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Leading in positive

Interview with Luis Maroto

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Luis Maroto | CEO of Amadeus IT Group

Luis Maroto is committed to leadership based on emotions and the experience acquired over the years, to the detriment of mere technical knowledge. For this CEO it is also essential to lead by example and be able to create corporate culture surrounding this attitude every day in the company. He also advocates closeness and transparency with his teams, as well as the generation of a creative and innovative environment that establishes new talent management models.

How does someone prepare for being the leader of a business?

I do not believe that you "prepare yourself" to be a leader. It is a combination of circumstances, evolution, work, etc. Leadership is something that you build with your teams from the start of your professional career. In my case, it is the result of a bit of fortune, which always helps, a definite commitment, being open to changes, working within the organisation, and doing more than what is required of you from day to day. As I mentioned, it also helps to be fortunate enough to be

in the right place and that your bosses value the effort you are making at a particular time and that you have people you can learn from. As a result, you evolve in the organisation.

What are your leadership principles and which do you consider are fundamental to positive leadership?

It is fundamental to have a good team to work with, one that you trust and with which discussions and problems can be addressed. Some humility and prudence are

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necessary when it comes to examining the complexity of the environment in which we are living. We must also avoid overreacting to circumstances, because these situations occur every day in any organisation. You should be close to the teams. Ultimately, management and leadership styles nowadays are not what they were. It's no longer worth being isolated on one floor, you have to know what is happening in the business and in the company as much as possible.

In an economic climate like that of today, what message would you send out to a young person who had just finished his or her studies and was about to enter the labour market?

Firstly, in terms of the knowledge that they have obtained, I would say that they will have to recycle it a lot, and that it is only a set of skills, a basis on which to continue learning. They have to bear in mind that they have not finished their training period, that they will continue to evolve and that they must be attentive in order to continue acquiring the necessary knowledge. Secondly, I would encourage them to have initiative and enthusiasm. We all want people who are optimistic, have a desire to work, take the issues forward and solve problems around us. I am referring to a certain level of energy, enthusiasm, wanting to learn, progression and belonging to an organisation. Finally, although young people generally have a lot of knowledge, they do not know everything, so some humility is necessary to learn from people who can teach them and about the experience of a company.

How must a leader assume their company's good governance and corporate responsibility?

All companies have a responsibility to society. Society gives us a lot, and there is a part that we have to recognise and give back. I am not talking about giving something specific like working with external organisations, I mean something a little more granular. Firstly, you cannot be holding social events within an organisation and then have a company in which working with people and employees is a disaster. Secondly,

we must encourage people to follow a certain social responsibility culture and, thirdly, be attentive to what is happening locally within the society in which we are immersed. In this connection, the company has a certain responsibility, but it is not only to work within the community, but to work together so that the company acts in a sustainable and ethical way.

Within the sphere of activity of a leader, how do you maintain a team's trust in the organisation in an environment of cutbacks such as that suffered as a result of the recent crisis?

Fortunately in Amadeus we have not gone through any restructuring processes, but we have experienced a lot of change: business units and countries in which we have had to restructure, evolve and change. This is absolutely necessary and the only way to do this is by being transparent. You have to explain the reasons, why you do things and get people to understand. Making decisions that are not understood is not the best motivation for the people you work with. In summary, you have to explain well why things are done in that way and be transparent about the reasons.

Innovation has become one of the great levers of growth, but how can you innovate in the field of leadership and people management?

It is necessary to ensure that innovation is present in all stages of the company and that it is used both externally with new business models and product innovations, as well as in internal management. In fact, when you create an environment in which some creativity, freedom and innovation are allowed, managing people guides you to different talent management models. In summary, innovation has to be present in each area, in people management and of course in leadership.

Since you began leading large teams, how do you feel that the leader's figure has evolved? What qualities do leaders need now that they did not need a few years ago?

Leadership in which the person at the top took 99%

“In Amadeus we have experienced a lot of change. You have to explain why you do things and get people to understand.”

of the decisions has disappeared. The world is much more complicated now and this forces management committees or any valued leader figure to depend more and more on the people who have the knowledge and their teams, which have much more experience on the ground. All of this requires a more inclusive leadership style, in which the leader is part of the team. Although it is the leader who finally makes the decisions and takes the risk, the distance between the decision makers and the senior executives has been reduced and that leads to flatter structures with less hierarchy. We now have a management style that is closer, more down to earth and with greater delegation and power for people when making decisions.

Is there a leader you especially admire? Could you explain why?

I would say Nelson Mandela, a very classic example. I think he showed great equilibrium in difficult times and was able to integrate various sensitive matters in a very complex environment with respect and natural leadership. Additionally, he succeeded in embedding his figure, his opinion and his way of doing things into a very complex society.

Moving on now to training, what are a leader's main training needs? Which technical and emotional aspects must training for executives pay attention to nowadays?

The technical part is not the problem, people have more and more training, there are more courses, greater access to information, etc., but the emotional part is a problem. Leaders must maintain a tremendous equilibrium, and know how to listen,

perhaps more than before. Listening is something that is always difficult because leaders tend to resolve and act. I believe that being able to listen, balance and make a more consensual and calm decision that takes into account people's different sensitivities and opinions is something that is learned with age, experience and each person's character. This more emotional aspect is also absolutely necessary to be able to attract and retain talent and to form teams. Technical knowledge is replaced, there are always people who may have the knowledge when making a very technical decision, but most decisions are based much more on intuition and global knowledge than on specific knowledge.

If you could draw up a profile of the ideal leader, which three qualities would you choose?

Perfect leaders suitable for all companies do not exist. There are companies, and even societies, that need different profiles. In fact, we see a lot of the latter on a political level with certain leadership styles needed for certain moments.

In my opinion, a leader has to be balanced when making decisions, they cannot jump from one place to another based on their emotions, they have to be able to motivate, to attract the team, to work as part of a whole team and lead by example. With regards to leading by example, more and more people, especially employees, pay more attention and the example set by what you do is felt by the organisation. To summarise, a leader must be a person who leads by example, has a certain closeness, generates a culture based on this example, maintains an equilibrium and is capable of making decisions.

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