

Chapter XVI

IT-Enabled Global Customer Service: Findings and Conclusions from Six Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes IT-enabled customer service development projects in six global companies. The chapter summarizes the projects to illustrate some of the contemporary trends in developing customer service processes and systems. The cases more importantly provide an opportunity to learn from experiences in implementing new service processes and models. While some of these lessons describe conventional wisdom known to all experienced managers, others may appear surprising. Perhaps most importantly, the experiences serve as a reminder that the most challenging phase in developing services on a global scale is when organizational boundaries for the development efforts are defined. Trying to integrate and harmonize everything is rarely the

most viable strategy. The cases also illustrate that a fully integrated real time customer information system may not always be a prerequisite for high-quality global customer service. So rather than simply implementing complex state-of-the-art technologies to all service units, managers more than ever need a clear vision of where and when global harmonization and integration of service processes truly benefit the company and its main customers.

BACKGROUND

The case studies reported in this chapter are taken from the collection of experiences recorded by the members in the Systems Group. The Systems Group is a roundtable of business development, concerned with the newest philosophies and tools for the practice and art of management. This group brings together managers in Finnish globally operating companies, as well as scholars from universities, at several meetings yearly.

The focus has been on how to manage and develop companies (engineering-dominated businesses) on their way towards globalization. The key word of the Systems Group from 1990 has been "Process Approach" meaning: put focus on the horizontal communication along different chains of activities (business processes, e.g., logistics) from the customer viewpoint. This approach seems to be the proper approach for a company operating globally in the era of evolving network culture.

Our way of working has been sharing of experiences; this means a profound and open handling of case studies. In our previous books, *Joining the Global Race* from 1992 and *Process Management Works—If Only Implemented?* from 1998, we have reported the internal development of the companies during the 1990s. A 10-year and even longer background to the case studies of Kone, Nokia and Metso Automation was reported already in these two books. The most important lesson learned is that development is not a project but a long and continuous process.

This book goes beyond internal focus to the development needed to create proper external relations. The stories of Kone, Nokia and Metso Automation are continued in their own chapters. In addition, three new case studies are introduced: Fujitsu Invia, ABB, and Outokumpu Copper Electrical Power and Components (EPC) business line. While the case descriptions in this book, and in previous books, have extensively been used, the chapter also draws from presentations and discussions about these projects in Systems Group meetings. These discussions have provided rich background material about past developments in the cases. In some respect, this chapter attempts to capture the key aspects of the practical knowledge generated in discussions within the Systems Group meetings.

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