Factors influencing a customer’s loyalty in B2B relationships

A qualitative study of relationship marketing

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Abstract

Title: Factors influencing a customer’s loyalty in B2B relationships: A qualitative study of relationship marketing

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Keywords: Customer loyalty, Behavior, Relationship marketing, B2B

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to get a deeper understanding of which factors that influence a customer’s loyalty in the relationship between a supplier and a customer in B2B and how these factors are achieved?

Frame of Reference: In the following chapter we present theory from previous research related to our research questions and purpose. First, a conceptualization of relationship marketing is outlined followed by theory regarding customer loyalty. Second, the selected factors of relationship marketing that can indicate customer loyalty are presented one by one.

Methodology: In this chapter all the method choices to fulfill the thesis’ purpose and to answer the research questions are discussed and motivated. The choices for this study are comprehensive approach, qualitative method, a case study with one case company interviewing three informants.

Empirical Study: In this chapter we present primary data that is collected for our study. It is collected through personal interviews with three informants at Getinge.

Conclusion: Our conclusion is that satisfaction is more important that the other nine factors and that shared value and bonding are less important then the other factors. How they are achieved depend on the situation, the employee at Getinge and the customer in specific and there are no clear guidelines on how the should be achieved. Although there are no guidelines there are directions and the achievement of the factors are based on Getinge’s core values. The employees of Getinge are using the core values together with their individual common sense to reach the best result of customer loyalty.
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Thank you!

Halmstad, May 2014

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Pia Andersson                      Klara Karlström
Abbreviations

**Relationship marketing** - Relationship marketing is defined as all marketing activities concentrated to establish, develop and maintain successful relational exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

**Customer Loyalty** - Customer loyalty is defined as a customer’s repeated purchases that are triggered by a supplier’s activities (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner & Gremler, 2002).

**B2B** - Business-to-business (B2B) is when companies exchange products or services of value to other companies (Kotler, Armstrong, Wong & Saunders, 2005).

**B2C** - Business-to-consumer (B2C) is when companies exchange products or services of value to consumers (Kotler et al., 2005).
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1.0 Introduction

In this chapter we describe the background of the chosen subject as well as why this subject is of interest. After the background we present the problem discussion, purpose, research questions and delimitation.

1.1 Background

The foundation of all marketing is composed by relations (Gummesson, 1998). Traditional marketing theory has referred marketing as impersonal mass-communication resulting in impersonal exchanges of mass-produced goods but this view is not in accordance with reality (Ibid.). Marketing has moved away from focusing on single short-term transactions towards the creation of long-term relationships and marketing networks (Kotler et al., 2005). Companies were in the past taking their customers for granted since there were so few alternative suppliers available on the market (Ibid.). Kotler et al. (2005) explain that companies in recent time have realized that it is essential to keep their customers loyal by building relationships with them. The significance of relationships, networks and interaction has been of interest for researchers and marketers for over thirty years of time and by retaining customers and keeping them loyal the approach of relationship marketing has come to existence (Gummesson, 2002). “Relationship marketing is marketing based on interaction within networks of relationships” (Gummesson, 2002, page 3). For relations to occur there is requirements of two parties in contact with each other (Gummesson, 1998, 2002). Morgan and Hunt (1994) propose that all marketing activities concentrated on establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges refers to relationship marketing. Buttle (1996) state that relationship marketing is “[…]progressively more concerned with the development and maintenance of mutually satisfying long-term relationships with customers” (Buttle, 1996, pp. 1). This thesis is focused on the definition stated by Morgan and Hunt (1994).

By building strong relational bonds relationship marketing improves customer loyalty resulting in improved firm performance (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder & Lacobucci, 2001). The firm performance improves since it requires higher costs to obtain new customers than to retain the existing ones (Kotler er al., 2005). Buttle (1996) states that the concept of relationship marketing is based on two economic arguments. “One: it is more expensive to win a new customer than it is to retain an existing customer. Two: the longer the association between company and customer the more profitable the relationship for the firm” (Buttle, 1996, pp. 5). Buttle (1996) explains that there has been a growing awareness of a customer’s lifetime value for firms. The relationship approach considers a firm’s revenues and contributions of a customer in a long-term perspective (Ibid.). Buttle (1996) states that a customer’s sales and profits rise the longer the relationship lasts. “As customers become more satisfied with the service they receive, the more they buy” (Buttle, 1996, pp. 5). The term relationship marketing got international acceptance among marketers during the 1990’s (Gummesson, 1998) and has become an important topic within companies of different sectors (Payne, Christopher, Clark, Peck, 1995). The industrial sector is
where relationship marketing has its origins but it has got the greatest attention in the service sector (Ibid.). The change towards focusing on customer relationships was driven because of more intense global competition, more fragmentation of markets, higher level of product quality, more demanding customers and rapid changes of their buyer patterns (Buttle, 1996). The relationship with the supplier creates additional value for the customer towards the product or service (Grönroos, 2004) and competitive advantage is found in the relational bond (Buttle, 1996). Since lasting relationships with customers cannot be copied by competitors it provides a unique and sustained competitive advantage for that supplier (Ibid.). Gummesson (2002) explains that relationship marketing as a label might be new, but not the phenomenon. The phenomenon of relationship marketing is old in the history of trade and commerce, it has always been important to take care of relationships in business (Grönroos, 2004). At that time it was not called relationship marketing, it was just concluded that business markets and consumer markets could have a reliable repeat in business from strong relations (Ibid.).

1.2 Problem discussion
Relationship marketing has during the latest decades grown explosively (Palmatier, Gopalakrishna and Houston, 2006) since the business philosophy has changed towards stimulating long-term customer relationships (Kucukkancabas, Akyol & Ataman, 2006). Although the business philosophy is focused on relationships, the content in marketing books still rarely speak about relationship marketing even if it is becoming a general marketing approach (Gummesson, 2002). Kotler et al. (2005) report that classic marketing theory and practice focus on the skills of attracting new customers instead of the ability to retain existing ones and keeping them loyal. The phenomenon of retaining customers appears to be the most important challenge for marketers in recent time (Alrubaiee & Al-Nazer, 2010) and the importance of relationship marketing has therefore enhanced since its main purpose is to increase customer’s loyalty (Wang, Liang & Wu, 2006). Relationship marketing is a strategically important tool to use to obtain and secure the result of customer’s loyalty, which leads to higher competitiveness and also enhanced satisfaction among the customers (Ibid.).

Even though relationship marketing is essential it is not suitable and effective in every situation (Kotler et al., 2005). If a company sells commodity goods with low switching costs where it is easy to change supplier because of undifferentiated products, then relationship marketing is not effective (Ibid.). Kotler et al. (2005) explain that on the contrary, relationship marketing is very suitable for complex products with high switching costs when customers are highly engaged in the specific purchase. Long-term relationships are very important in B2B markets when firms want to increase their profits and market shares (Chang, Wang, Chih & Tsai, 2012) and because these types of companies strive towards long-term relationships they caught our interest when writing this thesis since we want to study a company with loyal customers. In every interaction firms in this sector need to satisfy their customers and by this build lasting long-term relationships preventing their customers from switching to another firm (Ibid.). Manufacturing firms enjoy long-term relationships with customers since it brings security and profitability
(Buttle, 1996). In B2B marketing it all comes down to dealing with individuals one-to-one (Sullivan, 1997) and that is why we want to focus on the relationships between a supplier and a customer in this sector. According to Sullivan (1997) there are no shortcuts when building a relationship with another individual. It takes an investment of time and resources as well as a strong commitment and a belief that the relationship is of value for the customer for it to be successful (Ibid.). Relationship marketing directs to the individual customer (Gumnesson, 2002) and its primary goal is to create loyalty (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner & Gremler, 2002). Past studies have shown progress in the understanding of relationship marketing but there are still questions unanswered regarding what relationship marketing really is and how it can be implemented (Sin, Tse, Yau, Lee, & Chow, 2002). There are conceptual differences of relationship marketing and the practice has varied interpretations and applications in the literature (Bedman, Agbemabiese, Kodua & Braimah, 2013). According to Trimetsoontorn and Chattananon (2009) there are lacks of definitions regarding the different factors of relationship marketing. Kucukkancabas et al. (2006) explain that there is a need to identify the phenomenon’s key factors (Ibid.). In order to propose to researchers and practicers that relationship marketing is the way to reach successful marketing, all the factors that really compose relationships need to be identified (Sin et al., 2002). Most of the research that exists regarding the factors of relationship marketing are performed through quantitative approaches with no information on how to achieve the factors (i.e. Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sin et al., 2002; Trimetsoontorn & Chattananon, 2009 and Bedman et al., 2013). This thesis will therefore fill the gap and add a qualitative study to this research area that describes both the influencing factors and how these can be achieved.

1.3 Purpose
The purpose of this study is to get a deeper understanding of which factors that influence a customer’s loyalty in the relationship between a supplier and a customer in B2B and how these factors are achieved.

1.4 Research questions

R1: Which factors influence a customer’s loyalty in the relationship between a supplier and a customer in B2B?

R2: How are these factors achieved?

1.5 Delimitation
This study has the purpose to analyze which factors that influence a customer’s loyalty in the relationship between a supplier and a customer in B2B and how these factors are achieved. The analysis is taken from the supplier’s point of view so the B2C perspective is therefore not included in this paper.
1.6 Disposition

Chapter 1: Introduction
In this chapter the background of the problem is presented as well as the discussion of the chosen topic. After that follows the purpose, research question and delimitation. The information includes the subject of relationship marketing resulting in customer loyalty in a B2B context.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework
The theoretical framework includes theories about relationship marketing, customer loyalty and its influencing factors. The factors are reviewed separately which is used when analyzing the theories with the collected empirical data.

Chapter 3: Methodology
This chapter includes the chosen methodology appropriate for this research, which contains the motivation for choosing a qualitative study. The information further includes that the research has been conducted through a case study with explanations of the chosen informants, the collected secondary data as well as the level of validity and reliability for this thesis.

Chapter 4: Empirical findings
In this chapter the collected empirical data is presented. It includes data collected from three semi-structured interviews with managers of Getinge. The subjects discussed includes the perceptions of customer loyalty, which factors it contains of and how these factors can be achieved.

Chapter 5: Analysis
In this chapter the collected empirical data is analyzed and compared with the theoretical framework for the purpose of finding similarities and differences. The analyze focuses on comparing how Getinge works when achieving customer loyalty in order to establish, develop and maintain successful relationships with what the theoretical framework suggests.

Chapter 6: Conclusions
The final chapter of our thesis includes the presented conclusions. After that the theoretical implications, practical implications as well as suggestions for future research are discussed. Finally, a model of the most influencing factors of customer loyalty according to this study is submitted.
2.0 Theory
In the following chapter we present theory from previous research related to our research questions and purpose. First, a conceptualization of relationship marketing is outlined followed by theory regarding customer loyalty. Second, the selected factors of relationship marketing that can indicate customer loyalty are presented one by one together with suggestions on how they can be achieved.

2.1 Conceptualization of Relationship marketing
As stated by Morgan and Hunt (1994) relationship marketing is all marketing activities concentrated to establish, develop and maintain successful relational exchanges. When these activity efforts are successful it leads to improved customer loyalty but the literature about this phenomenon is various when it comes to which relationship marketing factors that influence customer loyalty (De Wulf et al., 2001). About which individual factors that best captures the aspects of a relationship between a supplier and a customer there is little agreement among different researchers (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal & Evans, 2006). What is central to the conceptualization of relationship marketing is that no single factor can lead to a customer’s loyalty on it’s own (Ibid.).

2.2 Customer loyalty
A customer’s repeated purchases that are triggered by a supplier’s activities can be referred to as a customer’s loyalty (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner & Gremler, 2002). Gummesson (2002) states that a loyal customer is important for a supplier because he or she is less price sensitive. Gummesson (2002) also states that it is essential for a supplier to continuously remind a customer to remain loyal. When having a loyal customer it is easier for the supplier to create additional sales on that specific customer (Blomqvist, Dahl, Haeger & Storbacka, 1999). A customer’s loyalty is depending on different factors and the feeling of loyalty can change between markets regarding to the competitiveness (Blomqvist et al., 1999). Blomqvist et al. (1999) explain that in a strongly competitive market the customer has higher expectations of the supplier and it requires more for a customer to become loyal. On the contrary, in a less competitive market the customer has lower expectations and it requires less of a supplier in order to make a customer loyal (Blomqvist et al., 1999). A supplier needs to be aware of what kind of market it belongs to in order to make a calculation on how to make the customers loyal (Ibid.).

When investigating the link between relationship marketing and customer loyalty, Bedman et al. (2013) discusses six factors: trust, commitment, communication, conflict handling, bonding and competence. According to the study did the six factors provide value for customers and were seen as important when achieving a customer's loyalty (Bedman et al., 2013). According to Jesri, Ahmadi and Fatehipoor (2013) there is a relation between customer loyalty and the relationship marketing factors of trust, commitment, communication, conflict handling and competence. Bahaedin (2012) also explain that commitment, satisfaction and trust all have impact on a customer’s loyalty. According to Sin et al. (2005) there are six factors of relationship marketing:
trust, bonding, communication, shared value, empathy, and reciprocity. Sin et al. (2005) explain that these factors are critical success factors for customer loyalty. Sin et al. (2005) state that the value of the relationship marketing factors lies in the integration of them in order to create a comprehensive picture of what aspects of a relationship that influences a customer’s loyalty (Sin et al., 2005). Since there are various research about which factors that compose relationships, this study will discuss all the ten factors that are mentioned above. In the own constructed model below we have put all the ten factors in the outer circle to demonstrate that they are equally influencing the inner circle of customer loyalty. With the result of this study we will analyze if this is the case of this study or if the model should have another layout.

Factors influencing loyalty (Own construction)

2.2.1 Factors influencing customer loyalty

Reciprocity
Reciprocity can be described as a dimension of a business relationship and this dimension makes it possible that two parts exchange favors (Trimetsoontorn & Chattananon, 2009). Reciprocity means that both parts will be likely independent of each other and have mutual benefits of the cooperation (Ibid.). Reciprocity is according to Cialdini and Rhoads (2001) an obligation for
parties to return what they have received from other parties. We define reciprocity according to Cialdini and Rhoads (2001). Ravald and Grönroos (1996) state that relationship marketing has become the chosen approach for firms when wanting to develop reciprocal and valuable long-term relationships with customers. Wiersema (1997) explains that a close relationship between a supplier and a customer requires reciprocal understanding. Cialdini and Rhoads (2001) state that reciprocity usually can be applied when there is an exchange of gifts or services but also regarding concessions. If one party is requesting something that the other party is not willing to accept, then a lowering of that request can make the other party feel more obliged to accept the new offer (Cialdini & Rhoads, 2001). Sethi and Somanathan (2003) explain that in a reciprocate behavior parties reward each others generosity and punishes opportunistic behavior. The behavior that one party receives can be expected to be given back either it is positive or negative (Ibid.).

**Trust**

Trust is when a customer develops an unspoken understanding with a supplier and believes that the seller will be reliable and behave according to the customer’s benefit (Crosby, Evans & Cowles, 1990). Morgan and Hunt (1994) explain that trust exists when a party has confidence in an exchange partner to be reliable and to have integrity. When there is trust in the relationship between a supplier and a customer it creates the feeling of security and control (Ibid.). We choose to define trust according to Morgan and Hunt (1994). Trust makes partners in a relationship more willing to sacrifice and less willing to calculate their benefits and costs (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). When talking about relationship marketing success then trust is seen as a key variable (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). If a supplier has the ability to keep promises and to act consistently with integrity and concern for the customers then that influences their loyalty for that supplier (Bedman et al., 2013). Morgan and Hunt (1996) explain that a trustworthy party has high integrity, is being honest, fair and truthful. When there is high trust conditions between a supplier and a customer then the relationship is seen as safe and highly valued since the parties can be counted on to create equitable arrangements (Morgan & Hunt, 1996). When a customer’s trust in a supplier increases then a customer’s intentions of having future interaction with that supplier and being loyal increases (Ibid.). Wiersema (1997) explains that suppliers can obtain trust by showing the customers proof of what they have accomplished in previous comparable situations.

**Bonding**

Bonding is described as a dimension of a business relationship, which makes two parts act in a unified manner towards a desired goal. Bonding is a process within a relationship that is increasing over time (Trimetsoontorn and Chattananon, 2009). Bonding creates ties between the parties and influences the perceptions and the behavior towards each other (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). In this thesis we choose to define bonding according to Bendapudi and Berry (1997). Bendapudi and Berry (1997) state that social bonding can reduce or even eliminate the fear that the relationship partner might behave in an opportunistic manner. According to Bedman et al. (2013) there is a strong link between social bonding with a customer and a customer’s loyalty.
Michaud (2000) states that a firm should establish a common ground with the customers since they can relate to people who are like them. When establishing a common ground then the customer connects with the supplier beyond being another client. In order to do this Michaud (2000) suggests that the person representing the supplier should highlight its own personality and preferences in his or hers office through personal items. The customer will see the items and relate to their own life, which creates a connection between the parties. This connection will make the customer more receptive to what the supplier’s representative is offering. By bonding with the customer the supplier creates a common ground of things they have in common. Cialdini and Rhodes (2001) also state that similarities create positive results when it comes to liking and bonding with another party.

**Communication**

Andersen (2001) defines communication as “The human acts of transferring a message to others and making it understood in a meaningful way” (Andersen, 2001, pp. 168). Communication between parties is interplay of emotions, ideas, facts, arguments, opinions and plans (Ballantyne, 2004). McKenna (1992) states that communication is a dialogue that is effective when two parties gain something. We choose to define communication according to Ballantyne (2004). When a supplier is communicating with a customer then listening is as important as talking. Bedman et al. (2013) explain that a supplier’s ability to communicate effectively and frequently with customers has impact on the willingness of these customers to be loyal to that supplier. Frequency in the communication ensures a customer to become loyal (Bedman et al., 2013). When communicating with a customer it is important for the supplier to keep a positive attitude (Michaud, 2000). If a supplier is positive and upbeat then customers want to be around and want to do business with that person (Ibid.). Michaud (2000) explains that a supplier’s positive attitude when interacting with customers creates a more harmonious environment for all parties. “Before meeting with your customer, review your notes and begin your conversation as if you were talking to a dear friend or family member” (Michaud, 2000, pp. 18). Blomqvist et al. (1999) explain that it is important for a supplier to give a customer feedback about how the relationship is working, both from their own perspective as well as the customers. The communication between a supplier and a customer should be a dialogue so the parties can learn from each other through continuous exchanges of information (Blomqvist et al., 1999). By continuous communication with customers a supplier can learn about demands, needs, expectations and behaviors and develop the organization in order to meet the given conditions (Ibid.).

**Empathy**

According to Sin et al. (2002) empathy is when parties of a business relationship can see the situation from the other party’s perspective. Empathy is also an understanding of another party’s desires and goals (Ibid.). In this thesis we choose to define empathy according to Sin et al. (2002). “In a close relationship customers could reasonably expect suppliers to have a better appreciation of their circumstances and requirements; customers in turn should develop more realistic expectations of their suppliers” (Buttle, 1996, pp. 7). Michaud (2000) explains that it is
important for the supplier to be a good listener and to show concern for the customers since their favorite topic is themselves, their want, needs and their situation. “The more you talk about yourself or your business, the more you turn your customers away” (Michaud, 2000, pp. 18). A supplier should listen and try to understand its customers by giving them full attention which will make the customers feel important by knowing that the supplier care about them and their specific situation (Michaud, 2000). Michaud (2000) states that customers want to sense an attitude of “We are all in this together” and that the supplier has their best interest at heart. According to Wiersema (1997) customers don’t want to show their true issues, hopes, questions and fears if the supplier doesn’t show empathy. Tripp (2013) explains that the key to do business is to show empathy. Suppliers show empathy if they are not only giving offerings to customers made from the supplier’s perspective (Ibid.). Tripp (2013) states that when wanting to work with empathy a supplier needs to consider the customers as humans and not only as targets and the supplier needs to step inside the customer’s world in order to fully understand it.

**Shared value**

When partners have a common view about what is important, appropriate and correct regarding behaviors, goals and policies then they have shared values (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). We choose to define shared value according to Morgan and Hunt (1994). To share values between parties is important in order to provide a direction for the similarities of goals, policies and strategies (Sivades & Kashyap, 2012). Sivades and Kashyap (2012) state that shared values can lead to cooperative behaviors which can lead to enhanced motivation for the parties to cooperate. If parties share values then they are more engaged to rise above and beyond the assigned requirements (Sivades & Kashyap, 2012). According to Sivades and Kashyap (2012) shared values are both an antecedent as well as a consequence of commitment. The shared values might develop over time throughout the relationship when the involved parties become more committed to each other (Ibid.). Sivades and Kashyap (2012) state that when a party pays attention to equitable treatment, is being transparent about what rules and procedures they aim at and treats the other party with respect then that indirectly promotes shared values.

**Commitment**

Commitment occurs when there are requirements for maintaining long-term relationships (Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer & Kumar, 1996). Andersson and Weitz (1992) explain that when wanting to continue a relationship with a partner it is referred to as commitment. We choose to define commitment according to Andersson and Weitz (1992). Morgan and Hunt (1994) state that commitment entails vulnerability and that traits of trust are important for the relationship to be committed. According to Bedman et al. (2013) there is influence of commitment when it comes to achieving customer loyalty. If customers feel that the supplier is committed to satisfy their needs then that leads to higher loyalty for that supplier (Bedman et al. 2013). Morgan and Hunt (1994) explains that commitment generally leads to enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in marketing relationships since commitment indicates willingness to cooperate, lowers the tendency to leave the relationship and predicts unanimous consent and concession. Ghijsen,
Semeijn and Ernstson (2010) state that a supplier’s initiatives and investments in a customer likely will extend the relationship between the parties. Ghijsen et al. (2010) also explains that the initiatives and investments shown by the supplier will direct commitment to the customer who understands that the relationship will not be jeopardized. The initiatives, investments, promises and efforts made by the supplier towards the customer showing that the relationship is valued to be long-term will increase the customer’s level of commitment (Ibid.).

**Conflict handling**

According to Knippen and Green (1999) is the handling of conflicts an effectively resolved existing disagreement between two parties. In this study we defines conflict handling according to Knippen and Green (1999). Bedman et al. (2013) explain that the way a supplier handles conflicts can lead to a customer’s loyalty. When a supplier handles a conflict with excellence then that can increase the customer’s satisfaction and create loyalty beyond where it was before the incident. There is evidently a strong link between effective conflict handling and customer loyalty (Bedman et al., 2013). Blomqvist et al. (1999) state that it is important to have routines regarding complaints in order to handle them as effective as possible and to be able to maintain a satisfied customer. According to Blomqvist et al. (1999) it is not easy for a supplier to get a customer satisfied again if the process of solving an issue has taken long time, involved many different people in the firm and been costly for the customer. It is important to try to handle a customer’s complaint as quick, easy and generous as possible in order to maintain the relationship with the customer (Ibid.). Blomqvist et al. (1999) explain that a customer’s complaints gives valuable knowledge about the customer. A customer who complaints should be rewarded instead of punished state Blomqvist et al. (1999) since the person gives useful information to the supplier about its expectations of the product or service that was delivered. Vavra (1995) states that a good handled complaint increases a customer’s satisfaction leading to loyalty and repeated purchases. Every time a customer is complaining to a supplier the supplier has the potential of transforming a dissatisfied customer to a satisfied one at the same time as the supplier gathers valuable information for the future (Ibid.).

**Competence**

When having competence it refers to as having technical skills and knowledge (Buttle, 1996). We choose to define competence according to Buttle (1996). Bedman et al. (2013) state that competence is found to be a major factor when achieving customer loyalty. Competence of a supplier requires the ability to understand its customers and has the ability to satisfy their needs as well as adjusting to customers’ changing needs (Bedman et al., 2013). Wiersema (1997) states that customized adaptions require a supplier’s creative thinking, organizational changes and hard work. For a supplier to be able to adapt to customer’s different desires, proactively collected knowledge about customer’s various need is required (Wiersema, 1997). It is essential to know about a customer’s specific circumstances, cultures and problematic issues in advance in order to be able to give the customer a suitable adapted offer (Ibid.). Wiersema (1997) explains that if a supplier’s insights about a customer’s geological, ecological, political and financial
circumstances surpasses the customer’s own insights about its surroundings then that can lead to impressive achievements for the supplier. A supplier with the competence to create adapted solutions for customers works up value in the relationship by providing to free the customers from their present problematic issues that they cannot or will not solve themselves (Ibid.). Wiersema (1997) states that by coaching and helping customers to change and improve their processes a supplier approaches closer to the customers and creates additional value for them.

Satisfaction
According to Buttle (1996) satisfaction occurs when a customer’s expectations are met or exceeded. We choose to define satisfaction according to Buttle (1996). The key to obtain a customer’s satisfaction is to understand the customer’s expectations (Buttle, 1996). Expectations are a mixture of a customer’s personal needs and experience, word of mouth and marketing communications (Ibid.). If customers are dissatisfied then they are likely to spread negative word of mouth about that supplier which can harm the supplier’s prospecting customers (Buttle, 1996). The satisfaction in a relationship between a supplier and a customer is created after the transaction (Payne et al., 1995). To create a long-lasting relationship with a customer a supplier should focus on delivering high level of satisfaction after the transaction in order to create more transactions with that customer in the future (Ibid.). Kobylanski and Pawlowska (2012) explain that in order to reach customer satisfaction a firm needs to recognize the customer’s expectations and perceptions. By identifying this a firm can transform their products into the quality that the customer’s expect and therefore reach satisfaction (Ibid.). According to Kobylanksi and Pawlowska (2012) it is essential to conduct measurements regarding satisfaction and that if a firm can measure satisfaction then they can manage it.
3.0 Methodology

In this chapter all the method choices to fulfill the thesis’ purpose and to answer the research questions are discussed and motivated. The choices of comprehensive approach, qualitative method, case study, case company and informants, interview guide, collection of primary and secondary data, analysis method as well as reliability and validity are outlined.

3.1 Comprehensive approach

There are two different methods to use when collecting data and which one the researcher should choose is guided by the research question (Jacobsen, 2002). Backman (2008) and Jacobsen (2002) describe the two most common research methods as descriptive and explanatory. According to Jacobsen (2002) the purpose of a descriptive research question is to pattern a connection between different phenomenon. With a descriptive approach the researcher wishes to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and examine if something is true or false (Ibid). A descriptive method means that the researcher explains how something really is in meanwhile a explanatory explains why a phenomenon happens or why it behave in a certain way (Jacobsen, 2002). Since our purpose is to describe and map out which factors that influence customers’ loyalty and how these factors are achieved, the descriptive research method is selected. Our research questions and purpose made us use an intensive approach. An intensive approach is used when the researcher wishes to perform a deep research of a phenomenon (Jacobsen, 2002). Since we want to gain a deeper understanding of our research questions we chose to focus on one company to get as much information from the informants in that company as possible. If we would choose to collect information from more than one company the gained information would not be as deep as when focusing on only one company.

3.2 Choice of method

There are two methods that are appropriate to use according to Bjurwill (2001), qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method includes mostly verbal formulation and soft data (Patel and Davidsson, 2011) in contrast to the quantitative method that includes more statistic analysis and numbers (Backman, 2008). Jacobsen (2002) means that a qualitative method is a suitable choice when the research needs a deep understanding or to reach details within a certain area and it is also appropriate when the reality is regarded. To answer our research questions a qualitative method is selected since we are going to find out which factors that a company uses to reach customer loyalty and how these factors are achieved. The qualitative approach is the most suitable choice of method since we want to reach the details and get deep and rich information. The quantitative method is excluded since our research questions are not possible to answer with a quantitative approach; this is because with a quantitative approach there would have been a risk to lose a lot of important information (Jacobsen, 2002). Jacobsen (2002) describes two different strategies when performing research, deductive and inductive. Inductive approach means that the researcher is doing research without expectations which is called an open approach (Ibid.) A deductive approach means that the researcher collects information and expectations about the research area before the research is performed (ibid.). In this thesis a deductive approach is used.
to get an overview of a problem area, to find a gap in the knowledge and then to base our interview questions on that.

3.3 Case Study
In this thesis a case study is chosen. According to Yin (2009) a case study is when a researcher carefully is studying one or a few limited cases. Further, the researcher chooses one or several respondents that are well selected to get the right information (Yin, 2009). The concept of a case study is a modern phenomenon that is a suitable option when reality should be studied. A case study is most applicable in research including questions of “how” and “why” (Yin, 2007). Ejvegård (2009) describes case study as an applicable choice when the researcher should obtain a perception of how something is working or how it appears. Jacobsen (2002) means that fewer case companies make it possible for a more in-depth analysis. Case studies are applicable when something is going to be studied deeply (Bell, 1995), and when the author wishes to see when a special phenomenon occurs (Merriam, 1994). Case studies are also applicable in development of new theories (Jacobsen, 2002) and the analysis and results from previous case studies can create new interesting research questions to test in another context (Yin, 2009). Our study intends to go deep and includes questions that will answer how something is working which makes a case study a well motivated method choice for us. According to Bell (1995) it is important to be aware of the risks by using a case study; the result can be distorted since the data collection is including independent sources and the data can thereby be hard to control. It is also hard to generalize the result and the case study can thereby receive critics of the value of the conclusions that occur (Bell, 1995). In this study we are not generalizing the result since we are having only one company that includes three informants with the purpose to understand their specific situation.

3.4 Data Collection
3.4.1 Primary data
Data that is collected for the first time for a special case is called primary data (Jacobsen, 2002). In order to collect primary data the researcher search for data that is directly collected for the chosen research question (Ibid.). There are a few methods that can be used when collecting primary data to a qualitative research (Jacobsen, 2002). The options available according to Jacobsen (2002) are individual interviews, interviews in groups and observations. According to Repstad (2007) it is important to use respondents that can and will answer the questions that the interviewer has, otherwise there may be uncomfortable situations which in turn leads to unsustainable results.

Our choice of company is Getinge who is a globally leading Swedish provider of equipment, systems and solutions within healthcare and life sciences with a purpose to enhance quality and cost efficiency. Getinge is developing in a rapid pace regarding terms of sales volumes as well as generated customer offerings. The organization, containing of 15 000 employees, over 100 proprietary sales companies around the world and 28 production facilities placed in 9 different
countries, is separated into three business areas: Medical Systems, Extended Care and Infection Control (Getinge, 2014a). The area of Medical Systems provides equipment for surgical workplaces, cardiac surgery, vascular interventions and intensive care. Extended Care produces ergonomic solutions for the healthcare sector and the area of Infection Control manufactures equipment for disinfection and sterilization. Getinge’s core values, no matter which business area, are: insight, integrated solution and customer satisfaction and the company strives for customer loyalty (John, Personal Communication, 27/2 2014).

![Getinge Organization](image)

Before deciding which case company to choose we had some criteria in order to perform a selection of suitable companies. We wanted the case company to be a B2B-company since long-term relationships are very important within B2B-markets (Chang, Wang, Chih & Tsai, 2012). We contacted Getinge, a B2B company that produces durable products with an active strive towards long-term relationships. Getinge was willing to collaborate with us and since the company had the criteria for our purpose we saw this company as a suitable choice. Together with our contact person at Getinge we found the informants at the company that had the right knowledge for answering our interview questions and thereby should provide us with information to answer our research questions. Our primary data is collected through individual interviews from three carefully selected employees at Getinge. The three informants are all working at Getinge in the business area of Infection Control. John Hansson is a General Manager and Anders Nilsson and Irina Lindblad are both Sales Directors.

### 3.4.1.1 Interview guide
The primary data collection in a case study is most commonly in the form of interviews. Based on our research questions a purpose to our thesis was defined and this purpose has worked as a helping tool to keep to the subject during the interviews, a method that Jacobsen (2002) recommends. The informants should be informed of the purpose of the interview (Kylén, 2004) and too specific questions should be avoided because it will increase the risk that the informants
answers what they think the interviewer wants to hear (Jacobsen, 2002). During the creation of our interview guide we kept in mind to not make too specific questions and instead we created questions that would not lead the informants to one specific answer. Before performing the interviews we informed our informants through an email with a summary of the questions that we wanted ask with the purpose that they would be prepared for the time when we were going to perform the interviews. In the beginning of the interviews we started to ask some general questions to the informants to make them feel more comfortable, a recommendation that we obtained from Jacobsen (2002). An interview guide can be open, structured or semi-structured (Kylén, 2004). A open interview guide implies that based on what the informants answer the next question is designed (Jacobsen, 2002). A structured interview guide means that the questions are created before the interview (Ibid.). According to Jacobsen (2002) is a semi-structured interview guide a combination of the open and the structured interview. In this study we have chosen to use a semi-structured interview guide. Under each question that we created there was one or two well developed supplementary questions, something that Bell (1995) means is a good option. The purposes of the supplementary questions are to help the informants develop their own thoughts, which in turn lead to comprehensive answers (Bell, 1995).

Most of our questions were formed as open question, but in some cases we decided to use yes and no questions, even though Wärneryd (1993) says that yes and no question should be avoided. The yes and no questions were in our case used in order to know if the factors are important or not and then followed up by open questions of how they are achieved. Wärneryd (1993) and Kylén (2004) mean that if the researcher wishes to have yes and no questions they should be followed up with supplementary question within the interview guide, which we did. A few times before the interviews were performed the interview questions were examined in purpose to make sure that they were relevant in order to answer our research questions, if they were easy to understand and if they would give us comprehensive answers. We were also controlling that we did not have similar questions that Kylén (2004) means is not suitable. The interview guide was translated into English since we made all the interviews in Swedish. The interviews were made in Swedish because it is the mother language of both the informants and interviewers and we thought it would make the informants more comfortable, which thereby could lead to more comprehensive answers. We are aware of the risk of this might affect the result negatively but agreed the advantages of implementing the interviews in Swedish were valued higher than the disadvantages. After carefully controlling the translation we could not see that it would interfere with our result. We also chose to have the same interview questions for the three informants since they are on the same professional level and the same questions were also chosen since we wanted to have answers that were easier to analyze and compare.

3.4.1.2 Individual interviews

We chose to collect our primary data through open individual interviews face to face. Patel and Tebelius (1987) describe this as a good way to collect data in a qualitative method. Why we chose open individual interviews to our study was because of our purpose to go in-depth and
describe a complete view as good as possible. This would have been hard to reach with another method since the research questions needed nuanced data to be answered. Jacobsen (2002) explains that open individual interviews are good when information about an individual’s opinions and perceptions of a phenomenon are desired. Before we performed the interviews we read official information about the company to be prepared and to avoid unnecessary questions, which Patel and Davidsson (2003) recommend. We chose to make the three interviews at each of the informants’ office at Getinge. Jacobsen (2002) means that the informants feel secure and comfortable in their own office where they are almost every day and that this leads to a more natural and relaxed conversation. According to Bell (1995) the interviewer should accept the informants’ choice of place since it can be decisive with the quality of the answers. Further, the interviews should be performed without interruptions (Bell, 1995) and since our informants wished us to come to their office it was a suggestion we accepted and we told them that we wanted to sit undisturbed and that was something they accepted.

The interviews started with an acceptance from the informants that we were allowed to record the interviews. According to Repstad (2007), Nyberg (2000) and Bell (1995) recording an interview is a good option but they all agree that there are some negatives aspects. Repstad (2007) means that recording facilitates for the coming analysis since the recorded data is easier to listen to again and to hear what actually was said during the interviews. Repstad (2007) also means that it is easier for the interviewer to keep focus at the interviews when recording them and thereby can the interviewer focus on reading facial expressions and body language better. Nyberg (2000) explains that important information is easier to catch when the interview is recorded. A disadvantage with recording an interview is, according to Jacobsen (2002), that the informants can get nervous and that the atmosphere in the room can get artificial. We considered the advantages higher than the disadvantages and conducted the interviews with a recorder. During the interviews did no one of our informants seem nervous or worried about being recorded, which made us continue with the recordings. The interviews continued with us explaining for each informant the purpose of the interview; something that Kylén (2004) recommends the interviewer to do. All our interviews lasted for approximately 60 minutes, a time Kylén (2004) considers is sufficient to go in-dept. Something that we were aware of before our interviews was the "interviewer effect" and according to Jacobsen (2002) this is when the informants get affected of the interviewer in higher or lower extent. This implies that the different interviewers can obtain different result as a consequence of their behavior (Ibid.). Nevertheless, we believed that the use of interviews when collecting data were the best method for us. Jacobsen (2002) means that using individual interviews face to face as a method brings a confident atmosphere, which in turn leads to an open and rewarding conversation.

3.4.2 Secondary data
According to Friberg (2012) an effective way to collect data is to use secondary data. Secondary data is data that is already developed and have been collected for another purpose (Backman, 2008; Jacobsen, 2002). Secondary data can occur in texts, stories and histories in which the
researcher has to interpret to find relevant data for the specific study (Jacobsen (2002). Before we started with our thesis we began to read different books and articles about relationship marketing and customer loyalty. The purpose of this was to get a perception of how far the research had come and where we could find a gap that we could fill with our thesis. The whole process of this thesis started by selecting a subject and then we started to read about our major field of study, relationship marketing. We started to review and read books, articles and theses from earlier years within our subject to get a general picture of what relationship marketing is. This is what Svenning (2002) recommends the researcher to do in the beginning of a research process. Carlsson (1990) means that it is good to read previous research to find a gap that needs to be filled. To keep a thesis trustworthy it is important to use updated literature. We have used well-established theories from earlier years as well as more updated theories. The literature we have used is written in Swedish and in English by both Swedish and international authors. To collect the secondary data we have used Halmstad University’s databases, Libris, Pro Quest, Taylor and Francis online, Emerald, JSTOR and ABI Inform Global. We have also used Halmstad City library’s database, LIBRA and also Google Scholar. Secondary data and information that is coming from previous research with a different purpose can bring high risks (Jacobsen, 2002). During the process of gathering secondary data we have been very critical towards the data that we have used and we have made sure that the secondary data is trustworthy and we have critically decided if it is data that we can build our thesis on.

3.5 Data analysis
After we did the interviews we transcribed them. To write down the recorded interview is according to Bell (1995) important. After the transcription all unnecessary data for our purpose was excluded in the empirical chapter. According to Repstad (2007) excluding unnecessary details makes it easier for the researcher to continue the work with the analysis. It is also easier for the reader to keep focus when there is no need of reading unnecessary details. During the processing of the empirical data we made sure that we were critical to the information that we collected, that it was correct and true. Repstad (2007) means that a common problem is that researchers are to loyal to the informants and the information they give. Jacobsen (2002) explains that information that has been transcribed should be systematized and categorized in order to create a structure. In this structure categories should occur where the information can be combined and for the researcher to find patterns (Ibid.). Yin (2009) means that it is essential to create categories and to structure the gathered information when it gets presented in a study. We have used the same categories in our theory, empirical data and analysis in order to create a clear and well-defined structure that will be easier to read.

3.6 Reliability and validity
Validity and reliability are sometimes interchanged and hard to explain in the right way (Bell, 1996). If the research question is not reliable it is also missing validity but if the research question has a high reliability it does not necessary mean that it has high validity (Ibid.). Yin (2009) describes validity as if the empirical data is valid and relevant. The concept of validity is
divided into two parts, intern and extern validity (Ibid.). Intern validity means that the researcher measures the things that he or she wants to measure (Yin, 2009). The external validity measures how a result from a research can be generalized (Jacobsen, 2002). According to Yin (2009) the generalization has many times been a barrier in case studies when it has been discussed if the case can be generalized or if it contains too little information in order to do that. Svensson and Starrin (1996) as well as Jacobsen (2002) explain that the validity measures the quality of the collected data. Svensson and Starrin (1996) state that often there is no generalization in qualitative studies. In some cases there are a kind of generalization, when the theory can be studied in similar situations but can lead to different results (Svensson and Starrin, 1996; Yin, 2009). It is also important that the study is reliable and trustworthy says Jacobsen (2002). The study is reliable if the process was performed in a reliable way and if there were no apparent measuring errors. When a study has high reliability the study will get the same result if another researcher will do the same research and use the same methods (Jacobsen, 2002). Bell (1995) explains reliability as to which extent we can trust the data that is collected. Bell (1995) also states that the study needs to be based on trustworthy references, which is something we have been aware of the whole time of the writing process. We have spend time to get in contact with a suitable company and the right employees within that company to get as good and rich information as possible. We have had some criterions of which traits and knowledge that the informants should have and have carefully chosen appropriate ones on top positions with knowledge about what factors that influence loyalty and how to achieve them. All of the informants are presented by name throughout the thesis that makes the study more reliable since the informants are responsible for their own words.
4.0 Empirical findings

In this chapter we present primary data that is collected for our study. It is collected through personal interviews with three informants at Getinge. First the informants explain about their interpretation of the value of customer loyalty and then they explain their view of the influence of all the ten factors on customer loyalty and how these factors can be achieved.

4.1 Informant 1: John Hansson

**Customer Loyalty**

John explains that for Getinge it is very important with loyal customers. The industry demands customer loyalty since the customers influence each other. In Sweden Getinge has approximately 100 customers and if one of them are unsatisfied everybody knows about it. When speaking about loyalty John mentions an expression called “Share of wallet” and that means that a customer is spending everything on one company. “If they spend 100 SEK they spend 50 SEK at the machines from Getinge, 30 SEK at dish soup and 20 SEK at education for exam ple. The more the customers buy from one company the more loyal they get. If you deliver everything for customers then they are completely with you”, John says. John explains that in Sweden sometimes it is the opposite way, the customer do not want to buy everything from one company, to be too dependent. But more often than not the customers want to have just one supplier that is responsible for everything. This means that you just have one company to call when something does not work, and eliminates the risk that no one can help you or that everybody blames each other when something does not work.

According to John is everything connected in the work for customer loyalty. The quality is very important, the functionality, the education for the customers and also the people working at Getinge in order to get loyal customers. The people of Getinge are branding. In a long-term perspective branding will lead to that prospecting customers also want to be Getinge customers since everybody else is. John is saying that he really do not know why, but customer gets more loyal to a strong brand. In small markets where Getinge has a high market share it is very important to keep the customers loyal since the effect of word of mouth is high. According to John it is very important that they are service minded and always say hello when they are coming and good-bye when they are leaving. "Sometimes we do have some sweets with us, to create a nice meeting”, John says.

**Reciprocity**

Reciprocity is important and Getinge is reaching for it with their customers. John even here refers to their headlines “Always with you” and “partners for life”, which mean that if the relationship is not reciprocate then they will not be “partners for life”. Since Getinge’s products are durable with a lifetime of approximately 15-20 years it may be that the same employees are not working at Getinge the second time the customer is buying from them, which makes it harder to be partners for life. John adds that if the employees are not staying for a long time the hiring of new
employees is well developed and that the old and new salesmen work together for a long time and visits all the customers together and transfers the relationship to the new employee so that the relation lives on and continues to be reciprocate.

Trust
Trust is important for Getinge and their advertisement line towards the customer is ”Always with you”. This is how Getinge wants the customers to feel when collaborating with them, that the customers can trust that the employees of Getinge will be with them. John explains that Getinge offers complete solutions and that this provides great effects regarding trust. “This message that we have a complete offer for the customers and that we should make sure that we are with them is communicated to all of our employees. Getinge is building their brand and their trust depending on what they have done, how they have performed. It is also important to take care of the trust since it can disappear from just a small mistake”, John says.

Bonding
John says that bonding is good in order to reach Getinge’s headline “Always with you”. When trying to bond with customers John adds that personal meetings are essential. To “always be with” the customer it is important for Getinge to have access to salesmen so that they can reach the customer. It gives outstanding results even though it is more expensive than other sales formats, John explains. If the company has money for it then it will in the end be the best way of selling and that is why Getinge is working with salesmen. “If we should remove our salesmen and not meet the customers in person and create that bond and instead just work with selling online, then we could reduce the price by ten percent. But as long as someone else have salesmen then they are winning. The physical meeting is always winning” John says. Getinge participates in many fairs and at many industry association meetings. “The relationship between the customer and the employee at Getinge is important and every time when the customer and Getinge have contact we should try to build a strong relationship and try to bond with each other. This is also happening, especially for some employees that have almost weekly contact with our customers”, John explains.

Communication
According to John it is important to communicate with the customers and to always be available. “If they have a problem they want to give away the responsibility, they want us as a supplier to take care of it”, John says. There is no global rule of how often we should contact our customers, but there are local guidelines of how to do it. John also explains that it is important to measure that the relationship is working and that the customer is satisfied and this is most often done by communicating with the customer. According to John it is very important to be service minded within the communication and for the employees to have a positive attitude when they are visiting the customers.
Empathy

It is important for the employees at Getinge to feel empathic of the customers and to familiarize their selves with each customers situation. “This is done to make the customer like you because if the customers do not like you then you will not get any business”, John says. He continues to say that it is not always that the customers feel the empathy for you. It is very important to try to understand and help the customers by seeing situations from their perspective. John also says that when the customer is not satisfied with something then the employees of Getinge need too understand that and feel empathic for the customer since it is the reality for them and they need to be totally satisfied.

Shared value

In some areas it is important that Getinge share the same values as their customers. For example, John says that they are against corruption that is something they do not accept. He continues to mention that it sometimes is important to share values and sometimes not. “If two people have totally different values it does not work”, John says. “The employees of Getinge can not have totally different values as the customers, but if we do it is solved by having local representatives and not global salesmen”, John explains. He says that having local salesmen is an easy way to reach the same culture and more likely the same values among the employees and the customers. “In Mexico we have Mexican salesmen and in France we have Frenchmen as salesmen” John explains.

Commitment

It is important that Getinge is committed towards their customers. John refers to their line “Always with you” and “Partners for life” and says that commitment is needed if Getinge and the customers should be partners for life. “One of the things we do within Getinge is to do our customers working environment better and more effective which means that we help them with better solutions”, John says. This way of helping our customers shows that we are committed. “Commitment is also a part of bonding since we are working for a better solution for the customers and that includes that you also build trust and understand them”, John explains.

Conflict handling

To handle conflicts is important according to John. “Conflicts will happen and that can for example be when a customer is unsatisfied with a delivery or with the service that Getinge has provided”, John says. “It is very important to handle a conflict when it happens because the worst thing when handling a conflict is to not do anything about it and ignore it, John adds. “To work with conflict handling proactively is an advantage and if the customer is complaining even though it is not Getinge’s fault and problem then it becomes Getinge’s problem and the employee at Getinge that works with the specific customer should collect facts and information and try to solve the problem as smooth as possible”, John explains. “Sometimes it is a personal problem that the customers have with the salesmen of Getinge. That they do not like them or they maybe do not like the way he or she looks or acts. When this happens Getinge have to solve that
problem in the moment”, John says. “It is also important to not be too emotional and instead be more understanding and correct. To solve the conflicts or problem that appears Getinge does not have any special guidelines, it is common sense for the ones involved”, John says. When saying this John repeats the importance of handling the problem directly and to not ignore it. “It is important to always help the customer and solve the problem that they have with our products”, John adds. He mentions that even though the warranty is not valid anymore Getinge should anyway help the customer to solve the problem. To be honest, correct and fast are what Getinge strives for and to reach a solution with the customer that both parts are satisfied with.

**Competence**

According to John competence is when Getinge is the experts of what they do and that it is important for Getinge to be competent in their business area. John says that most of the customers do not know what solution is best for them. If Getinge comes to one of the departments at a hospital and says that they should install a specific system with computers and more technical devices it does happen that they do not want the computers at all. John means that it is not important for the customers to be competent and that the customers of Getinge not always are competent. It is Getinge’s duty to be the experts. Getinge should find a solution that leads the customers to a more simple and effective every day. John also explains that they provide their customer with education, which makes them more competent. It is very important for Getinge to be competent and to be the best choice of their products and within their business area. When John is talking about Getinge’s second core value, integrated solution, he mentions that Getinge does not just have products; they have the resources to educate their customers and to help them with most of their needs. Getinge analyzes and calculates how the customers can be the most effective with machines and other equipment and how the customers can save systems making them control their firm in a better way. This offering helps the customers to measure their effectiveness. John adds that their core value Insight means that Getinge is the expert of their customers’ firms. Getinge can see what the customers do not know that they need. This comes from the knowledge that Getinge have of building this departments every day all around the world. Getinge have the competence of seeing where the customer can be more effective with Getinge’s products.

**Satisfaction**

Getinge always tries to be close to the customers and to offer service in order to get satisfaction since that is very important for the company to achieve. John explains that to achieve satisfaction is to show service and to be available and that can for example be to answer the phone within three signals. “This is because we should have high availability at our salesmen” John says. A core value of Getinge is to appreciate customer satisfaction. To make sure that Getinge has high customer satisfaction they make measurements. To do this they call the different customers and ask how satisfied they are with Getinge as a supplier. “Primarily, we have an organization that can deliver what our customers expect”, John explains. This means that a company can sell the best machines but if there is no service, support or that they do not answer the phone when the
customers need help then the customers will still be unhappy and not satisfied. It is very important that everyone within Getinge is aware of what their values are so that they can behave according to that. John talked about the importance of word of mouth in order to achieve satisfaction in the durable industry within B2B. Getinge’s customers are not that frequently buying their products since they are durable which means that when it is time for changing the products or buying new ones there is no one of the people that was there when the customers first bought the products. What John means happens then is that the customers listen to other hospitals, which products they have, their experiences of the products and if they are satisfied. Therefore the references Getinge receives are very important to them. "It is very important for Getinge to not have any dissatisfied customers since they are references and can be crucial if potential customers will buy from Getinge”, John explains. "Therefore are we very sensitive about unsatisfied customers and in Sweden we are more sensitive than in the rest of the world since our market share is 65-70% here. In other countries where we have 5 % market share we can ignore if a customer is unhappy or unsatisfied and go to the next one. The higher market share the more sensitive you are for one unhappy customer”, John says. It is very important that the customers are satisfied. To satisfy the customers Getinge have offers with a whole package that can make them more effective in their work. "Help them to be effective every day and to be satisfied with the work they do between eight and five. Find the right solutions for them and give service and support all the way”, John explains. “It is very important that our products have quality and functionality since that is what Getinge stands for. It is essential to be true to the customer and to make sure that they get what they think they will get”, John says. The education that Getinge has needs to have high quality and be professional in order to get satisfied customers. John explains that Getinge’s work to get satisfied customer is comprehensive. “Getinge’s customers have approximately 90 percent machines from Getinge in their productions. The service, quality and the machine’s reliability determines how good Getinge is”, John explains. “These factors together with education for the customers affects Getinge very much”, he adds.

4.2 Informant 2: Irina Lindblad

Customer loyalty

According to Irina customer loyalty is more or less a repurchase from the customer. Irina describe that the customer gets loyal if he or she is satisfied with the product during the 15-20 years it is durable, and that the customer have been satisfied with how it worked and the support, education and updates that was given. If everything worked, the customers are willing to repurchase and that is loyalty, Irina states. "Loyal customers are saving time, since we do not need to do the sales work from the beginning again, the base is already there and this is saving time which is important” Irina says. For Getinge there are many competitors so it is essential for Getinge to work hard to give the customers reasons to buy from them. Loyal customers are important since Getinge provide top quality products, Irina says. When being honest, standing by our words and delivering we achieve loyalty, Irina says. "Does a company have quality in our
industry and relational factors above it then it leads to that the customer gets satisfied and purchases again. If the relationship is loyal the customer comes back to the company and wants more things since they trust me and that my solutions are good for them” Irina says.

Reciprocity
A reciprocate relation with win-win is important, that it is genuine and two-way. ”It is very nice to succeed with a reciprocate relation with a customer” Irina says. That the customer feels that we have been engaged, shown a good attitude and tried to help and if the customer shows the same thing back then it is a recipe that the relationship is reciprocate” Irina means. If the relationship is like that the customers most likely will come back and want more products.

Trust
Irina says that it is very important with trust since equipment, regardless how good it is, someday will brake. ”Hopefully we are quick enough to get them spare parts and than it was not a major problem”. Irina continues to say that Getinge always gives a solution and sometimes they can repair their customers products and sometimes not, but if they cannot repair it they make sure that the customer gets satisfied anyway. “Some customers are so dependent on our products and if the things are not working then the customers might need to cancel a whole day of operations and this means that they might loose a lot of trust with their customers and also money”. In turn this means for Getinge that they really work and value their after sale service. “It is very important for us to deliver quick after sale service since this make the customers trust us and that we always will fix things that are broken”. Irina means that the after sales service in Getinge’s industry is very important. If Getinge has good after sales service this create positive word of mouth which will spread between the customers.

Bonding
"If there are several decision makers and if we are several that are in the same meeting it is very hard with bonding, there is no time to bond with everyone”. Irina means that often bonding is happening when two parts can relate to something like personal as values, hobbies, family and so on. Irina says that after a couple of meetings with a customer then a question about the family could be asked and in addition she says that bonding most often happens at the fourth or fifth meeting with the customer. Irina means that she has many customers that she do not have the time to bond with, it is not the most important thing she prioritizes. ”It would be very fun to bond more with our customers but we do not since we have such a big volume of customers” Irina says. At some points bonding happens spontaneously and that is good, but it is just a few times per year Irina says. ”For example a customer can send a New Years card or that we just feel the connection, this is happening but not something that we strive for. It is just a little extra, like bonus at the job”. Irina means that when Getinge participates at fairs there is no time to bond with the customers or the potential customers. It is just business talking with a limited time. But she mentions that bonding is happening of itself. For example Irina met a women at a fair that had a daughter with the same name as Irina. ”We talked a little about her daughter and so on, and
we bonded over that”. Most often there is no time for bonding and no time to show the personality and bond over something personal items that are visible, like a motorcycle, golf club or a boat. If items are showing then the opportunity can be taken and Irina says that she can talk about that. ”But it needs to come genuinely from me and not be strained”. Irina is saying that if she do not have the same hobby as a customer it might be hard for her to ask relevant questions about it. ”If I would just work with just a few customers then I could collect information about what their hobbies were and what they liked”. Another thing that can make bonding happen is to be updated about the latest news. ”It is also a way to bond to be well updated about the most important sport within the country you are visiting, for example to know something about the players in that sport or some results”.

**Communication**

It is very important that the communication is good and that happens often by itself since we are careful with our service. ”If some of our products are not working for one of our customers it is very important that we will be informed about this”. Then the employee of Getinge that have the contact needs to do the communication so the customers get satisfied. Communication is very important. It is important to communicate with the customer to see if they need new products or if they are satisfied with the ones they have. Most of the communicating in Getinge is per phone and Irina says that they also communicates through newsletter and invite the customers to fairs. A good communication with the customers is very important and also that it is happening regularly to see if the customers are satisfied, Irina says.

**Empathy**

Irina says that it is important to be empathic, to understand the customers. ”You need to understand why some things are important for the customers”. Empathy in Getinge’s case is to understand what the customers’ goals are and when they are punished and how. ”We need to understand if they can loose a lot of money when they have to cancel many operations during one day or if they risk to loose their license if our products do not work” It is essential to understand the customers’ problems and to show that we care and that we will make an effort in order to solve their problem. There is no need for emotional empathy more than understanding in this context since we have so many customers.

**Shared Value**

It is not possible to share all the customers’ values, but Getinge’s employees can relate. People have different values depending on where in the world they are. People need to relate to different people’s situations Irina says. ”It is in my job to discover and relate to the customers and I need to put an effort in understanding the customers, that I can understand something related to the customers’ values”, Irina says. Irina explains that a customer can be difficult to read and it can be hard to know which values that person has. ”The most safe and easiest value that also is the most easiest conversation to talk about is children and family” Irina says. ”It is not easy to share values but to relate is essential”, Irina adds.
Commitment
Commitment is important for Getinge and their customers. According to Irina commitment is related to understanding the customers’ problems. "If I am not committed then I will not find a great solution, I will just get rid of the problem and then we do not get a loyal customers”, Irina means. To commit to a customer in a way of making the best solution and to solve the customer’s problem is important. Irina says in addition that it is sometimes impossible to satisfy the customers even though she is committed, that she can only do her best. To show commitment towards the customers is important, Irina says.

Conflict handling
It is important for Getinge to solve all the customers’ problems, but sometimes it is not possible. The customers’ requirement can be something that Getinge can not meet. "For example it could be that a very old machine needs spare parts, and we can not get them since the machine is not produced anymore. It makes the customer angry if it is not possible to get the spare parts." To solve that Getinge cannot solve the first problem with the spare parts. Instead Irina gives some kind of offer, like reduced price if the customer wants to buy new products since Getinge could not help them to fix their old one. Irina means that an exclusive discount for that special customer can be made and often this arrangement makes the customer feel appreciated and maybe will be satisfied in the end. Irina says that if Getinge wants loyal customers then the conflicts that appear needs to be solved, especially since Getinge provide such expensive products and the customers expect them to have high quality.

Competence
It is extremely important that we are experts in our business area. The customers do not need to have the competence since we have the education within Getinge. We use our competence as a way to reach satisfaction. "The customers’ competence is not always high and this is why we have the education for them, since we are expert of the products. We educate them at Getinge Academy to make them understand the advantages of our products”. Irina explains that it is important that they are experts in their field since the products are so complicated. Getinge educates the customers in infection control and it is something that show the customers that Getinge has knowledge and is competent.

Satisfaction
It is hard to satisfy all customers since all customers have different interpretations on that make them satisfied. Some of them are unreasonable and that can be hard to handle. Irina says. "You can try everything but they are still not happy”, Irina explains. The most important thing is to deliver good products with high quality and keep the service on top, Irina says. “Regardless how nice and polite we are the machine still needs to work in order to make the customers satisfied. If a customer buys an expensive product from a well known brand the customer expects the product to be good and not break”. Irina continues and says that if you buy a cheaper product then you are more aware of the chance of it to break and you just hope that it will remain whole.
Sometimes it is not possible to satisfy the customers but Getinge always do their best. "In our industry the most important thing when wanting to achieve satisfaction is to provide a product with quality for our customers. If quality, reciprocity, trust, bonding, communication, empathy, shared values, commitment, conflict handling and competence is achieved in a good way then satisfaction is reached and the customers become loyal". To work more with customer loyalty I would say that it would be enjoyable to surprise the customers, to do something amazing for them. The industry that Getinge is within is conservative which makes it hard to exceed the customers’ expectations and to make the customers curious to see what Getinge’s next developing move on the market will be, Irina means. But in addition she says that this is not how it is for Getinge, it is just a vision or a wish that she will amaze the customers.

4.3 Informant 3: Anders Nilsson

Customer Loyalty
According to Anders customer loyalty is very important for Getinge. Customer loyalty is according to Anders that you as a supplier is the preferred option by the customers. He says that it is impossible for a supplier to stand without competition and that you as a supplier needs to realize it and find reasons for the customers to buy from you. “Our customers need to be able to defend the choice of buying from Getinge and we need to give them reasons for it”.

Reciprocity
Reciprocity is important according to Anders. When talking about this Anders explains that you should not make life difficult for the customer just like the customer should not make life difficult for the supplier. To make the other person happy you need to make life easy for him or her. “Do not make it hard and give the customer many documents to fill out, that is just annoying”. Do not give out extra costs because for misunderstandings regarding an order, if you make life hard for the customer then that customer will not be satisfied”, Anders explains. When Anders worked in Singapore he came across an expression called “look good mentality” and this meant that you should help each other to “look good”. “If you do not help another party to “look good” then you have lost that party forever and you can be sure that the party will buy from a competitor instead. “If you do not help another party then that party will not help you”. It is important for Getinge to be reciprocating towards the customers since they are very valuable for Getinge.

Trust
To have trust in the relationship with customers is important according to Anders. To work with relationships and to create trust lies close to his heart and it is the way he always has been working. “I cannot work in any other way. I have a product that is comparable with others in the market with prices normally higher than every other competitor. The only parameter I can work with is the relationship since it all comes down to if the customers trust us to deliver to them. When things are not working then Getinge wants their customers to feel that they are there to
help them making it work again. “If you have made successful deliveries with customers then they will trust you to do it successfully again since they have had a good experience. The things we have said that we would do we make sure are carried out so there will not be any delays which can affect the customers negatively”.

**Bonding**

Anders says that it is good with bonding in the relationship with customers. Anders explains that it takes time to build relationships and that there is no recipe of how it should be done. What is essential is to try to figure out and understand the other person and his or her situation. “Get to know what makes that person react, if the person is afraid or nervous about something then try to understand why and ask questions”, Anders explains. By bonding and understanding what is important for the customer it creates opportunities on what to offer for that specific customer.

**Communication**

To know how to communicate is essential according to Anders. “To communicate effectively and not just let the mouth go is essential”, Anders explains. When having effective communication it is important to meet in person. It is especially important for Getinge who works with products that are customized solutions for the specific customers. “We need to have a dialogue with our customers. It is like building an architect-designed house where we are the architects and the customer is the client ordering it. It lays in the client’s best interest to communicate with us so that the client gets what he or she wants. To make the client satisfied we need to have information passing between the parties in the dialogue”. When speaking about communication Anders adds that it is very important to have continuity. That the customer gets to talk with the same persons at Getinge every time they are in contact. “When talking about ourselves in our every day life then we choose to communicate and visit the same dentists, hairdressers and so on since we have been communicating with those specific persons before and want continuity of talking to the same persons again. That is how it usually is”.

**Empathy**

Anders says that empathy is important and that it is essential to think about the customers as human beings. When talking about empathy he says “Walk a mile in someone else’s shoes and find out what is important for that person and give offers related to that. That will make the customer feel like a winner”. In order to make a customer satisfied it is essential to be empathic of that customer. To be able to be empathic and to understand the customer’s situation Anders is often searching online for information that can help him understand how it is for the customer to work and how their work environment may have changed till recent time. “Getinge is a part of an understanding of what goes on in the life of the customers, what frame of reference they have, what they really mean when saying something specific. Also, it is important to understand the customers’ own interpretation of their own problem in order to be able to solve it”. To obtain this empathic understanding it is essential to meet the customers in person, Anders says.
Shared value

To respect the customers’ values is essential according to Anders. He says that Getinge had an incident with the lack of shared value with a customer in Indonesia. Getinge had a local representative that was from a specific area that the customer did not approve to work with because of that area. For that customer to approve to work with Getinge a change of local representative was needed even though this woman working for Getinge in Indonesia was a really capable employee. She never got the change to show what she could do because of the values connected with the areas in Indonesia; that people from different areas cannot cooperate. Anders needed to respect that customer’s wishes and take over that customer for the relationship to continue.

Commitment

Commitment is important according to Anders and he wishes to be even more committed to every customer but that it is hard to maintain. Talking about commitment makes Anders think about two specific cases where he had to show a high level of commitment to be able to build relationships with these customers. “These customers were really hard to close in on and I worked on them for several years, I could feel the suspiciousness towards me”. After a long time Anders got the opportunity to make a delivery and he made sure to do a little extra for the customers. “I made sure to be with them during the weeks they visited us here and took care of them. According to their preferences I made sure they got the food that they wanted, found places where they could wash up, lay out carpets and pray since they were religious. It went on like that and when this was done I had gotten my two absolute best customers. They were super loyal but it took long time to get there. It started with suspiciousness but after showing a high level of commitment towards these customers they became loyal”.

Conflict handling

Anders explains that it is essential to handle conflicts effectively in order to get loyal customers. “A good way to create loyalty is to handle complaints and conflicts quick and easy. I really believe that a correct and effectively handled complaint or conflict is the best marketing you can possibly do”, Anders explains. “When there is a complaint or a conflict with a customer then one should react fast as a lightning. If I should for instance gather the parts from the workshop myself that a customer is in need of and send them down to the customer in Africa then the pieces may not cost more than 1000 SEK and to send it way add just approximately 300 SEK. That is all I have to spend on that marketing effort, and that is nothing compared to what the customer spends on your products which can add up to millions. The price for me to get the parts the customer needs and to send it to Africa does not cost more than taking that same customer out to dinner”, Anders says. “A company should quickly and effectively handle complaints and conflicts, one can never hide from problems. You just have to fix it”.

**Competence**

Anders means that it is important for Getinge to be competent within their business area. According to Anders it is essential to effectively be able to fix the customers’ problem when something happens. “It will ravel and things will break so the question is, can we fix it quickly or is it troublesome, takes time, is heavy and expensive for the customers?” If we have the competence and are cost-effective when handling problems then that will strengthen the relationships with the customers and they will probably become loyal. When customers will give arguments of why they choose you as a supplier you have to give them a good reason, Anders explains. According to Anders Getinge wants the customers to think that Getinge has amazing after sales service that are really good and available and makes sure that things run as it should. Since the customers do not have to be competent it is essential for Getinge to educate them about the products and how they should work with them.

**Satisfaction**

Satisfaction is the most important factor according to Anders. “If the customer is not satisfied with our delivery then everything falls apart and the customer will not buy from you again even if you are trustworthy, friendly and committed and so on”, Anders says. In order for Getinge to achieve satisfaction then the customers’ expectations of both quality and the relational factors needs to be met. “It is essential that it finally works out and that the customer is satisfied, but it does not have to be perfect from the very start. When something goes wrong during a delivery-survey together with the customer and the person gets angry during the first day then that person will not be satisfied. Day two and day three we have fixed what was wrong, we solved it and day four when the customer leaves to goes back home then we have reached satisfaction in that relation even though it started a bit shaky. We fixed the situation and the customer got satisfied”, Anders explains. It is the full interpretation of all factors that achieves satisfaction according to Anders.
5.0 Analysis

In this chapter we present the theoretical framework together with the collected empirical data of our study. The theoretical framework is always presented first regarding every headline followed by the informants’ answers one by one. The analysis ends with a table of the informants’ answers to make the information easier to overview.

5.1 Customer’s loyalty

As stated by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner and Gremler (2002) a customer’s repeated purchases that are triggered by a supplier’s activities can be referred to as a customer’s loyalty and Gummesson (2002) added that a loyal customer is important for a supplier because he or she is less price sensitive. According to Blomqvist, Dahl, Haeger and Storbacka (1999) it is easier for the supplier to create additional sales on a specific customer if that customer is loyal. According to John, Irina and Anders it is very important for Getinge to have loyal customers. John mentions that the more the customers buy from Getinge, the more loyal they get. Irina explains that loyal customers are important for Getinge since their products have high quality and are expensive. Irina also says that if customers are loyal they will come back and buy more since they trust her, her suggestions and that the solutions they will receive are real and appropriate for them.

As explained by Blomqvist et al. (1999) a customer’s feeling of loyalty can change between markets regarding to the competitiveness. According to Blomqvist et al. (1999) it requires more for the customer to become loyal in a strongly competitive market since the customer has higher expectations of the supplier. When talking about this John means that where Getinge has small markets a high market share it is very important to keep the customers loyal since the effect of word of mouth is high and the amount of customers are few. He means that in bigger market it is easier to find new customers since they have more customers to choose from. John says that the quality, functionality and education are important for the customers and also the people working at Getinge. This to get the customers loyal since the different markets where Getinge works are very competitive. Irina means that Getinge is not the only one that wants loyal customers; there are many competitors who wants to have the same customers as them so they always need to work hard to keep their customers. Irina adds that in their competitive markets they need to meet the customers’ expectations of both quality and all the relational factors that the customers’ expect to receive. According to Anders it is impossible for a supplier to stand without competition and he says in addition that Getinge has given their customers reasons to buy from them in order to get them loyal in these competitive markets.

5.2 Factors influencing customer’s loyalty

Reciprocity

As explained by Trimetsoontorn and Chattananon (2009) reciprocity can be described as a dimension of a business relationship and that this dimension makes it possible for two parties to exchange favors. Both parties will be likely independent of each other and have mutual benefits.
of the cooperation (Ibid.). Cialdini and Rhoads (2001) explained that reciprocity is an obligation for parties to return what they have received from another party. According to John reciprocity is important for Getinge and they are striving for reciprocity with their customers. John refers to their headlines “Always with you” and “Partners for life” and means that if the relationship with the customer is not reciprocate then they will not be “Partners for life”. Irina says that a reciprocal relation that is win-win for both parties is important, that the relationship is genuine and two-way. According to Irina it is important that the customers feel that Getinge is engaged, that they start with the positive behavior, show a good attitude and that they are helpful since this will make the customers behave in the same way back to Getinge. Irina says that if the customers show the same behavior back to Getinge then it is a recipe that the relationship is reciprocate. Irina adds that if the relationship is reciprocate then the customers are more likely to become loyal. Anders explains that Getinge should not make the customer’s life difficult since that will lead to that the customer will not make life difficult for Getinge.

As explained by Sethi and Somanathan (2003) a reciprocate behavior is when parties reward each other’s generosity and punishes opportunistic behavior. The behavior that one party receives can be expected to be given back no matter if it is positive or negative (Ibid.). In order to achieve reciprocity Anders means that it is important to do a little extra for the customers and then it is more likely that the customers will do the same for Getinge. It is important for Getinge to start being reciprocate towards the customers since the customers are very valuable for Getinge. If Getinge does not help the other party then they will loose that party forever and then the customers will make sure to buy from a competitor instead. Wiersema (1997) explains that a close relationship between a supplier and a customer requires reciprocal understanding. Cialdini and Rhoads (2001) state that reciprocity usually can be applied when there is an exchange of gifts or services but also regarding concessions. If one party is requesting something that the other party is not willing to accept, then a lowering of that request can make the other party feel more obliged to accept the new offer (Cialdini & Rhoads, 2001). Anders explains that Getinge reached reciprocity with a customer when they offered to come to the customer’s office and meet face to face, instead of emailing back and forth, which resulted in a more effective cooperation. In this way they exchanged services and lowered the customer’s requests.

Trust

According to Crosby, Evans & Cowles (1990) trust is when a customer develops an unspoken understanding with a seller and believes that the supplier will be reliable and behave according to the customer’s benefit. Morgan and Hunt (1994) have explained that trust exists when a party has confidence in an exchange partner to be reliable and to have integrity. Morgan and Hunt (1994) stated that when there is trust in the relationship between a supplier and a customer it creates the feeling of security and control. John, Irina and Anders all mean that trust is important between Getinge and their customers. John adds that Getinge’s advertisement line ”Always with you” is how Getinge wants the customers to feel when they are collaborating with Getinge. As explained by Bendapudi and Berry (1997) trust makes partners in a relationship more willing to sacrifice
and less willing to calculate their benefits and costs. When talking about this John means that if the customers trust Getinge then they are more willing to buy complete solutions from Getinge since they trust in what Getinge provides.

As stated by Wiersema (1997) suppliers can obtain trust by showing the customers proof of what they have accomplished in previous comparable situations. Bedman et al. (2013) explained that if the supplier has the ability to keep promises and act consistently with integrity and concern for its customers then that influences their loyalty for that supplier. Morgan and Hunt (1996) stated that a trustworthy party has high integrity, is being honest, fair and truthful. Morgan and Hunt (1994) also stated that when the customer’s trust in a supplier increases then a customer’s intentions of having future interaction with that supplier and being loyal also increases. When there are high levels of trust between a supplier and a customer then the relationship is seen as safe and highly valued since the parties can count on each other to create equitable arrangements (Ibid.). According to John Getinge is building their brand and its trust depending on previous actions, how well they have performed, and that these experiences are what builds the customer’s trust. John adds that it is also important to take care of the trust within the relationship since it can disappear from just a small mistake. Irina explains that trust is obtained through how well Getinge fulfills the customer’s needs and that it is a lot of value in the after sales service when it comes to building trust. Anders explains that if Getinge has made successful deliveries with customers before then they will trust Getinge to do it successfully again since the customers did have a good experience. Anders adds that Getinge always makes sure that they fulfill what they have promised to the customers.

Bonding
Trimetsoontorn and Chattananon (2009) explains that bonding is described as a dimension of a business relationship which makes two parts act in a unified manner toward a desired goal and that this is a process within a relationship that increases over time. According to Bendapudi and Berry (1997) bonding creates ties between parties and that this bond influences the perceptions and the behavior towards each other. Bendapudi and Berry (1997) also state that social bonding can reduce or even eliminate the fear that the relationship partner might behave opportunistic. Bedman et al. (2013) explains that there is a strong link between social bonding with a customer and a customer’s loyalty. When talking about this John says that it is important for Getinge to have salesmen in order to meet the customers in person and thereby increase the possibility to create bonding since that is good to achieve. John adds that the physical meeting is always winning over only having online contact. Irina means that it is hard to create bonding since there usually are many decision makers and she adds that in her interpretation bonding is just a bonus due to the high amount of customers. Irina says that since there are so many customers to handle the lack of time makes bonding something extra that can occur but are not strived for. For Anders bonding is a good factor when building a relationship.
According to Michaud (2000) a firm should establish a common ground with the customers since they can relate to people who are like them. Michaud (2000) also explains that when establishing a common ground then the customer connects with the supplier beyond being just another client. In order for this to happen Michaud (2000) suggests that the person representing the supplier should highlight its own personality and preferences in his or her office through personal items. Michaud (2000) states that the customers will see the items and relate to their own life which creates a connection between the supplier and the customer. The connection will make the customers more receptive to what the supplier’s representative is offering them (Michaud, 2000). Cialdini and Rhodes (2001) state that the similarities create positive results regarding liking and bonding with another party. When discussing bonding John explains that the relationship between the customer and the employee at Getinge is important and every time when the customers and Getinge have contact they should try to build a strong relationship and try to bond with each other. Irina says that bonding often is created when parties can relate to personal values, hobbies and family situations. Irina gives an example of when she met a customer at a fair and her daughters name was the same as Irina’s and that they bonded over this. She also adds that if there are personal items showing like a motorcycle, golf club or boat then she can ask questions about these things and thereby create bonding through that. She also points out that it is important to follow the news and to be updated about the national sports within countries where Getinge is visiting customers. To create bonding with a customer Anders is asking questions and he tries to understand what is important for the customer in order for the relationship to be closer.

**Communication**

According to Andersen (2001) communication is the human acts of transferring a message to other humans and making it understandable and meaningful. Ballantyne (2004) explains that communication between parties is interplay of emotions, ideas, facts, arguments, opinions and plans. According to McKenna (1992) communication is a dialogue that is effective when two parties gain something. Bedman et al. (2013) explain that a supplier’s ability to effectively and frequently communicate with customers has impact on the customers’ willingness to be loyal to that supplier. Bedman et al. (2013) also explain that frequency in the communication from the supplier ensure customers to become loyal. According to John it is very important to communicate with the customers and to always be available for them. John explains that there is no global rule of how often Getinge should contact the customers but that there are local guidelines of how to do it in different markets. Irina says that it is very important with good communication and that it automatically happens since Getinge values after sales service. Anders adds that it is important to communicate effectively and that it is also important to meet in person since Getinge has customized solutions for specific customers. In order to create customized solutions it is essential to have a dialogue with the customers. Anders also means that continuity is the key of communication and that the customers gets to communicate to the same person at Getinge every time they are in contact.
According to Blomqvist et al. (1999) it is important for a supplier to give customers feedback about how the relationship is working and that this feedback should be both from their own perspective as well as the customers. John explains that it is important to measure that the communication is working and that the customer is being satisfied. The measurements are often done by communicating with the customers in order to both give and get feedback. According to Blomqvist et al. (1999) the communication between suppliers and customers should be a dialogue, the parties can learn from each other by continuously exchanging of information. Blomqvist et al. (1999) explains that by continuously communicating with customers a supplier can learn about their demands, needs, expectations and behaviors and develop the organization in order to meet the conditions. Michaud (2000) explains that when communicating with a customer it is important for a supplier to be positive. Michaud (2000) adds that if a supplier is positive and upbeat then the customers will want to be around and to do business with that person. According to John it is very important to be service minded. John explains that for the employees it is essential to have a positive attitude when they are visiting the customers. Irina explains that good communication with the customers is very important for Getinge. Irina also says that the employees of Getinge gives and receives feedback and communicates with the customers to discuss their situations and to have a dialogue with them. She adds that other ways to communicate is to contact the customers through newsletters and to invite them to different fairs. According to Anders it is important for Getinge to have a dialogue with the customers. Anders explains that the dialogue is like building an architect-designed house where Getinge is the architect and constructor and the customer is the client ordering it. He adds that it is in the client’s best interest to communicate with Getinge in order for Getinge to give the customer what he or she wants. Anders explains that to make the client satisfied it is needed to share information between the parties in a dialogue.

**Empathy**

Sin et al. (2002) explain that empathy is when parties of a business relationship can see the situation from the other party’s perspective and to also understand another party’s desires and goals. John and Anders says that it is important for the employees at Getinge to feel empathic of the customers and John continues to say that it is important to also familiarize themselves with each customer’s situation. Irina adds that empathy in Getinge’s case is to understand the customers goals and the punishment they can get if anything goes wrong, that they can loose a lot of money or loose their license. Michaud (2000) explains that it is important for suppliers to be good listeners and to show concern for their customers since the customers’ favorite topic is themselves, their wants, needs and their situations. Michaud (2000) also explains that suppliers should listen and try to understand their customers by giving them full attention that will make the customers feel important by knowing that the suppliers care about them. John explains that empathy is very important, to try to understand and help the customers by seeing situations from their perspective. John also means that when a customer is not satisfied with something then the employees of Getinge need to understand that and feel empathic for the customer. Irina also means that empathy is essential and that Getinge needs to understand their customers and why
certain things are more important than other things. Irina and Anders explains that it is essential to be able to see the situations from the customers’ perspectives to know what is important for them and give offers and solutions related to that. Anders means that it is important to understand the customers’ own interpretation of their problem in order to be able to solve it. Anders adds that in order to obtain this empathic understanding it is essential to meet the customers in person.

According to Michaud (2000) customers want to sense an attitude of “We are all in this together” and that the supplier has their best interest at heart. Wiersema (1997) states that customers do not want to show their true issues, hopes, questions and fears if the supplier does not show empathy for them. Tripp (2013) explains that the key to do business is to show empathy. According to Tripp (2013) suppliers show empathy if they are not only giving offerings to customers made from the supplier’s perspective. Tripp (2013) states that when working with empathy a supplier needs to think about the customers as humans and not as targets and the supplier needs to step inside the customers’ world to fully understand their views. John says that it is not always that the customers feel empathy for Getinge and he adds that empathy is obtain through making the customers like Getinge, otherwise Getinge will not get any business. Irina means that it is important to understand the customers’ problematic and to really make an effort in order to solve it. She adds that it is important to understand the customers but not to be too emotionally involved. According to Anders it is essential to be empathic for the customers and to treat them as human beings. To be able to be empathic and to understand the customer’s situation Anders is often searching online for information that can help him understand how it is for the customer to work and how the customer’s work environment may have changed till recent time. Anders says that Getinge needs to understand what goes on in the life of their customers, what frame of reference they have and what they really mean when they are saying something specific.

**Shared value**

Morgan and Hunt (1994) explains that when partners have a common view about what is important, appropriate and correct regarding behaviors, goals and policies then they have shared values. According to Sivades and Kashyap (2012) is the sharing of values between parties important in order to provide a direction for the similarities of goals, policies and strategies. Sivades and Kashyap (2012) also explain that for two parties to share value there is a need for trust and commitment in that relationship. When discussing shared value John mentions that it sometimes is important to share values and sometimes not. John continues by saying that if a supplier and a customer have totally different values it does not work. Irina agrees with John and says that it is not possible to share all the customers’ values and that it is not that important to do that, but she adds that it is important to be able to relate to their values. Anders means that the ability to understand and relate to customers’ values is needed in order to be able to cooperate.

According to Sivades and Kashyap (2012) shared values can lead to cooperative behaviors which can lead to enhanced motivation for the parties to cooperate. If two parties share the same values then they are more engaged to rise above and beyond the assigned requirements towards each
other (Sivades & Kashyap, 2012). According to Sivades and Kashyap (2012) the shared values might develop over time throughout a relationship when the involved parties become more committed. When one party pays attention to equitable treatment, is being transparent about what rules and procedures to aim at and treats the other party with respect then that indirectly promotes shared values (Ibid.). John says that in some areas it is important that Getinge share the same values as their customers. For example, John explains that Getinge is against corruption since it is something they do not work with. John also means that the employees of Getinge cannot have totally different values as the customers. This issue is being solved by having local employees in different markets since this is an easy way to reach the same culture and more likely the same values among the employees of Getinge and the customers. Irina means that customers have different values depending where in the world they live. It is important to be able to relate to the customers and as an employee of Getinge it is a duty to relate to the customers. According to Irina it is good if it is possible to distinguish a common value with the customer. She adds that the easiest value to share is the importance of family and children; otherwise it can sometimes be hard to find shared values. Anders says that the lack of shared values can cost problems and that Getinge have had experience of this. Anders adds that to solve that problem Getinge needed to exchange the employee in contact with the customer in order to continue the relationship since they could not get along.

Commitment
Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer & Kumar (1996) explains that commitment occurs when there is requirements for maintaining long-term relationships. According to Andersson and Weitz (1992) commitment is referred to wanting to continue a relationship with another party. Morgan and Hunt (1994) state that trust is important for the relationship to be committed and according to Bedman et al. (2013) there is influence of commitment when achieving customer loyalty. As explained by Morgan and Hunt (1994) commitment generally leads to enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in marketing relationships since it shows a willingness to cooperate, lowers the tendency to leave the relationship and predicts unanimous consent and concession. Johns mean that it is important that Getinge shows commitment towards their customers. John refers to their headline “Always with you” and “Partners for life” and says that commitment is essential if Getinge and the customers should be partners. Irina agrees that commitment is important and she adds that in her interpretation commitment is related to empathy. Irina explains that the best solutions for customers are found trough commitment. Commitment is important according to Anders and he wishes to be even more committed to every customer but that it is hard to maintain that towards each customer he interacts with.

According to Ghijsen, Semeijn and Ernstson (2010) will a supplier’s initiatives and investments in a customer extend the relationship between the parties. Ghijsen et al. (2010) also explains that these initiatives and investments shown by the supplier will show commitment to the customer who then will understand that the relationship will not be jeopardized. John means that Getinge achieves commitment with the customers by giving them the right help and the right solutions.
John adds that commitment also is a part of bonding since they are working for a better solution for the customers and that includes building trust and understanding each other. Irina explains that to be engaged and to try to find solutions for the customers is the best way of achieving commitment since this shows that the employees of Getinge have done their best to help them. Irina also adds that a customer can be disappointed even if the employees of Getinge have been committed in their work. Anders explains that an example of being really committed is about two specific cases where he did show a high level of commitment to be able to build relationships with two different customers. After showing a lot of commitment and endurance Getinge got loyal customers, but they had to do a lot of extra for them in order for this to happen. Anders did spend a lot of time with the customers making sure that they were taken care of regarding their specific preferences. After this effort Getinge got their two most loyal customers according to Anders.

**Conflict handling**

The handling of conflicts is an effectively resolved existing disagreement between two parties (Knippen & Green, 1999). According to Bedman et al. (2013) can the way a supplier handles conflicts lead to a customer’s loyalty. Bedman et al. (2013) also explain that there is an evidently strong link between effective conflict handling and customer loyalty. John means that conflicts will happen and can for example occur when a customer is unsatisfied with a delivery or with the service that Getinge has provided. John continues to say that it is very important to handle a conflict when it happens since the worst thing when handling a conflict is to not do anything about it and to ignore it. John means that problems that can occur might be personal and that the customers do not like the employee of Getinge. When this happens then Getinge has to solve that problem quickly in the moment, John adds. Irina states that it is essential to be able to solve every conflict with customers but that it sometimes just does not work and that the customers’ requirements cannot be met. Anders means that conflict handling is important and a good way to create loyalty.

It is important to have routines regarding complaints and conflicts in order to handle them as effective as possible in order to keep a customer satisfied (Blomqvist et al., 1999). It is not easy for a supplier to get a customer satisfied again if the process of solving a complaint or a conflict has taken long time, involved many different people in the firm and been costly for the customer (Ibid.). Blomqvist et al. (1999) adds that it is important to try to handle a customer’s complaint as quick, easy and generous as possible in order to maintain the relationships with the customers and keeping them loyal. Blomqvist et al. (1999) state that a customer who complaints should be rewarded instead of punished state since the person gives useful information to the supplier about its expectations of the product or service. According to Vavra (1995) a good handled complaint increases a customer’s satisfaction leading to loyalty and repeated purchases. John means that the information they collect about the complaints is important in order to solve the problems. John explains that to work with conflict handling proactively is an advantage and if the customer is complaining even though it is not Getinge’s fault and problem then it becomes Getinge’s
problem. John adds that the employee at Getinge who works with the specific customer should collect facts and information and try to solve the problem as smooth as possible and that it is important to not be too emotional and instead be more understanding and correct. John says that Getinge has no special guidelines regarding how to solve conflicts, it is Getinge’s employees that are involved who use their common sense. When saying this John repeats the importance of handling the problem honestly, correct and directly and to not ignore it. He is also saying that it is important to always help the customers and solve the problem that they have with Getinge’s products, even though the warranty is not valid anymore. Irina means that if Getinge wants loyal customers then it is needed to solve conflicts, especially since Getinge provides top quality products and services and has a higher price. Irina gives an example of when a customer has a really old machine and wants spare parts and it is not possible since the machine is not produced anymore, then the customer might get unhappy. Irina adds that to solve the situation, the best way is to give the customer a special offer such as reduced price or an exclusive discount. Anders really believes that a correct and effectively handled complaint or conflict is the best marketing and that it is essential to react as quickly as possible. Anders means that it is easier to just solve the problems that makes the customers satisfied than to argue and discuss back and forth about who is right and who is wrong.

**Competence**

According to Buttle (1996) having competence is referred to as having technical skills and knowledge and according to Bedman et al. (2013) competence is found to be a major factor when achieving customer loyalty. Bedman et al. (2013) state that a supplier’s competence requires the ability to understand its customers and has the ability to satisfy their needs as well as adjusting to the customers’ changing needs. According to Wiersema (1997) requires customized adaptions a supplier’s creative thinking, organizational changes and hard work. Wiersema (1997) also explains that for a supplier to be able to adapt to customer’s different desires, proactively collected knowledge about customer’s various need is required, such as specific circumstances, cultures and problematic issues. According to Wiersema (1997) it is important for suppliers to have insights about a customer’s geological, ecological, political and financial circumstances that surpass the customer’s own insights about its surroundings since that can lead to impressive achievements for the supplier. John explains that competence is when Getinge is the expert of the business area that the company is in and it is important for Getinge to be considered competent. John says that most of the customers do not know what solution is best for them. He means that it is not important for the customers to be competent and that the customers of Getinge not always are competent. John adds that it is Getinge’s duty to be the experts. Getinge should find solutions for the customers that leads to a more simple and effective every day for them. John adds that one of Getinge’s core values is insight and that means that Getinge is the experts of their customers’ firms and that their insight surpasses the customers’. Irina and Anders say that it is very important that Getinge has competence within the business area since the customers do not necessarily have that. Irina adds that Getinge cannot and do not expect the customers to have the same competence as them since Getinge should be the experts helping the customers. Irina means
that it is important for Getinge to be competent in order to help the customers since the products are complex. According to Anders it is essential to effectively be able to fix the customers’ problem when something happens. Anders adds that if Getinge has the competence and is cost-effective when handling problems then that will create a loyal relationship with that customer. According to Anders Getinge wants the customers to think that Getinge has amazing after sales service that is really good and competent as well as available and that the employees of Getinge makes sure that things run as they should.

A supplier with the competence to create adapted solutions for customers works up value in the relationship by providing to free the customers from their present problematic issues that they cannot or will not solve themselves (Wiersema, 1997). By coaching and helping customers to change and improve their processes a supplier approaches closer to the customers and creates additional value for them (Ibid.). When John is talking about Getinge’s second core value integrated solution he mentions that Getinge does not just have products but also the resources to educate the customers and to help them with most of their needs. John explains that Getinge provides the customers with education that make them more competent in the handling of Getinge’s products. Irina means that the competence of Getinge’s customers is limited and to solve this lack of competence the customers get education within Getinge Academy that shows that Getinge is competent. Irina adds that this is done to make the customers understand the benefits of Getinge’s products. According to Irina Getinge educates the customers about infection control and in addition to this Getinge is available with the competence and knowledge about the technical issues since that is too difficult to educate to customers. Anders means that since the customers do not have to be competent it is essential for Getinge to educate them about the products and how they work.

**Satisfaction**

According to Buttle (1996) satisfaction occurs when a customer’s expectations are met or exceeded. Buttle (1996) also states that the key to obtain a customer’s satisfaction is to understand the customer’s expectations that are a mixture of a customer’s personal needs and experience, word of mouth and marketing communications. The three informants all agree that satisfaction is very important, the most important factor of the relational ones that we have discussed in the interviews.

When customers are dissatisfied then they are likely to spread negative word of mouth about the firm that can harm the firm’s prospecting customers (Buttle, 1996). A firm needs to recognize the customers’ expectations and perceptions in order to achieve customer satisfaction (Kobylanski & Pawlowska, 2012). According to Kobylanski and Pawlowska (2012) it is essential to be able to measure satisfaction and that if firms can measure this then they can manage it. John explains that to achieve satisfaction they need to show service and to be available and that it can for example be to answer the phone within three signals. According to John Getinge always tries to be close to the customers and to offer service in order to get satisfaction. John adds that a core
value of Getinge is to appreciate customer satisfaction. He also means that a company can sell the best machines but if there is no service, support or that the company does not answer the phone when the customers need help then the customers will still be unhappy and not satisfied. John states that it is very important that Getinge’s employees are aware of their core values so they can behave according to that. John also explains that it is very important that Getinge’s products have quality and functionality since that is what Getinge stands for and that is what the customers expect. John also adds the importance of word of mouth in order to achieve satisfaction in the durable industry within B2B. He explains that Getinge’s customers are not that frequently buying products since they are durable which means that when it is time for changing the products or buying new ones there is no one of the people that was there when the customers first bought the products. What John means happens then is that the customers listen to other hospitals, which products they have and their experiences of the products and if they are satisfied. Therefore, John adds that the references Getinge receives are very important to them. John also states that it is important for Getinge to not have any dissatisfied customers since the references from them can be crucial if potential customers will buy from Getinge. In order to get satisfaction Irina wants to amaze and exceed the customers’ expectations instead of just meeting them. Irina explains that Getinge is striving to amaze the customers but that the company often meets the expectations and that it also leads to satisfaction. According to Irina the most important thing when wanting to achieve satisfaction is to provide a product with quality. If quality, reciprocity, trust, bonding, communication, empathy, shared values, commitment, conflict handling and competence is achieved then satisfaction is reached and the customers become loyal. Irina adds that it is hard to make all Getinge’s customers satisfied since they all have different expectations. Getinge tries to keep all the customers satisfied but does not always succeed since being satisfied is different between different people. According to Anders satisfaction is the most important factor in the relationships with customers in order to get them loyal and that Getinge needs to meet expectations of both quality and relational factors for it to be achieved.

Payne et al. (1995) state that the satisfaction in a relationship between a supplier and a customer is created after the transaction and when delivering high levels of satisfaction also after the first transaction it can create more transactions with that customer in the future. According to John it is very important that the customers are satisfied and to achieve this customers get offerings with a whole package that can make them more effective in their work. John adds that it is very important that Getinge’s employees who are in contact with the customers are striving to get them satisfied. In order to get satisfied customers the education that Getinge has needs to have high quality and be professional. John explains that Getinge comprehensively works to offer full solutions to their customers and by having a core value in the company to appreciate customer satisfaction we can really make the customers happy. Irina means that it is not just the personality and behavior of Getinge’s employees that influence satisfaction because if the product has a lack of quality then the customers will not be satisfied so it is the combination of quality and all the relational factors that creates success. According to Anders it is essential that it finally works out
and that the customer is satisfied, but it does not have to be perfect from the start as long as the customers’ expectations are met in the end. He adds that it is the full interpretation of all the factors that will determine if the customers will be satisfied or not.

### 5.3 Cross-case analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors influencing customer loyalty</th>
<th>John Hansson</th>
<th>Irina Lindblad</th>
<th>Anders Nilsson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How to achieve reciprocity?</strong></td>
<td>Getinge achieves reciprocity by making sure to show the value of the relationship (through engagement, a good attitude and helpfulness) towards the customer in order for the customer to value the relationship with Getinge.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How to achieve trust?</strong></td>
<td>Getinge achieves trust through what they have done and how well they have performed towards a customer. In this after sales service is essential.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is good</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty but is a bonus</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How to achieve bonding?</strong></td>
<td>Getinge achieves bonding through personal meetings when the relationships can grow stronger so they can find a common ground and understand each other. Bonding is perceived more like a bonus rather than an active strive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How to achieve communication?</strong></td>
<td>Getinge achieves communication by being available, showing a positive attitude and by having continuity and a two-way dialogue that is effective.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How to achieve empathy?</strong></td>
<td>Getinge achieves empathy by understanding the customers’ perspective, how they are rewarded or punished in their own work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared value</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty but Getinge cannot share all values with customers</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and Getinge has to relate to customers’ values</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and Getinge has to respect customers’ values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How to achieve shared value?</strong></td>
<td>Getinge achieves shared value by having local employees working in different markets that share more values with the customers in that area or by having someone who can relate and respect the values without sharing them with the customers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to achieve commitment?</td>
<td>Getinge achieves commitment by being helpful and engaged towards the customers and by showing that the employees of Getinge have done their best towards the customers in order to solve their issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict handling</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to achieve conflict handling?</td>
<td>Getinge achieves conflict handling by solving issues that arise with customers by being honest, correct, fast and sometimes by giving exclusive discounts.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to achieve competence?</td>
<td>Getinge achieves competence by having insight and the ability to integrate solutions for the customers and also by giving them education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is very important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is very important</td>
<td>Influences customer loyalty and is very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to achieve satisfaction?</td>
<td>Getinge achieves satisfaction by understanding and delivering what the customers expect, want and need. The achievement of satisfaction includes both quality as well as all the other relational factors to be fulfilled.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Factors influencing loyalty and how these can be achieved (Own construction)
6.0 Conclusion

In this chapter the result and conclusion are discussed. We relate the result and conclusion to the research questions and to our purpose. Finally, we deliberate regarding theoretical and practical implications, give suggestions for further research and discuss the limitations of our results.

It is getting more and more important for companies to really put an effort on the customers to get long-term loyal relationships and thereby secure their loyalty. During this study we have seen the value of relationship marketing for the B2B-company Getinge. According to this study we realized that for Getinge and their complex products relationship marketing is essential and that the informants are familiar with different factors leading to loyalty and how these can be achieved. The result is more clearly explained below under the two research questions:

R1. Which factors influence a customer’s loyalty in the relationship between a supplier and a customer in B2B?

After analyzing the answers that the informants at Getinge gave us we came up with that all the factors that we have studied in this thesis are important, but that it is one factor that are more important than the others. The analysis showed that the factor satisfaction was the most important factor and a factor that includes all the other factors in order to be achieved. The factor of shared value influence loyalty but not in the way that the supplier needs to share the same values as their customers, they just need to be able to understand, relate and respect the other party’s choice of values. The factor bonding includes some different thoughts from the informants but they agree that when bonding happens it is good, but that it is not something that they actively strive for. The other factors; commitment, conflict handling, trust, competence, empathy, communication and reciprocity are all important and led to customer satisfaction and thereafter the customers become loyal to Getinge. The factors are all important but depends on how many customers Getinge has as well as the level of time that the employees of Getinge can spend with each and every one of these customers. Since the informants did not feel that they could spend enough time with every customer they have to prioritize the factors and sometimes think of bonding as a bonus because of the lack of disposable time. The result of our study shows that a B2B-company like Getinge values the long-term relationships with the customers since the company values customer loyalty in order to increase profits and market shares. As mentioned by the informants it is important to value every interaction with customers since every meeting can be essential so the customers do not switch to another supplier. When we understood which factors that influenced customer loyalty in the case of Getinge we wanted to know how these were achieved according to our additional research question:

R2. How are these factors achieved?

Regarding how the factors that influence loyalty can be achieved Getinge has no special guideline. Getinge just has the foundation based on the company’s core values that show what
the employees of Getinge should stand for. Based on these core values all the employees of Getinge have some sort of a guideline and then that mixes up with every employees’ common sense on how to behave in a relationship with a customer. No relationship is the other one alike is stated by all the informants so there cannot be one specific guideline of how to act. The three informants in this study mean that everything regarding how to achieve different factors of relationship marketing resulting in customer loyalty is adapted to the situation that occurs in consideration with Getinge’s core values. According to this study satisfaction was a factor that included a mixture of all of the other factors in order to be achieved and that makes this factor more important when wanting to achieve customer loyalty. We conclude that the factors of commitment, competence, conflict handling, communication, bonding, empathy, reciprocity, shared value and trust all lead to customer satisfaction, which in turn results in customer loyalty in the case of Getinge. The own created model from the theoretical framework was therefore revised and now it shows how the factors of relationship marketing influence a customer’s loyalty according to this specific study.
6.1 Implications

Theoretical implications
Our study gives a suggested understanding of the factors of relationship marketing that influences customer loyalty and how these can be achieved. These factors and the achievement can enable a new basis for future research in the area of relationship marketing leading to customer loyalty.

Practical implications
This research suggests some practical implications that can be used by Getinge in their work regarding relationship marketing resulting in customer loyalty. First, the influencing factors according to our revised model can be carefully reviewed by Getinge’s employees who are working with customer contact in order to find gaps where improvements are acquired. The employees can then analyze how they individually work with the factors and make sure that all factors are respected since they all according to this study influence customer loyalty. Second, the results from John, Irina and Anders of how the influencing factors can be achieved can be used in Getinge’s future sale workshops with the purpose to inspire other employees how to manage their customer relations leading to loyalty.

6.2 Further research

For the result in this study to be validated and generalized there is a need of further research. In order to analyze if the result of the factors influencing loyalty and how these are achieved according to our informants matches with how it actually would be then observations could be performed. Through observations can the spoken result from the interviews be compared with the observed behavior and by this find similarities or differences in the result. We also suggest that it would be interesting to compare the result of Getinge with other companies, both in Sweden and abroad to see if there are any differences in the change of environment and culture and other aspects regarding the factors of relationship marketing leading to customer loyalty.

In this study a qualitative method was used and we suggest that it would be interesting to use a quantitative method with the purpose to generalize our result. We believe that a quantitative study with different B2B-companies can be analyzed in order to see if the same factors are important within these different firms and how these factors are achieved according to the firms. It would also be interesting to see if the result in one industry would differ between another industry or if that does not interfere at all. When the B2B-companies are analyzed it would be interesting to analyze how the work with customer relationships in B2C-companies is managed and if the factors and the achievement of these from this study can be implemented in the B2C context as well.
7.0 References


**Individual interviews with informants**

John Hansson, General manager at Getinge Infection Control (2014-02-27)

Irina Lindblad, Sales Director at Getinge Infection Control (2014-02-27)

Anders Nilsson, Sales Director at Getinge Infection Control (2014-02-27)
Intervjuguide

Personlig bakgrund / Företagsbakgrund

1. Är det okej att vi spelar in intervjun?
2. Vilken utbildning har du?
3. Vilken position har du i företaget?
4. Hur gammal är du?

Kundlojalitet

5. Vad är kundlojalitet enligt dig?
6. Hur viktigt är det att ha lojala kunder?
7. Vilka egenskaper består kundlojalitet av…

- Är det viktigt att kunden litar på er? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?
- Är det viktigt att kunden är nöjd? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?
- Är det viktigt att ni är kompetent? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?
- Är det viktigt att kommunikationen med kunden är god? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?
- Är det viktigt att ni “bondar”? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?
- Är det viktigt att ni kan hantera konflikter? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?
- Är det viktigt att ni delar samma värderingar? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?
- Är det viktigt att känna empati gentemot kunden? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?
- Är det viktigt att ni är engagerade i kunden? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?
- Är det viktigt att relationen är ömsesidig? Om ja, varför? Hur uppnår ni detta?

8. Finns det någon mer egenskap som du anser leder till kundlojalitet?
**Interview guide**

**Personal background/ Company background**

1. Is it okay if we record the interview?
2. What education do you have?
3. Which position in this company do you have?
4. How old are you?

**Customer loyalty**

5. What is customer loyalty according to you?
6. How important is it to have loyal customers?
7. Which relational factors are included in customer loyalty?

Is it important that the customer trust you? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

Is it important that the customer is satisfied? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

Is it important that that you are competent? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

Is it important that communication with the customer is good? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

Is it important to bond with the customer? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

Is it important to handle conflicts? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

Is it important that you share the same values as the customer? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

Is it important to be empathic towards the customer? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

Is it important to be committed to the customer? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

Is it important that the relationship is reciprocated? If yes, why? How is this achieved?

8. Are there any more factors that you perceive leads to customer loyalty?
This dissertation was written by Pia Andersson and Klara Karlström during the Master's Programme in International Marketing 2014.