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To: Wei, Yong-Kang (Instructor)

From: Belen Castellanos Frederick

Subject: El Gollo Observation – Document Use

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In Jaco, Costa Rica, a coastal tourist-town on the Pacific coast, there are many small businesses that struggle to survive, and government offices are under the supervision of armed guards. Being sensitive to the nuances of the Costa Rican informal economy, I was not surprised that most businesses write as few receipts or documents as possible in order to avoid paying taxes. The corruption at the federal level inspires corruption at the local level, where small businesses don't want to give up money just to have it stolen by politicians at the federal level. On another note, small businesses fear the rise of competitors who want to imitate their business model, so most are not open to someone documenting how they do business, aside from the tax avoidance. However, there are a few national chain stores here that are very careful to meet all documentation standards established by the federal government. In order to complete this assignment, I chose El Gollo, a store that sells common household items.

The customer experience involves a series of documents. At El Gollo, I worked with worker, Jakir Brenes Moraga and cashier Sheysi Jimena Varga. The first document produced for the public is a label taped to every model item on the shelves or floor. It has item details and three pricing tiers: cash and two credit options for micropayments. Customers look at these labels to know the prices and feel assured that they are not being quoted random prices based on their appearance or nationality.

The second document is a decision document. When a customer communicates a decision to purchase one or more items, the salesperson pulls out a pad of "decision" documents where the product detail and quantity is noted, as well as your name and their name, and your Costa Rican id number. The salesperson fills out one of these papers, then walks the customer to the back area where a micro document is used. The customer pulls a number from the ticket roll and sits down in a waiting area with other customers. The decision document is handed to one of the employees sitting in customer-facing cubicles behind a thick glass shield, who glances at it and puts it in a basket.

After a wait, each customer is eventually called to one of the cubicles. Sometimes only one cubicle is available, so the cubicle inhabitant already has the customer decision document. The cubicle person will ask for a personal email and Costa Rican ID again, before inputting your data. At this point, the cubicle person inputs the data from the decision form into the computer and sends a receipt to a shared printer. The receipt is printed and stapled to a warranty document and ink stamped. They also email an electronic receipt to the customer. They file their copies of the documents in a physical file cabinet.

The customer is handed the document and must look for the salesperson to pick up their item. The salesperson tells the guard that the order is paid. The customer waits for the salesperson to hand over the item or set it outside in the case of someone needs transport, e.g. for a large appliance. In the case of transport, the customer makes a verbal agreement for a price and pays cash to the truck driver who then transports both the customer, and the item purchased to some agreed-upon address.