

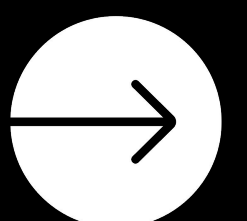


Lucas Urbano
Procurement Adventurer

Intro

What better place to meet than the staff restaurant at the top of Unilever House, London - the view over The Thames and city beyond is incredible! Over a plant-based burger from the Vegetarian Butcher and Magnum Icecream (both Unilever Brands) Lucas and I reminisced about our time working together at Danone and the motivating work he's now doing on **sustainable procurement at Unilever.**

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How did you pick procurement as a career?

I initially began my career in operations at a small factory in Brazil. While I had aspirations of transitioning into procurement, a unique opportunity arose to work in **Sustainability for Danone** in Paris. Given my keen interest in sustainability, my decision was clear, and we made our way to France. Interestingly enough, my career interests have since intertwined and merged.

**"I noticed the
disconnect between
Sustainability and
Procurement Teams"**

What was your role in Paris and why was it so pivotal to your career?

In Paris, I joined Danone during a fascinating period, coinciding with the 2015 Paris COP. My role revolved around **positioning Danone's climate strategy on the global stage**. It was during this time that I noticed a disconnect between Sustainability and Procurement Teams.

Typically, the Sustainability Team formulates the sustainability strategy, while the Procurement Team possesses the authority and resources to implement it. However, these two aspects don't always align as seamlessly as they should. Addressing this issue became a focal point in my career. I came to understand that when sustainability is at the core of the procurement strategy, and suppliers are engaged closely, remarkable positive change can be achieved.



**"This up-bringing
instilled in me a
deep appreciation
of the soil"**

How did sustainability get into your blood in the first place?

Growing up in Ribeirao Preto, Brazil, often referred to as the capital of Agribusiness in the country, I witnessed first hand the **environmental impact humans can have**. In this agricultural town, where sugarcane cultivation is prominent, farmers used to burn the leftover materials after the harvest. I distinctly remember the skies filled with debris from the fires, and the surrounding area covered in layers of ash. When the authorities banned this practice, it brought me immense joy, and a seed was planted within me.

Additionally, my grandfather and father had small-holder plots where they grew and sold vegetables. This upbringing instilled in me a deep appreciation for the soil and the process of nurturing growth, further fueling my passion for sustainability.



What has been the highlight of your time in procurement?

During my tenure at Danone, one of the highlights was **orchestrating a strategic U-turn on a major project** that wasn't progressing as planned. This involved rebuilding relationships with farmers and making rapid decisions to secure the necessary fruit. It was an incredibly challenging task, especially considering the backdrop of the Covid pandemic.

Why did you transition to your role in sustainability?

While I have a deep passion for procurement, there are **significant sustainability questions that I am eager to address**. Currently, I believe that my procurement experience, combined with collaboration with colleagues from non-obvious stakeholders such as NGOs, start-ups, and implementers of regenerative agriculture, allows me to make the greatest impact in the realm of sustainability.

What does sustainable procurement mean to you?

To me, sustainable procurement entails **integrating and embedding sustainability principles** into the very fabric of the procurement system. It should not be treated as an optional add-on. Additionally, it is crucial to have a clear vision of the desired outcomes, as sustainability cannot be merely an academic exercise. We are now at a critical juncture where procurement must engage with and tackle holistic challenges that surpass our traditional boundaries.

**"The key is to
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How can procurement teams step change sustainability results?

Procurement teams often want to make a difference in sustainability, but it can be challenging given the daily pressures of supply and cost management. Therefore, the key is to **transition from mere commitment to effective operational delivery**, although this is easier said than done. It may require an entrepreneurial mindset and innovative approaches to achieve tangible results.

What is Unilever doing to deliver Net Zero?

Unilever has developed a comprehensive and well-considered plan to reach Net Zero emissions by 2039. The initiatives are tailored to specific business sectors, considering the materiality of emissions sources. For instance, the Regenerative Agriculture project, which I lead, plays a vital role in Unilever's Net Zero strategy. By applying the principles of **regenerative agriculture**, we can achieve numerous benefits, including soil health, improved water quality and quantity, enhanced biodiversity, and a reduction in the overall carbon emissions associated with ingredient production. Moreover, regenerative agriculture allows us to sequester and remove carbon from the atmosphere, contributing to our sustainability goals.

**"Sometimes the
procurement
mindset can be
too narrow"**

Which are the key sustainability skills procurement need to focus on?

Sometimes the procurement mindset can still be too narrow. To deliver operational delivery, we need to consider the **whole system and end-to-end supply chains**. Franck Riboud (ex-CEO of Danone) made the following statement: “It is a common sense observation that no living organism, either a company, can grow and develop in a deprived environment or a desert.”

We also need to understand what and who is needed to make the change – NGOs, Farmers, Government Bodies and so forth.

For sure it's often a people thing. We sometimes find the rationale to make positive change is clear but paradigms are so ingrained that people don't want to change. So we have to overcome this.

Who are your sustainability heroes?

I had the privilege of meeting one of my heroes, **Muhammad Yunus**, who won a Nobel Peace Prize for his work in spreading the concept of microcredit to help impoverished individuals start businesses. My second hero is **Marina Silva**, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change in Brazil. Despite facing immense pressure, she remains humble, resilient, and innovative in her role.



**"Procurement's
scope will extend
far beyond its
current boundaries"**

What will Procurement look like in 15 years time?

Difficult to say but I can highlight some key themes. Procurement's scope will **extend far beyond its current boundaries**, and we will dedicate significant time addressing sustainability, access to food and energy, democracy, and artificial intelligence (AI).

Can anyone replace David Attenborough?

No one can truly replace David Attenborough, but there is room for someone else to carry forward his legacy. It would be wonderful to witness someone continuing his impactful work.

Who would you like to be for the day?

I would choose to be **Ursula von der Leyen**. I admire her authority and the potential to make game-changing progress in sustainability. Plus, her elegance is inspiring!



How do you like to relax outside work?

I typically spend time with my family outdoors, playing with my two daughters and our dog. Additionally, I find relaxation in cycling through the mountains, with a desire to explore more Alpine cols. Fishing is another way I unwind, and a recent trip to Argentina with my dad and brother was truly special.



Rapid fire

Amazon Rainforest or Brazilian Beach?

I suggest exploring the unique ecosystem of the **Atlantic Forest in Brazil, which combines forests and beaches.**

Magnum or Ben & Jerry's?
Ben & Jerry's.

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