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Interview with María Ángeles Delgado

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“Companies that are not able to grasp this big technological transformation and incorporate it into how they do business will not survive”

María Ángeles Delgado, Fujitsu's General Manager in Spain

In a constantly changing world, savoir faire is essential. María Ángeles Delgado, Fujitsu's General Manager in Spain, knows the sector in which she has worked for over 30 years inside out. Her experience and development have allowed her to understand the keys to successful and efficient leadership. She believes that the world is undergoing rapid change and that a leader should not be a stranger to this reality. Her definition of leaders is clear: “They must have strategic awareness, great communication skills and, above all, be very people-oriented.” María Ángeles Delgado also has a key message for the younger generation: “To move forward, you always have to leave something behind. If we aren't able to give up something we have, it's going to be very difficult to move forward”.



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In a time such as the present, when it seems like we are starting to leave the crisis behind, what should a leader or an executive do? On what areas should they focus their management efforts?

We are starting to emerge from the crisis, but it's also true that while we were in it the world was changing. Business moves at high speed, meaning that we continually access new businesses, new markets, new services and new ways to connect with customers.

All this means that a leader's primary mission today is to guide the organisations so that these companies, at a time of complexity, uncertainty and change, achieve success.

To do this I believe that innovation warrants a great deal of attention. What was until now business as usual, is no longer the business we used to know. Looking after people is of the utmost importance, seeing how we must change our organisation so that we can achieve success in this period of transformation, and a lot of attention must also be paid to communication.

Today more than ever leaders must communicate and have strong people skills, since relationships open up new ways of reaching out to customers, making new alliances and new partners.

In short, the world is now completely different to the place we knew before, and this makes organisations feel a sense of insecurity. Therefore, leaders must transmit security and vision to guide their organisations towards success in this changing world.

Yours is a leading company in the ICT sector, what role is ICT going to play in the future?

Of course, it will play a fundamental role, as ICT is one of the origins and causes at the heart of the transformation we are seeing.

Technology is revolutionising everything. In 2020 there will be over 50 billion devices connected to the internet, including the world of smart devices, where already we aren't just talking about computers and mobile phones, but that any everyday object will be connected to the internet. We can only imagine the new world of possibilities and opportunities that will open up. Behind these changes is technology.

On the one hand, the internet is coming to everyday objects and making them smart; on the other hand, we have this large quantity of data that these objects are able to transmit, what we know as big data; and lastly, we have the ability to manage these large quantities of data, how to convert these data into knowledge, analyse them and draw conclusions, which, furthermore, are useful in helping us to take decisions, so-called business intelligence.

This transformation that technology will make possible will also allow us to do things wherever we are and at whatever time, with all the tools to take decisions wherever and whenever.

All these technologies are genuinely at the root of this transformation. We are heading towards a digital

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economy, where business will not be possible without technology. It's very important that company executives understand this, that they see that technology opens up new business possibilities, new markets, new ways of reaching out to customers, new alliances and new services.

All this is going to be fundamental for competitiveness. I would go so far as to say that companies that are not able to grasp this big technological transformation and incorporate all these technologies into the way they do business will not survive.

Do you think that both the world and executives are ready for this transformation?

Fortunately there is increasing understanding of what the technological transformation is all about. The “Digital Revolution” report, which is sponsored by Fundación Telefónica and which we have just presented, is a magnificent publication because it covers all the aspects of the digital transformation: Not just the technology that makes it possible, but how it will change companies, how we should develop talent, how it will affect security or the legal framework. There is increasing awareness of this change and greater understanding that we have to transform ourselves in order to live in this new digital world.

And it's not an option, we can't choose whether to be a part of it or not, that world is here, establishing itself

“We have to get across to executives and public officials the fundamental role that technology already plays”

rapidly and what we have to do is be part of it as soon as possible. We've come on a long way but there is still a lot to do.

We have to get across to executives and public officials the fundamental role that they have to play and, in fact, that technology plays.

Until now, it seemed that technologies had a process support role and had been, during the crisis years, a cost and efficiency saving tool. But this isn't enough, technology is a competitiveness tool, a way to leverage growth and internationalisation, and a source of new ways to connect with customers and new businesses. Understanding this is fundamental.

We're on the right track but we have to continue working so that we are all truly aware of the fundamental importance of the need to adapt ourselves to this new digital society in which we are already immersed.

You have worked in the world of Information and Communication Technologies for a long time. What do you believe are the peculiarities of this sector? What specific characteristics and competencies do you think executives in this sector should possess?

They must have strong observation skills. Given the speed at which the world is changing, executives have to be able to grasp these changes, before they happen, and deduce the impact they will have and what that will mean for their organisation and their business. Observing what is happening and being able to interpret

it in terms of each company, business and cultural environment is crucial. On the basis of this observation, they must be able to design well thought-out strategies and, above all, be able to carry them out, because we often come up with good strategies but then fail to implement them.

Communication is also important so that the whole organisation falls into line around objectives that are the fruit of this strategy. Every single one of the organisation's employees must understand and know the strategy, because companies are going to have to react extremely flexibly.

Only an organisation with a well-defined strategy that runs in the lifeblood of each one of its employees is going to be able to react very quickly. This is what the world today demands from us. This is the only way that organisations will have ability to collaborate transversally, which is essential when dealing with new businesses or alliances.

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

In training too we must talk about innovation, it's the basis for future success. But innovation meaning the way we do things, the processes, how organisations operate and their attitudes.

In this sense, we have important work to do in the area of training, not just in the sense of providing people with the technical knowledge in any discipline they require, but also in terms of how they look at the new world in which we have to do business.

Training must be focused on developing skills such as, for example, the ability to take risks, which is going to be more important than ever because to succeed you have to be able to take risks. Only leaders who take risks will succeed in the future. Of course, I mean those who know how to assess the risks and how to mitigate them, not those who take them thoughtlessly. Training

must also be highly focused on learning, because every morning we have to tackle different situations, situations which we have never had to tackle before. Therefore, the ability to manage this uncertainty must be developed and transversal-cooperation within the company is essential for this.

Training must be focused on all of these skills and, therefore, on the development of leaders and their organisations.

Research and Development has always been part of Fujitsu's DNA, how can innovation be achieved in terms of leadership, especially in terms of leading teams of people?

R&D is a very important aspect of innovation that allows products or services to be brought to market that incorporate innovative elements which yield profit for the company.

It has been part of Fujitsu's DNA since the company's founding speech in Tokyo 1935, when its first chairman said, "Never lose your passion for research and development." I think we still have it and it has led to our company holding more than 100,000 patents in the market.

But this alone isn't enough. Innovation isn't just about developing new products, it's also the way we do things, the processes. Process innovation is fundamental. Processes, in the new digital world, are processes in which there will be many more players: people, objects, or computers, what we call the "digital ecosystem". Therefore, process innovation is essential.

It also has to be innovative in the way we reach out to our customers, via new relationship channels opened up to us by social networks and technology. We must be innovative in the way our organisation operates. Companies must be very agile in order to confront the challenges they are faced with on a daily basis,

“SMEs must grow in size so that they can successfully begin internationalisation projects”

and react very quickly. Therefore, we also have to be innovative in the way we work. Innovation is in everything and at Fujitsu we know that.

Do you consider internationalisation to be a key factor for recovery? How do you perceive the globalisation of the Spanish company?

Yes, we live in a globalised world in which we must compete. In Spain there are numerous examples of companies that have established themselves internationally and to great success, and we can be proud of them as they are leaders in their respective industries, such as energy, infrastructure and construction.

But Spain is mainly made up of small and medium-sized companies, and it's SMEs that now must embark on the road to internationalisation. In this sense, one task pending for SMEs is for them to start growing so that they can access economies of scale, invest in R&D and successfully begin these internationalisation projects.

Company executives increasingly collaborate and interact with each other, participating in forums, associations and foundations. In this sense, how has executives' role developed? Is there a tendency towards more collaborative leadership?

There's no doubt that one of the fundamental factors of this new digital world we speak about is that previously established relationships have completely changed. For

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example, a customer becoming a partner, or a company we were not aware of in our industry beginning to have common interests with ours.

We have many examples of this in the world I work in. For example, today a construction company could perfectly well be a partner of Fujitsu, since in the healthcare sector, an industry in which we are actively engaged, we are seeing many innovative new business models.

This means that in the same project, for example in the construction of a hospital, we can find a hitherto unthinkable alliance of companies: since they are working together in construction and management, i.e. data centre management. Knowing how to seek new alliance opportunities, areas of collaboration or common interest is going to make us stronger at doing business inside and outside Spain.

That's why I have pointed out that one of the essential skills for any leader is the ability to establish relationships for mutual gain, to recognise who their allies are, including those who until now didn't seem to be. We must include our employees in this same collaborative spirit, be able to make the most of our organisations' talent, and also apply this to our companies.

Every day it is becoming increasingly important for companies to be socially responsible, for our activities to bring well-being and prosperity, to create jobs and to be

sustainable and planet friendly. This collaborative nature, seeing different players as potential allies, is essential for leaders today and in the near future.

If we focus on your case, your professional career, which of your experiences have stood out for you the most?

The experiences which have stood out the most for me have always been the times that have been the most difficult. In the 30 years that I have worked in this industry, I have had the opportunity to experience times of prosperity and times of crisis, either for the economy or our industry, since the industry we're in hasn't just been vulnerable to economic developments but has undergone its own transformations: the mainframe and open systems eras, the arrival of the internet and, today, the digital revolution. All these technological changes have led to a change in the rules of the game.

You learn most when times are at their most difficult because you come out of them stronger. They make you develop a number of skills which we have needed in recent years, such as stamina or the ability to carry out complex tasks without becoming discouraged.

Basically, they build character and experience, which helps you succeed in the future.

Which leaders do you admire most and why?

I've admired leaders who have been very close to me throughout my professional career, from my first boss to the various directors. I've learnt a great deal from them all. As the years go by, you remember what they have taught you, their comments, their decision-making or the help you have received over your career and you are grateful for it. What you take in as you go along, as well as your skills and reflections, are what shape you.

The best and greatest leaders, those who I have had the opportunity to get to know and admire, are the people who I have been closest to.

What messages or advice would you give to young people who are preparing to become the leaders of the future?

Doing everything in our power to combat youth unemployment is a responsibility of all of us who hold executive positions. Our young people are the leaders of the future and we all have the duty to give them what we received when it was our turn.

The most important thing is to return to the basic values: effort, work, commitment, perseverance and stamina. The younger generation is going to come up against an even harder world than the one we have faced, so they must be very well prepared in order to stand their ground in the face of very uncertain situations.

It's also important to know where you want to be in the future. If it's very clear in your head where you want to go and what you need to get there, it will be of great help when you make decisions, because you will know how to distinguish between what will take you there and what will take you off course.

I would tell them that to move forward you always have to leave something behind. Every time I have taken a step forward I have left behind something that was more secure. If we aren't able to give up something we have, it's going to be very difficult to move forward.

If you could create an ideal leader or executive, what three qualities would you choose?

They would have to have great strategic awareness based on observing the changing environment around them. Secondly, they must have a considerable ability to carry things through and communicate to the organisation so that a perfect alignment around objectives can be achieved.

And, lastly, they must be very people-orientated: towards society, towards employees and towards

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all those who may be associated with the business. They must be great at forming relationships, be very people-orientated.

Because people are going to be a key differentiator. We have talked about technology but it is becoming increasingly accessible, which means that competitive advantages are not going to last as long and it will be people who have the ability and intelligence to combine these technologies and use them for the well-being and prosperity of society who will make the difference. Ultimately, I think that being people-orientated is the essential quality in leaders of the future.

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