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**Relating Systems Thinking and Design
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Customer Centricity: Transformation through systems oriented design from the inside of an agricultural corporation in Central and South America

Leandro Porrás Molina

Like many other industries in the past decades, the agricultural industry is undergoing a digital transformation that requires organisations to have the customer at the centre of their strategy. With this ongoing case study, I seek to experiment with a systems oriented design practice and approach to facilitate the transition from within a multi-national organisation operating across eight different countries in Central and South America to go from a product-centric mindset and strategy to a customer-centric organisation at its core.

Gigamapping has been used as a base tool to explore the different actors, processes, and issues involved in this transition to further explore and develop how cross-country and department collaboration can support the paradigm shift required to achieve the goals set out by top management. Other layers are added by bringing in other relevant stakeholders to convey communication and relationship connections within the boundaries of the system to be transformed, prototype interventions, and importance-performance analysis of such potential interventions within the system to determine a viable course of action. The results of this work are analysed in order to determine the value and application of systems oriented design in such a context.

KEYWORDS: customer centricity, omnichannel strategy, digital transformation, agriculture industry, multi-national corporation, systems oriented design, gigamapping, ZIP analysis

RSD TOPIC(S): Cases & Practice, Economics & Organizations, Policy & Governance.

Presentation Summary

Working as the experience design lead in the Digital Transformation Hub of DISAGRO¹, I'm approaching the corporation's transformation from a systems-oriented design perspective to a Customer-Centric Organization, drawing on my 45+ years of tradition in Product-Centric Strategy. I share the process of using gigamapping (Sevaldson, 2018) to involve the other areas²: Digital Marketing, Business Processes and Technology, leading the transformation efforts within the company to align the strategy in a holistic view that is to impact the operations in 8 countries: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Ecuador, each with their own management from corporate HQ office³.

Case Study

At the beginning of 2023, the company's Digital Transformation Hub department proposed to undertake an Omnichannel course offered by the Universidad Católica de Chile to all top management staff from the region in an effort to resolve some of the issues⁴ that had risen from the implementation of an e-commerce platform over the last two years for the company's B2B customer base.

¹ DISAGRO is a 40+ years old agricultural supplies manufacturing company based in Guatemala with a wide product portfolio and business units serving customers in 8 different countries across Central and South America with the purpose of driving development and food production for the region through fostering competitiveness of the agricultural industry by providing world best in class agricultural products, services and technologies.

² Areas from the Corporate Digital Transformation Hub are Product Development, Business Strategy, Digital Marketing, Service Center, Data Science, and Experience Design. After following an omnichannel strategy four pillars were defined and assigned to specific areas as follows: Culture Change to Digital Marketing, Processes to Business Strategy, Customer Centricity to Experience Design, and Technology to Product Development.

³ Each country has their own organizational structure and management; however, they all align with strategy set out by the board of directors which is executed and supported by the staff in corporate offices in Guatemala.

⁴ Issues ranging from customer adoption, as well as rejection from sales personnel and backoffice staff that led to disruption in operating processes and damage to the perceived customer experience; it also brought to light some "manual" processes that were out of policies and were only stressed with the adoption of an e-commerce platform (i.e. price list management, product management).

As a result of this training, the conclusion from the facilitator⁵ to the participants was that before an omnichannel strategy could be implemented, the company had to change its strategy and focus to a customer-centric one, and as a result, an omnichannel experience would happen by mapping out the cross-channel customer journeys (Amar et al., 2020).

After the aforementioned training, a three-year roadmap was established to tackle the various challenges ahead, divided into five different pillars⁶, each led by a member from the Digital Transformation Hub. With this plan, I set out to do a Systems Design Intervention, starting by facilitating a gigamapping session between four members of the team in order to activate existing knowledge as well as to analyse the contents mapped out to “search for possible new relations, intervention points, and innovations” (Sevaldson, 2022). As a result of this exercise, we found various areas with potential problems⁷ to be further explored, as well as an immediate intervention which involved laying out a company-wide survey⁸ to identify areas within the organisation with the highest perceived frustration by customers which would indicate a focus for redesign to align with the current strategy.

By carrying out the gigamapping session using pen and paper in the same room, it became clear that there was a need to allocate time to do this analysis and reflection on the topic and strategy for customer-centric transformation in a free manner yet made tangible and facilitated by a tool such as the Gigamap, furthermore having the time to

⁵ The course facilitator is Hernan Palacios Correa from the school of administration at the Universidad Católica de Chile, who was sought out because of his knowledge and expertise in e-commerce and omnichannel marketing strategy.

⁶ The pillars defined by the Digital Transformation Director were: Cultural Change, Customer Centricity, Organization and Processes, Technologies, and Conflict Management. Each led by a member of the core team as follows: Digital Marketing Lead, Experience Design Lead, Business Owner, Product Owner, and Service Center Lead, respectively.

⁷ The areas with potential problems identified through the gigamapping exercise are the lack of an established corporate CRM system, Product Pricing Management, Product Stock Management, Logistics and Delivery Pricing Management.

⁸ The survey mechanism was chosen as a means to reach the largest possible amount of answers and perceptions from the majority of customers, as well as to provide a means for freedom of expression from the customers and avoid potential biases on their answers if a company representative asked the questions.

lay out one's own views on the topic followed by a group discussion brought to light areas of interest, commonalities and differences within the team that ended up in a shared understanding of each other's points of view. However, the sense of abstraction from the exercise led to some doubts about what actual work or action items needed to be carried out immediately afterwards; thus, by the end of the session, each team member returned to their day-to-day activities, making it difficult to keep the momentum going in the conversation that had just taken place.

After carrying out a ZIP analysis (Sevaldson, 2018) to go deeper into the gigamapping exercise, the following departments from each country were identified as key stakeholders in the organisational transformation plan: Top Management, Sales, Product Management, Customer Service, Logistics, Supply Chain, Distribution, and Finance. The following processes were concluded to be in need of a redesign: Pricing, Stock, Delivery, Offering, Purchasing, Tracking, Customer Relations, and Payment. By mapping out the different processes carried out by different departments in relation to customer centricity, these issues arose as being top priorities for the team: inter-department communication, process ownership, and customer feedback loop.

Reflection and ongoing work

Having this overview of the challenge ahead, it became crucial to set out a company-shared vision to support the effort required as proposed by Edmonson (2017), and such a vision has been discussed, if not officially communicated, as the need to stay relevant in the future⁹ and form customer loyalty. However, there is the question of each individual's personal goals and assumptions that might come into conflict with the work to be carried out (Wettre et al., 2019) that need to be brought out to the working group and addressed, as of this moment individual priorities and goals may be different from the organization-wide mission to become customer-centric.

Furthermore, if such a transformation requires breaking traditional silos that have been formed over the years and cross-department collaboration is needed for complex

⁹ DISAGRO has position itself as a market leader in each of the countries it operates in, however it has come to recognize the changing nature of times and seeks to stay ahead of the competition and secure its market position for the future.

problem-solving challenges such as the one ahead, then the cultural change pillar should include, other than a customer-centric mindset, a collaboration mindset that involves embodying team-learning behaviours (Edmonson, 2017), this to enable the effective exchange of diverse perspectives already inside the organisation. Other exercises, such as the ones provided by Wettre et al. (2019 & 2022), can be a form of intervention to foster collaboration and understanding between the various departments and geographies involved in the transformation process.

Additional work needs to be carried out in mapping out relations between individuals to clarify who needs to be involved in the transformation process—and understand their role in it—in order to bring to light possible leverage points for the desired company transformation, as well as to test and quickly prototype interventions in key parts of the system in order to do an importance-performance analysis that would allow for reflection, iteration and experiential learning (Sevaldson, 2022) and at the same time shed light into the most viable interventions to achieve the desired outcomes.

In conclusion, customer centricity requires a holistic understanding of the organisational system and its interdependencies to align processes, structures, and cultures toward customers' needs. In this context, SOD can play a crucial role in navigating the complexities involved both inside and outside the organisation to understand and meet the evolving needs of the customers in the market DISAGRO operates in.

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