

Expert opinion

Digitizing companies: industrial processes with experimental processes

By Nicolas Odet, Hardis Group Executive Vice President

With the growth in digital technology, value creation is now organized more around services than around products. This is a shake-up for businesses, who need to switch from an industrial process culture, to an economic model based on experimentation, agility and complicity with its customers.

The legacy of the industrial revolution

While the industrial revolution now seems far away, its legacy is still very much a force to be reckoned with in companies. Work is organized to suit the mass production of standardized products and services designed for the tastes and needs of the greatest number.

In the industrial model, the aim was to produce more, quicker. This led to a specialization of tasks, especially embodied by Henry Ford, and to work organized in silos: R & D, production, sales, marketing and communication, support, etc. In this model, the processes of development, promotion, marketing and even customer relations are generally themselves highly standardized, again with the stated goal of improving the company's productivity.

From the industrial revolution to the digital revolution

But what worked for over a century and a half seems to have reached its limits, with the advent of the Internet. This new area of expression, which allows everyone to give his opinion, share with others, or even organize a form of opposing force, has profoundly changed the situation: when a product or service is poor, the information spreads quickly on the Web.

Faced with customers who now both create and consume and who want to have their say, companies have no choice but to profoundly change the relationship they have with them. Exit commercials and half-kept promises! To attract and retain a customer as expressive as he is unfaithful, brands must now engage in dialog, justify and prove the value and quality of their products and services, or even give them meaning.

Ultimately, value creation is today more about customer interactions and (customized) services surrounding the product than the product itself. In this context, the strength of digital technology is to create value quickly and efficiently. And contrary to popular belief, digital services are not "virtual" or "less human": they instead make it possible to "humanize" all stages of the customer relationship, to make the process customer-centric (from designing a service to after-sales) and to propose a unique experience and journey.

At a time of experimentation and iteration

However, at the same time the digital revolution has also brought about a significant reduction of time-to-market. Demanding and less loyal than before, today's customers want

everything and they want it now. And they have no hesitation in turning away from one brand as long as another, more agile one is more responsive to their needs.

To quickly offer digital services that create value, brands now have every reason to proceed by iteration: launching a digital service, even if it is not 100% complete or successful, and then developing by integrating consumer opinion. This is an approach that can at first seem risky but which has the advantage of reducing the time-to-market, and transforming the risk of being discredited into a genuine opportunity, through the link created with consumers.

So out with long, standardized processes of the industrial age. And enter the agile company, interaction with customers, cooperation between the various operational departments, and experimentation. More a revolution than a development, and one that requires an in-depth transformation of the company at all levels: organizational, managerial, HR, etc. This type of transformation can hardly be implemented in "big bang" mode, and should also lead to in-house testing.

About the author

Nicolas Odet, Hardis Group Executive Vice President

Nicolas Odet joined Hardis Group in 2000 and successively held the positions of Head of Sales and Marketing in the New Technologies Skills department, Director of the Infrastructure and Facilities Management Department from 2006 to 2008, and Director of Services, Marketing and communication from 2009 to 2012. In particular, he led the transformation of Hardis Group's offering to cloud computing. Executive Vice President of the Hardis Group since early 2013 and a member of the executive committee, he helps to define the group's strategy and manage its operational implementation.

Prior to joining Hardis Group, Nicolas Odet held the position of business engineer at IBM (systems and storage division) and Sagem (network and optical fiber solutions).

Nicolas Odet graduated from Grenoble Ecole de Management in 1998 with a degree in technology management.

About Hardis Group

Hardis Group was created in 1984. It is a software publishing, consulting and IT services company which helps its customers to digitize their services. Ever since it was created, the company has built growth in a resolutely different way, based on pragmatism and the core values of local presence and a strong commitment to both customers and employees. The founding directors still run the company, 25% of employees are shareholders, and all the personnel is based in France.

Hardis Group focuses on seven major sectors: infrastructure and facilities management, development and Third-Party Application Maintenance (TPAM), consulting and project owner support, business intelligence, logistics and transport (Reflex solutions), development tools (Adelia Studio), and payroll outsourcing (Saphyr software).

As a software publisher, Hardis Group is capable of integrating its own solutions and can also call on the services of a network of partners. Its consultants are experts in high-quality IT project methodologies (such as ITIL and CMMI).

Hardis Group posted turnover figures of €54.7 million in 2012. To date, the Group has more than 2,500 customers and employs 630 people. Its head office is located in Grenoble, with four other branches in Lyon, Paris, Lille and Nantes.

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