

Human-Centered Organizations from a Systems Thinking Perspective

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The general principles established in systems theory can be used to study and understand the inner-workings of any given organization. As each human is an embodiment of many different systems working together harmoniously, it becomes clear that any group, organization, or community of humans simply adds a higher level of systematic abstraction. Much as each organ within the human body is a subsystem promoting the overall system's purpose (life), each member of an organization plays a similar role facilitating an organizational purpose. The positions employees, volunteers, and members play within an organization are easily observed, understood, and quantifiable. Recent systematic studies into human-centered organizations, however, have placed an increasing importance on the roles an organization's customers, clients, and/or patrons play as influential feedback. This has led to new theories emphasizing the importance of using human-centered design processes.

According to the *International Organization for Standardization (ISO)*, one of the primary characteristics of a human-centered organization is its ability to “make usability and accessibility strategic business objectives” (ISO, 2016). To increase effectiveness in critical decisions, human-centered systems theories have applied principles of general systems theory to the design of an organization and its output as a whole. Because an organization's perception is tied directly to its products and/or services, a human-centered design approach can help an entire organization become increasingly human-centered. (Sabine, 2006, p. 2). An example embodying these theories can be found in Zhang, Patel, Johnson, Smith, and Malin's “human-centered distributed information design (HCDID)” model (2009, pp. 43-4).

Each phase in the HCDID design model stresses the importance of informational feedback from the end-user. Expanding on traditional design processes, the HCDID model adds additional informational feedback loops from end-users to guide the flow of design. According to the HCDID model, this informational feedback comes in four categories: user analysis, functional analysis, task analysis, and representational analysis. With each different type of analysis conducted by the end-user, these categories help the HCDID take an effective human-centered approach to designing software and information systems. (Zhang, Patel, Johnson,

Smith, & Malin, 2009, p. 43). Focusing on the end-user, this model emphasizes a product's usability and accessibility. By adding additional informational feedback, the HCDID model strives to help organizations make positively impactful design decisions from a human-centered and systematic approach. Focusing primarily on the customer's needs, HCDID helps improve customer satisfaction. Choosing a human-centered approach can "design desirable relationships for people both inside and outside the organization, using product development as the vehicle to shape these relationships and ultimately the organization itself" (Junginger, 2006, p. 3). By placing a high value on customer satisfaction, satisfied customers will, in turn, place a high value on the products and services offered by a specific company.

In addition to influencing the design process, S. Junginger observes the ability for human-centered product development to "transform [an] organizational environment." Junginger further establishes that the common outcome of every design process is an eventual product, and "an organization can be a product in its own right" (2006, p. 2-3). Applying systems thinking to Junginger's claim, it is easy to see that an organization (as a system) has an inherent influence on all the subsystems within, and vice versa. Therefore, Junginger's claims regarding users rarely distinguishing between a product and provider find increasing significance. Following systematic logic, it becomes clear that customer satisfaction forges a direct relationship with perceptions of an organization as a whole. To promote customer satisfaction, human-centered design models have simply added new channels of communication between an organization and end-user. Many shortcomings and problems with a product/service are hard to foresee and are not often discovered until after public release. By taking a human-centered approach, the design process can play a significant role in promoting customer satisfaction with both a product/service and its provider.

Ultimately, each additional channel of communication offers a chance for an organization to become increasingly human-centered. With this communication providing the informational feedback guiding design, companies can release products that promote a positive perception. By giving appropriate consideration to the end-users, an organization can build quality customer relationships. With positive perception ultimately influencing the overall success of an organization, the significance of human-centered design becomes quite clear.

References

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