

Conceptualizing Customer Success in Business Markets: A Theories-in-Use-Approach

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Abstract

With customer success management, a new customer-facing function is gaining momentum in business markets. Despite its explosive growth in business practice, academic insights on customer success remain scarce. The present research investigates customer success from a theories-in-use perspective. Building on 25 in-depth interviews with customer success managers, this research identifies customer success as a three-dimensional construct combining an outcome, a process, and a long-term focus. The study finds key antecedents to customer success at three levels, i.e., (1) in the customer firm, (2) the supplier firm, and (3) the customer-supplier relationship. Findings indicate that customer success can lead to positive financial and non-financial outcomes for both customers and suppliers. Finally, our analyses reveal contingency variables that moderate the effects between the focal construct and its antecedents as well as outcomes.

Keywords: *customer success; theories-in-use; theory building*

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