there were nine companies from the diverse business lines which thought differently. Those companies understood that the multilingual customer service is something that they need to investigate and develop, and showed an interest for a solution to it. At the same time a handful of companies were already working on their own internal solutions to this matter. Such observations from the market survey approved our hypothesis, which we developed initially, that there is a need for multilingual customer service solutions among companies from the household related sector. This also supports our theoretical framework, even though several companies violate the theories in different ways and do not completely support our theoretical path to multilingual customer service. This will be further explained in the review of our theoretical framework later in this thesis.

Several authors (Turek, 2000: Read, 2003; Ruffini 2006) point out that the increased ethnic diversity in Europe has created a demand for companies to cater to this segment of the population. Our in-depth interviews show that all four target companies have more or less engaged in activities to better understand and serve immigrant customers. The organisational actions taken vary a lot, but they all intend to get the companies closer to potential immigrant customers. During the interviews companies however clearly stated these actions are primarily taken with profits in mind, and have a clear strategic purpose to generate increased returns in the future. Even though companies trade for profit in different ways no company would in fact bother to invest money to reach new customers if it would not bring them any economic value.

From the four studied companies it is clear that Länsförsäkringar Skåne has engaged in the most extensive actions in this matter. The company has realized that understanding the immigrants and their cultural background could bring a valuable business opportunity. Their mission to recruit more foreigners to the organisation and the language

pool they have created by bringing together all the language skills that present employees within the Länsförsäkringar Group possess are both clear signs of a strategy where immigrants are in focus. This is well in line with Dhir's (2005) thoughts on how the language issue should be treated as a strategic issue for an organisation, and made part of the routine strategic evaluation of an organisation's strengths and weaknesses.

During our in-depth interviews we made a finding which is very significant for our study. In all four target companies the present language capabilities within their customer service operations are low, which also confirms Ruffinis (2006) statement that there is a significant backlash in the call centre industry today from complaints regarding call centre employees with poor language skills. In general the studied companies only demand their call centre agents to master Swedish and in some cases English. No further language capabilities are required from call centre agents that directly interact with customers on the front line. This contradicts Turek (2000), who claims that language skilled people are essential if customer service is to become proactive and successful. Narrow language knowledge seems to be a prevailing fact in call centres and customer service operations in general. This is a clear sign that companies still have a lot to learn and develop before they can claim to be truly customer oriented and that they pay attention to the individual needs of their customers. An important need for immigrant customers is to be understood and have the possibility to get the same kind of help and support from a company as anyone else.

Another problem experienced by the companies is to decide which groups of immigrants to cater for. Realistically focus should be on the largest groups and consequently the ones that would carry the biggest business opportunities, but this would also mean that smaller ethnic groups would not be given any attention. This is another factor to bear in mind for companies that want to develop their businesses to better suit the needs of immigrant customers. GSB experienced this problem when they hired a Bosnian landlord to better serve the large number of former Yugoslavian tenants in a particular area, and other tenants felt that they were unfairly treated. MailorderCo experienced another side to this

problem meaning that it is very hard to decide in which languages to serve customers and to know who would appreciate to be served in their native tongue. Though a foreign name does not mean that someone does not speak the domestic language, and many immigrants that have been anxious about learning Swedish would actually be offended if a company initially chose to address them in their native tongue.

Since immigrants born abroad make up for almost 17 % of the Swedish population they should realistically be a very important segment for companies that want to create competitive advantages with customer service today. In comparison to the large share that immigrant customers account for in the four studied companies, we got the impression that this group of people is still relatively unexplored and unknown to them. Both Länsförsäkringar Skåne and MailorderCo at some stage mentioned that their traditional Swedish organisations have been a breaking shoe in their process to adjust for immigrant customers. This phenomenon could clearly be observed at MailorderCo where the project called *Towns together*, that looked at what immigrant customers expect from companies and which was supposed to result in haring people with a foreign background, was provided very little space for within their organisation. The main reason was financial but the project was never realized because it did not get enough support and attention within the organisation.

Both SIBA and GSB have taken some minor organisational steps to better serve the large number immigrant customers. As mentioned earlier the situation for GSB is somewhat different compared to the other companies since this municipal company is not trading for profit in the same sense. GSB does not have to chase foreign customers with extensive marketing or other types of strategies, they have them already. In their situation a multilingual customer service would rather be used as a tool to facilitate the daily work routines, than a way of exploiting a business opportunity. Meanwhile the general impression from SIBA concerning this issue is that they are very aware of the business opportunity and the value of developing their customer service for immigrant customers, but they do not really know how to acquire the required language skills. This is where

MultiSpeak could enter the picture and offer its multilingual capability, a capability that SIBA says they would profit from but does not have a solution on how to develop.

Theory does not only stress the importance of the right language capabilities when dealing with immigrant customers, but also states the importance of being able to communicate with these customers on a cultural level. Harvey and Griffith (2002) state in their study that when individuals encounter cultural differences in their interactions they tend to view people from different cultures as strangers, i.e. unknown people who belong to different groups. This is why the cultural aspect is very important if companies want to earn the trust and confidence of immigrant customers. The company that has come furthest regarding communication over linguistic and cultural barriers is Länsförsäkringar Skåne. Länsförsäkringar Skåne has understood that it is highly important to understand how people from different cultures and religions can view and understand something like insurances in a totally different way, and what consequences this has on their ability to sell their services to this segment. This reasoning is well in line with Harvey and Griffiths (2002) research. They say that failing to effectively communicate intercultural relations with one's customers can hamper the development of relationships and that two diverse cultural viewpoints may accentuate misinterpretations during the communication.

5.4   Outsourcing

A further significant aspect in our study was to investigate if the companies were presently outsourcing their customer service operations to an external partner or keeping them in-house. Outsourcing has been an important factor in our study when looking on business opportunities for MultiSpeak. Our in-depth interviews with the four companies showed that they had different views on whether to keep customer service in-house or give it away to an external supplier.

All companies expect GSB have earlier engaged or are presently engaging in outsourcing activities within their customer service business. Both SIBA and MailorderCo have been outsourcing their call centre operations since many years and Länsförsäkringar Skåne

once had an outsourced call centre that handled outbound calls. This confirms Lonsdales and Cox (2000) research that outsourcing is not just another passing management fad but is today a widely accepted business strategy.

SIBA and MailorderCo share very similar thoughts concerning outsourcing. For both companies there is one determining factor, flexibility. According to them there are much better possibilities to adjust the capacity of the workforce needed from day to day when working with an external service supplier. This reasoning is well inline with theory stating that cost minimization is no longer the only primary reason for outsourcing and among others the search for flexibility has widened the scope of this phenomenon (Zhu et al., 2001: Nag 2004; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2000). It also confirms Beebes and Meyers (1999) research that organisations are now more likely to select outsourcing on the basis of who can deliver more effective results for a specific function or capability, than on weather it brings a cost-cutting effect.

In accordance with Gonzales et al. (2005) research it can be observed that the reason for outsourcing at SIBA has shifted from primarily cost minimization to strategic re-positioning, i.e. developing strategic long-term partnerships to bring up enhanced results. The company has been using the same external provider, Teleresurs, since they realized the need of a call centre. During the years SIBA has developed a very close relationship with Teleresurs and now both companies know exactly what do expect from each other. MailorderCo also emphasizes the role of a good relationship with its external suppliers where there is a running dialogue between the companies and clear terms and conditions within the agreement for how the work should proceed. And even though SIBA and MailorderCo say that the intention of cutting costs is always present, outsourcing in their cases has had a more strategic focus and a role of improving the competitiveness of theirs business (Zhu et al., 2001).

The other two companies, GSB and Länsförsäkringar Skåne, are both keeping their customer service operations in-house. Since GSB does not have a call centre in a conventional meaning they have never considered outsourcing. Länsförsäkringar Skåne

on the other hand did once outsource an outbound unit of its call centre operation, but due to the fact that they gradually lost control of this unit and the lack of quality they decided to bring it back to the organisation. The reason to this was that the relationship with the partner was poorly maintained and the external workers were less flexible to customer requests since they did not have the same amount of knowledge about the company's business.

Finally the need of an external multilingual call centre solution was perceived differently by the studied companies. In our theoretical framework we have presented outsourcing as a way for companies to acquire multilingual customer service from an external provider. This has been discussed as an option for companies that do not presently house the desired language capabilities, and are therefore not able to assist their customers in the preferred languages. Our study shows that some companies have decided to develop own solutions to this matter and thus have not shown any interest to an external multilingual call centre. Some companies may lack the resources or solutions to do it themselves, while others have not perceived the need of extended language skills at all.

Among the four companies that we were able to study more deeply only Länsförsäkringar Skåne showed no interest to the service that MultiSpeak could offer them. According to them they had already come a long way with their own solutions and clearly stated that they wanted to keep all units in-house for the benefit of their company image. The three remaining companies, MailorderCo, GSB and SIBA, could all see the potential business value that a co-operation with MultiSpeak could bring them. Even though they showed interest they were all careful to point out specific demands that would have to be fulfilled before even considering such an outsourcing venture.

6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we finalize our thesis by reflecting upon the results and draw conclusions from our analysis. Further we will discuss and review our theoretical framework to the background of our empirical findings. Working with this thesis also raised several question and thoughts related to our topic. This is why we have included suggestions for further research bordering on this thesis

After having performed our empirical study we can approve our hypothesis that there is a growing need for companies involved in the household related sector to offer multilingual customer service. Considering the large immigrant population in Sweden our findings agree with theory saying that there is a demand for multilingual call centres within societies where more people speak different languages.

The market survey showed that about one third of the 30 studied companies had realized the importance of offering multilingual customer service and could consider an external multilingual customer service solution. Among the rest several had already engaged in developing own solutions, while others declared that they have not encountered language difficulties at all when serving customers, and could not recognize a need for a multilingual call centre solution.

An interesting finding was that companies which operate within the same business line sometimes had a totally different view on the problem concerning language barriers. This can be hard to understand due to the fact that they serve the same market and offer the same kinds of services or products, and should realistically also perceive the problem in a similar way. The reason for this could be that the need to serve immigrant customers in their native language has just been discovered and that thoughts around this are still in its infancy. Another reason probably is that some companies possess better abilities to

identify customers' need and wants, and thus have more developed thoughts on this subject.

Parallel to this all 30 companies emphasized that they are indeed highly customer oriented. But are they really? To elaborate, in only the last year 96 000 immigrants came to Sweden. This could be viewed as a potential, or just a potential nuisance by organisations. Ignoring all those potential customers can hardly be considered as particularly clever in days when organisations are literally fighting over market space within so many other segments.

We on one hand derive it to be this way because many typical Swedish companies hide from reality when for instance stating that immigrants need to assimilate and learn Swedish. In a company with a traditional Swedish management there is probably a lot that works against the idea of getting to know and understand immigrant customers. Further, looking from time perspective people have been hesitant, and even hostile, toward immigrants mainly due to ignorance. Therefore we even believe that some companies may more or less deliberately alienate themselves from the immigrant segment out of fear.

On the other hand many companies are contented "fat cats", satisfied with status quo, not bothering to explore yet another market segment. Business history is full of contented organisations that eventually market progress got the better of. Some companies are very dominant in their business areas having a very large market share. These companies have enough to do with present customers and to concentrate on yet another market segment they probably consider would require too much effort. Every segment is not for every company, and no company can reach out to all customers. Companies should differentiate themselves and focus on customer groups that they are best suited to serve. This is why we believe that only some companies will develop a CRM that seriously takes in account the particular needs and wants of immigrant customers.

As presented in the empirical study, there are only a few companies that have begun to tap into this potential segment. The market is still premature when it comes to multilingual customer service and there are reasons to believe that there could be a great first mover advantage associated with this customer segment. Companies that realize this and act fast can harvest immense profits. Catching these customers could be especially valuable in businesses like banking and insurance, where satisfied customers often stay with the same company for their entire life.

Our in-depth interviews show that the companies are well aware of the business opportunity that immigrant customers hold, moreover they all have immigrant customers today but feel that the segment is badly explored and underrepresented. All four companies have ventured into projects and undertaken actions with the aim to get closer to immigrant customers. At the same time we feel that despite their ambitions the companies still have a long way to go to truly get the concept right. We believe that this requires an even deeper understanding and knowledge about immigrants concerning their languages, cultural backgrounds and beliefs.

In several cases their traditional Swedish organizations appear to hamper the process of adjusting to a culturally diversified customer base. This was enhanced by the statement of Länsförsäkringar Skåne that their Swedish upper management did only reflect their present customer base. In MailorderCo's case the upper management decided to cancel the ongoing multicultural project due to budget cuts, but to us is very clear that the project did not get enough support within the organization with people actually believing in it. These are problems encountered by companies that have tried to actively pursue immigrant customer segments, which enhances our conclusion from the pre-study that ignorance is still high and must be even higher in companies that have not even begun to open their eyes to this potential market segment. In many ways they seem paralyzed. The Länsförsäkringar Group presently has over 20 languages in their language pool but does not communicate this to customers. SIBA and MailorderCo seem content or resigned in their conclusion that they would not know which immigrant customers would like to be served in what languages. We conclude that since GSB has managed to catalogue their

customers it is either not a priority or there is a need for organisational measure to solve the problem. Ignorance and sloth are two characteristic that seem to be very apparent among many of the companies studied in our thesis. Even though many of them have understood the need and value of multilingual customer service, they show signs of laziness when it comes to exploring and developing solutions for it.

What concerns our secondary purpose of this thesis we can confirm that there exist market possibilities for MultiSpeak to offer their knowledge and multilingual services to other companies. GBS, MailorderCo and SIBA all expressed that they could see an opportunity in taking advantage of MultiSpeak's language library. However it must be stressed that this would require extensive planning and preparations and many practical as well as technical inquiries would have to be investigated and answered. MultiSpeak's call centre must further also possess the required capacities to engage in such extensive co-operations and at the same time be able to successfully operate their current business.

6.1 Review of our theoretical framework

During the process of analysis we were evaluating how our theoretical framework relates to the empirical findings. We wanted to analyze what effects our empirical data would have on our framework, and to see to what extent reality reflects theory. The consideration was that either would companies approve and develop our framework or they would violate and reject it. The discussion below will determine this.

Among the five companies that we were able to study more thoroughly MultiSpeak is the only one that fully reflects the significant ides of our theoretical framework. Customer orientation is deeply rotted in the company's strategy and the call centre with its broad multilingual skills is perceived as highly valuable resource and a significant profit centre. MultiSpeak's ability to communicate with customers on about 25 different languages gives them a very important competitive advantage. These characteristics established our believes that MultiSpeak would be a suitable solution to the need of multilingual customer service.

The empirical study resulted in several new and interesting findings which all in some way have impact or violate our theoretical framework. These findings also indicate that most of the studied companies do not fully support the theories we have dealt with. The most obvious finding that contrasts our framework is the fact that many of the companies did not stress the importance of being able to communicate with their clients in various languages, even though foreigners account for 10 to 45 % of their customer base. This shows that they have not pursued and developed CRM in a proper way and do not fully understand the idea that lies behind successful customer orientation. Moreover, in contrast to MultiSpeak, the companies see their customer service operations as cost centres, instead of developing them into strategic and profitable units that could be source of differentiation and sustained competitive advantage.

Three of the four companies that we managed to study more thoroughly, MailorderCo, GSB and SIBA, showed interest for MultiSpeak, which points to the fact that they would consider outsourcing from a strategic point of view by acquiring the desired language competency from an external provider. This would consequently agree with the solution presented in our framework. But even though many of our empirical findings are supported in the theories it is clear that our theoretical framework can no fully be applied on the four companies.

6.2   Further research fields

This thesis has shown that there are several issues in conjunction with serving immigrants in Sweden. Some things were only mentioned very briefly in this thesis and certain areas deserve to be further explored.

- Interesting would be to investigate the same subject but from the end customer's point of view.
- Investigate weather the situation is similar in other business areas than those we managed to study.
- Study how different companies develop and manage multilingual call centre solutions in-house.

- Does the current management design prevent a dynamic discussion on immigrant questions due to the lack of understanding?

Ultimately we hope that this thesis has illuminated the problems and possibilities related to the prospects of offering customized service to immigrants. We believe that this subject deserves more attention and that offering service to immigrants in their own language is not counterproductive to assimilation. Instead of alienating immigrants companies could help and inform them in a way that would truly favour integration. It has been intriguing as well as our privilege to scientifically explore this subject.

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Interviews

MultiSpeak (1/4 – 5/4 2007)

Head of Operations	*Name withheld*
Head of Business Development	*Name withheld*
Head of Human Resources	*Name withheld*

Market survey (10/4 – 24/4 2007)

Försäkringskassan	*Kirsten Holst*	*– Head of Information*
Bolagsverket	*Eva Beckman*	*– Head of Information*
Skatteverket	*Agneta Läth*	*– Title withheld*
PRV	*Susan Berg*	*– Head of Information*
Skånetrafiken	*Lars Hellström*	*– Head of Customer Service*
Vattenfall	*Ann Persson Grivas*	*– Head of Customer Service*
Posten	*Staffan Fry*	*– Title withheld*
Apoteket	*Ann Wendel*	*– Production Manager*
E-on	*Tommy Bergkvist*	*– Head of Customer Service*

ONOFF	*Name withheld*	*– Head of Customer Service*
Elgiganten	*Pierre Sigeus*	*– Head of Customer Service*
IKEA	*Eva Stål*	*– Press Contact*
ICA	*Name and title withheld*	
Bredbandsbolaget	*Tobias Julenius*	*– Head of Customer Service*
ComHem	*Bernd Schmitz*	*– Head of Information*
Tele 2	*Patrik Malm*	*– Head of Call Centre*
Trygg-Hansa	*Ingmarie Gustavsson*	*– Head of Customer Service*
IF	*Name and title withheld*	
Länsförsäkringar Skåne	*David Bokobza*	*– Title withheld*
Skandia	*Åsa Lindström*	*– Head of Customer Service*
Nordea	*Name and title withheld*	
SEB	*Cecilia Adielson*	*– Head of Customer Service*
Swedbank	*Yvonne Rosenqvist*	*– Head of Customer Service*
Handelsbanken	*Hans Glifberg*	*– Head of Information*
MKB	*Rita Tomé*	*– Title withheld*
SKB	*Kristina Huberg*	*– Head of Information*
GSB	*Per-Henrik Hartmann*	*– Head of Administration*
MailorderCo	*Name withheld*	*– Nordic Call Centre Manager*

In-depth interviews (8/5 – 15/5 2007)

Länsförsäkringar Skåne	*Jonas Månsson*	*– Trainee Program Manager*
MailorderCo	*Name withheld*	*– Nordic Call Centre Manager*
GSB	*Per-Henrik Hartmann*	*– Head of Administration*
SIBA	*Magnus Ekberg*	*– Service Manager*
	Marcus Rasmusson	*– Aftersales*

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extracted 20/05/2007

www.bostadsbolaget.se *extracted 23/05/2007*

www.lansforsakringar.se/Skane *extracted 23/05/2007*

www.siba.se *extracted 23/05/2007*

Appendix 1

Interview guide

- MultiSpeak -

The call centre business

- How is your customer service organized today?
    - Number of co-workers in direct customer contact?
    - Opening hours?
- What has contributed to the development of your multilingual call centre?
- When did you realize the need to offer your customers support in their home languages and when were those initiatives taken?
- In exactly how many languages can you provide customer service today?
- Which factors do you think are essential for a successful call centre?
- What distinguishes your call centre and what are you most respectively least satisfied with?
- What action has been taken to improve the customer service at the company?
- Do you consider your call centre to be a competitive resource?
- What do you do to maintain this resource?

Human resources

- What is your recruitment policy?
- Which qualities do you value high by your call centre agents?
- Do you have an educational program for new employee? If so, how it is structured and how long does it take?

Perception of the future

- Have you had any plans on expanding the present business?
- Do you have any particular technique to evaluate the market after new business opportunities?
- What are your ambitions for the future?

Appendix 2

Interview guide

- Market survey -

Company/Organisation:

Contact person:

Telephone nr:

- Is it important for you to be able to offer regular telephone support to your customers?

- Do you have a call centre or customer service today? If so,
  Opening hours:
  Number of co-workers:

- Have you considered outsourcing of your Call Centre business abroad or domestic? What is the reason for this?

- What characterizes good qualities of employees working in a Call Centre? How do you value the following qualities in scale from 1-7 (1- not significant, 7 - very significant): Efficiency, specialized knowledge, language skills, customer interaction

- Please make an estimate of how many of your customers have a foreign background?

- How do you try to interact with customers with language difficulties? Have you done anything in particular to give them better customer service?

- Do you feel that you cannot reach certain customer segments because of the fact that you are not able to communicate in their native language?

- Would you appreciate an external customer service provider that could serve your customers in many different languages?

Appendix 3

Interview Guide

- In-depth -

Company:

Interviewed person:

Position/area of responsibility within the company:

Customer service in general

- How is your customer service organized today?

    - Number of co-workers in direct customer contact?

    - Opening hours?

- What characterizes your customer service? What are you most and least satisfied with?

- Do you consider your customer service to by a competitive resource?

- What do you do to maintain this resource?

- Which factors do you think are essential for a successful customer service in your business area?

- Have you undertaken any special actions to improve you customer service?

Multi-linguistics

- Have you experienced an increased need for customer service in recent years?

- Has your customer base changed in a remarkable way?

- Sweden in its entity, and especially some areas of the country, has a very large foreign population. How many of your customers account for this group of people?

- Have you undertaken any organisational actions to deliver a better customer service to customers with language difficulties?

- Do you feel that you can not reach certain customer segments because of the fact that you do not posses broad language skills in-house?

Outsourcing

- There has been a major global trend among companies to outsource their customer service to external suppliers in Sweden and abroad. How much have you thought about outsourcing?

In our study of new potential business areas for call centres with broad language skills we have been able to identify nine interested case companies and one supplier.

- Would this company appreciate an external multilingual call centre that that would be able to assist your customers in many (~ 25) languages?

    - What are the motives to your answer and how do you reason about the trade off between cost and quality regarding outsourcing of your customer service?

- How do you look upon the future?

Appendix 4

Company/organization	Call centres site	Number of co-workers in customer service	Attributes of a good co-worker (evaluation in scale: 1. not important 7. very important)				Present language skills at the company	Amount of costumers with foreign background	Appreciation of broader language skills
			Efficiency	Specialized knowledge	Language skills	Customer interaction			
GOVERNMENT SECTOR									
Försäkringskassan	internal	432	7	6	5	7	high	appr. 15%	NO
Bolagsverket	none/personal contact	360	6	6	3	7	low	appr. 20%	NO
Skatteverket	internal	500	7	6	3	7	medium	appr. 33%	NO
PRV	internal	9	5	7	5	7	low/medium	appr. 20%	NO
Skatteetaten	internal	30	6	6	2	7	low	appr. 13%	NO
Vattenfall	internal & external	360	6	4	4	7	low	unknown	NO
PRIVATE SECTOR									
Utilities									
Posten	internal	300-350	7	6	7	7	low	appr. 33%	YES
Apoteket	internal	360	5	6	5	6	low	appr. 30%	NO
E-on	internal	360	5	6	6	7	medium	a few %	NO
Consumer electronics									
SIBA	external	29	5	5	4	7	low/medium	appr. 25%	YES
ONOFF	external	40	5	5	2	7	low	appr. 15%	NO
ELGIGANTEN	internal	95	7	3	3	7	low	appr. 18%	YES
Consumer goods									
IKEA	internal	280	7	6	2	7	low	appr. 20%	NO
ICA	internal	91	6	7	6	7	low	appr. 10%	NO
Telecom									
Bredbandsbolaget	internal & external	200	7	5	7	7	high	appr. 30%	NO
ComHem	internal & external	350	6	7	2	7	low	appr. 54 %	NO
Tele 2	external	1000	7	5	5	7	high	appr. 11%	NO
Insurance companies									
Länsförsäkringar Skåne	internal	40	7	4	3	7	medium	unknown	YES
Trygg-Hansa	internal	35	4	6	7	7	medium	appr. 30%	YES
If	internal	120	6	2	3	7	medium	appr. 11%	NO
Skandia	external	90	5	7	2	7	low	appr. 15%	YES
Banking									
Nordea	internal	-	7	7	7	7	high	unknown	NO
SEB	internal	330	7	7	7	7	high	unknown	NO
Swedbank	internal	40	7	6	4	7	low	unknown	NO
Handelsbanken	internal	130	5	6	4	7	low	unknown	NO
Mail order companies									
MailorderCo	internal & external	350-400	6	6	3	7	low	appr. 13%	YES
Housing providers									
MKB	none/personal contact	-	6	6	5	7	medium	appr. 50%	YES
Göteborgs stads bostads AB	none/personal contact	70	5	4	2	7	low	appr. 45%	YES
Stockholms Kooperativa Bostadsförening	none/personal contact	120	5	6	2	7	low	appr. 10%	NO