



The customer-centered transformational journey

Bernard Jaworski¹

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It is often the case that when a new CEO takes the reins of a company a “transformational journey” follows. These transformational journeys can take many forms. Increasingly these journeys have some form of “customer centricity” at their core. Certainly, other themes are present—operational excellence, innovation, and leadership—to name a few. However, more often than not, some form of customer focus is central to the transformation.

While we have a rich history of literature on customer centricity, we have much less understanding of these multi-year journeys. The key challenge for academics is to understand how to “expand our lens” to examine journeys that can take several years to complete. How does one start the customer centered journey? What levers does the organization pull to accelerate the journey? How does one sequence these journeys?

Perhaps the most critical role is that of the CEO. What are the characteristics of leaders who sustain their single minded focus over this length of time? How does the leader “move the entire organization” from one mindset to another mindset? Leading change has certainly been studied by leadership scholars, however, this work tends to be “leading change in general”—not specific to leading a customer centered transformation. The opportunity exists for scholars to lean in on this void in our literature.

In this spirit, Seán Meehan’s interview with Piyush Gupta CEO of DBS in Singapore is an excellent case study of an exceptional journey to be customer centered with an additional twist of managing digital transformation at the same time. It is a remarkable transition. In less than a decade it went from being “damn bloody slow” to the world’s best digital bank and ultimately the world’s best bank. How did this transition unfold? What was the role of Gupta in guiding, leading, and driving this transition?

Following this interview, co-authors Arne De Keyser and Yevs Van Vaerenbergh provide a comprehensive framework to “map” these large scale transformation journeys. They introduce seven levers as a basis to map and identify future research areas. The seven levers are: (1) leadership & governance, (2) value-based segmentation, (3) employee involvement, (4) technology, (5) ecosystems, (6) organizational culture & structure, and (7) key performance indicators (KPIs). Given these seven levers, the authors then “map” knowledge gaps in each domain. It is a rich, comprehensive springboard for future research in this important area of corporate transformation.

Bernie Jaworski
Section Editor, Practice + Theory

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✉ Bernard Jaworski
bernie.jaworski@cgu.edu

¹ Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA 91711, USA