

Solutions without a problem? Evading unused customer solutions through managing business customers' capabilities

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Purpose – Organizational capabilities are crucial for customer firms to successfully develop, deliver and use solutions. While organizational customer capabilities are necessary for value co-creation, prior research on organizational capabilities predominantly takes a provider centric perspective and delineates those capabilities that supplier firms necessitate to effectively offer customer solutions. However, it remains unclear how business customers themselves respond to changes in industrial service offerings and which capabilities they require to beneficially participate in the processes of solution development and deployment to realize the value in use they desire from the solution.

Design/Methodology/approach – The study draws on 20 in-depth interviews with representatives of supplier firms from a wide range of industries using the repertory grid method.

Findings – This study identifies 19 organizational customer firm capabilities that can be further subsumed into five broader categories. In combining these results with a critical review of extant literature on organizational customer capabilities, a typology of business customer capabilities is developed that relates to different types of solution business models.

Research limitations/implications – Theoretically, this research complements research on organizational solution capabilities from a customer perspective.

Practical implications – Managerially, the results can support supplier firms in evaluating, choosing, and developing their customer base during the processes of solution development and deployment.

Originality/value – This is the first study to investigate in detail the capabilities customers need to draw on in order to use solutions successfully. As a result, five key capabilities are identified that are highly relevant when participating in the processes of solution development and deployment from the customer side. In addition, it could be observed that in some cases solutions are solely 'bought' but not used. Such 'unused solutions' provide bad references for the supplier and thus have a negative impact for re-buy decisions of the specific solution customer as well as of others. By identifying strength and weaknesses of their customers' capabilities suppliers may avoid such 'unused solutions'. Overall, the research can support supplier firms in managing their customer base so that the customers receive the greatest possible value in use from the application of the providers' solution offerings.

Key words (max 5) Capabilities, organizational, customer solutions, service offerings, repertory grid method.

Paper type – Conceptual paper / Research paper / Research paper based on qualitative interviews.

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