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# Positive Leadership Interview with Víctor Pérez Díaz

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# “The Company is a citizen and, as such, it must behave in accordance with civil ethics”

Víctor Pérez Díaz, Chairman of the Spanish Committee of Experts on the Sustainability Factor of the Public Pension System

Today's world “is not globalised in a standardised manner, largely because internationalisation has not completely entered into everyday life”. These are the words of Víctor Pérez Díaz (Madrid, 1938), Chairman of the Spanish Committee of Experts on the Sustainability Factor of the Public Pension System. This scientific expert and scholar of economic, political and cultural sociology in Spain and Europe underlines the importance of business cooperation, since “without internal and external cooperative environments, it is difficult for companies to survive at medium and long term. Author of more than 50 books, Pérez Díaz has been recognised for his “impeccable” scientific career, the conceptual rigour of his investigations in the field of empirical sociology, his public cooperation and his work in the analysis of public authorities, as well as for the impetus of an emerging group of eminent sociologists in various institutions.



Víctor Pérez Díaz, Chairman of the Spanish Committee of Experts on the Sustainability Factor of the Public Pension System.

**In times like these, when it seems as if we are coming out of the crisis, how do you think a leader and senior executive should act? On what areas do you feel they must focus their management?**

It depends on the type of industry or company they are involved in, but in general, there are various ways of looking at what it is to be a leader. I suppose a central idea could be that of a person who brings order in the present and future and who, therefore, generates a feeling that there is an ordered horizon ahead.

“Order” can also be understood as “service”. It is not so much a position of superiority over others, but rather that of a companion and driver behind the group that the person serves. This is quite a post-modern idea: leadership in which the leader does not occupy a position above others, but rather in the middle, driving everyone forward.

This is linked to taking advantage of the resources at the leader's disposal and having a sound understanding of the environment in which he or she operates. That is to say, the leader must understand both external policies (what we do in the world, how it works and

what opportunities it offers us) and what he or she has inside, the resources available and those which can be strengthened.

**Do you feel that there is a difference between leadership exercised at a private company and leadership at a public institution or body?**

In both cases there is a responsibility to be accountable and provide reasons, despite the two types of organisations being led through different mechanisms. In the case of public bodies, there is a transparency rule, a responsibility to potential voters which is fundamental. One must also respond to what it means to invite possible queries or questions and not become entrenched.

Both of these are typical features in the world of businesspeople and entrepreneurs. The thought that we are under obligations from above sounds somewhat archaic and, probably, unacceptable nowadays for many people, who need to be persuaded with reason.

Also, the fundamental reasons are the facts: what matters are not just words, but rather that what is done is done efficiently and responds to social needs or demands.

**In a matter as delicate as pensions and other social issues, what kind of sensitivity must a leader have or what does society expect from him or her?**

With regard to all matters related to a welfare system, business leaders must know that there are certain general public political problems which require accountability, justification and legitimisation of what is happening. This legitimisation has to do with how the answer to the needs of the "most vulnerable" is formulated in the environment.

Therefore, it is not just about responding to the needs of the independent earners who pay for the services they need, but rather the mentality would be one of a society with a mutual benefits system, calculating

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**"Youngsters must be themselves, be free, take their own risks and make an effort to do things at their own risk"**

costs. There is another dimension in this environment: a society in which those who are able have moral and emotional obligations to the vulnerable and dependent.

Those involved in business must also adopt this idea, and they should also bear in mind that the pension problem or any other problem in the welfare system, such as healthcare, social care or education, are factors which affect them, directly or indirectly, both through the workers who depend on their company and the environment they are in.

An implicit factor in all this is that the Company is a citizen of one or various communities and, as such, it must behave in accordance with civil ethics in the world in which it operates.

**Senior executives seem to increasingly cooperate and interact with one another by means of forums or conferences. Do you feel that there is now a tendency towards a more cooperative leadership?**

The expressions "cooperative economy", "cooperative market" or "cooperative leadership" have to do with a particular meaning of the word cooperation. Within this meaning, the terms benefit and profit are not given primary importance.

Another less strict way is how some things mix with others. In any case, without internal and external cooperative environments, it is difficult for companies to survive at medium and long term. If there is no internal cooperation, there are no teams and, accordingly,

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## “Leaders must have the necessary skills to communicate with themselves, with the reality around them and with others who work with them”

there is no continuity of effort. But if there are no ecosystems, i.e. cooperation systems built around the business, companies run out of resources because they need regular external input in long-term, very repetitive interactive games which require mutual trust. Therefore, fair play in the form of partnership and not only competitive, but cooperative, morals are necessary.

If the cooperation is occasional rather than concentrated, companies cannot perform at their best. This is one of the problems in countries where a relative feeling of mistrust prevails, such as those of Latin America, where social confidence levels tend to be lower. This impacts on the density of the ecosystem that surrounds the companies and their trajectory, which is shorter and lower.

**Do you consider internationalisation to be a key element for recovery? How do you perceive Spanish companies' position in terms of globalisation?**

It depends on what type of product and service the company produces, i.e. whether it is oriented towards domestic demand or tourism, or whether it focuses more on exports.

Overall, it seems that, for some time now, we have been experiencing increasing involvement of a supposedly globalised world. It is not globalised in a standardised way, but rather, there is a European world which is more

integrated and other outside worlds forming part of the regular horizon containing small companies which are not used to innovating or expanding beyond their immediate environment.

This clips their wings, and internationalisation becomes a way of talking about technocrats or conferences, as it were, and so it does not enter into everyday life.

**Looking to the future, what message or piece of advice would you send out to the youngest generation, bearing in mind that many of them are the origin or the seed for the generations of future leaders?**

Youngsters must be themselves, be free, take their own risks and make an effort to do things at their own risk. The expectations of parents, godfathers, etc. sound like the classic patronage system. For all the public power protecting you or the powerful friends you may have, you must still be prudent and be alert to the possibilities that the world of the “gods” can offer you. What is fundamental here, is to be daring on an individual level.

**In conclusion, if you could draw up a profile of the ideal leader or senior executive, which three qualities would you consider?**

Firstly, that spirit of freedom and, therefore, confidence in oneself, the ability to trust others because he or she listens to others and is able to include them. Also, the ability to be alert to the environment in which he or she operates.

It is important to reflect with others, conversing, reflecting on reality, questioning it, being sensitive to adjustments experience requires one to make and, therefore, knowing how to talk with oneself.

These communicative qualities with oneself, with the reality around us and with others who work with us are crucial.

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