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“Terminals are going to be transformed into large digital platforms able to provide real time information and respond much faster”



Maurici Lucena | Chairman of Aena.

Graduate in Economics and Business Studies from Universidad Pompeu Fabra (UPF), Barcelona, and Master's Degree in Economics and Finance from the Centre for Monetary and Financial Studies (CEMFI) of the Bank of Spain, and currently the chairman of the Board of Directors and CEO of Aena, S.M.E., S.A.

Prior to joining Aena, Maurici held various executive positions in the public and private sector. He was also a member of and spokesperson for the Socialist Parliamentary Group in the Catalanian Parliament from December 2012 to October 2015.

In this interview Maurici, with his extensive experience in innovation and development in the public and private spheres, talks to us about the role of digitalisation in the aeronautical industry, the importance of decarbonisation in the aviation sector and the keys for leaders of the future.

The pandemic has redefined how we work with and relate to our stakeholders, and minimised trips and travel. How has this affected the aeronautical industry?

The pandemic has obviously changed certain habits, such as business trips, which in many cases are now replaced by video conferences. However, in my opinion, this effect is not going to have an overly large impact on

the high volume of global air transport. In other words, there is going to be certain degree of transformation in terms of business travel, but it will be less significant than suggested by preliminary analyses. Airports and airlines will adapt their range of services to this new reality, but I think that we are going to return to our usual activities much sooner than we thought.

What role is digitalisation and innovation playing in this transformation?

The pandemic has accelerated certain trends in the sector, which have arrived earlier than expected due to the requirements of this exceptional situation. In the case of airports, there are two main aspects to digitalisation. On the one hand, it is going to significantly improve the quality of the services we offer our passengers, because it will make contact between the airport manager and the customer more straightforward, seamless and direct. In this way, the user will be able to arrange services that make their life much easier: car parking, VIP lounges, shopping and restaurants.

Another aspect that is going to be improved by digitalisation is the invisible management of airports. Terminals are going to be able to offer more efficient and higher quality management of their infrastructure. Terminals are going to be transformed into large digital platforms that will be able to provide real time information and, accordingly, respond much faster.

In this regard, how can leaders foster this culture of innovation within companies?

When paradigm shifts occur in business management, the executives' role is a crucial factor. This is due to the fact that the future, competitiveness and success of their companies will depend on the success they achieve in steering organisations in the direction set by digitalisation.

To achieve this, it is crucial that the management team is clear about the diagnosis, what the new corporate policies that need to be implemented are and, on that basis, endeavour to implement those new priorities across the whole organisation.

In addition, I think another challenge facing executives is the need to succeed in building and reinforcing the connections between the different areas of companies, which more often than not tend towards fragmentation, so that implementation of new technologies can only be achieved transversally.

In the present climate, attracting and retaining diverse talent is a key element of business success, since it favours creativity and resilience. However, we continue to see few female role models in positions of responsibility and senior management. What initiatives can companies and authorities develop to foster and retain female talent?

The increasing presence of female talent in all areas of companies and in management teams, in particular, is a reality. More and more, we are seeing a growing body of women in roles of responsibility, which is good news. The guidelines issued by governments to drive the inclusion of female leadership in order to align the social reality with the business reality are very positive.

At a company such as Aena, this has been a very natural process. Since I joined the company in 2018, more women have become part of the management team without the need to take adopt any special measures. In my opinion, this forms part of a natural process, because over the years the number of women in executive positions has increased as a consequence of their experience and training.

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In addition to diversity, sustainability is another of the big challenges facing us as a society. Air transport and logistics companies pose a huge challenge to energy transition. What steps is Aena taking in this regard? How is it taking the lead on the road towards sustainability and in the fight against climate change?

Sustainability and the technology transition required to facilitate it is without doubt the greatest challenge of our time. And this is even more the case in the air transport sector because this sector has a significant carbon footprint. Therefore, decarbonisation of the aviation industry is a priority and is going to have a very decisive impact on the profile of aeronautics in the next thirty years.

Although clearly the starting point, airport infrastructure will obviously decarbonise more rapidly than aircraft. At Aena we are leading by example. By 2026, we will have covered our infrastructure energy requirements, achieving self sufficiency with the solar PV panels we are installing at all Spanish airports, and we will be 100% sustainable in terms of energy. We are also contributing to the rapid electrification of the entire fleet of handling vehicles in use at airports.

However, we are not only concerned about Aena, but also about the third parties that operate within airports, and this factor needs to be included in the company's governance framework: last year we approved a highly ambitious climate action plan and we were the first company both nationally and globally to commit at the Annual General Meeting to reporting separately on the performance of the company's climate action plan.

So far we are on track and we are achieving the goals we have established. If things continue in this way, it means that Aena will be neutral in terms of greenhouse gas emissions by 2026 and we will be a net-zero company by 2040.

Finally, young people are once again those most negatively affected by the current social and economic situation characterised by uncertainty and market volatility. What advice would you give to today's executives and to young people who are just entering the labour market? What attributes will the leaders of the future need?

Young people may take an ambivalent view of the times they are living in. In the space of a few years, they have experienced a series of economic and other types of crises that are unprecedented in terms of

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their magnitude and nature. All these crises may cause the younger generations to feel that they have been unlucky. But I believe they should not forget the bright side: they are a generation with a very high level of education, with access to goods and services that other generations never even dreamed of. For this reason, I think we should make an honest and fair analysis.

However, I understand that they face difficulties in joining the labour market despite their good education. Economic growth and governments' growing sensitivity to inequality should theoretically mitigate this problem. I also believe that there is a glimmer of hope for them when I consider that they are going to work in companies with business models that will differ from the classic model. Companies' business models will be much more diverse and that represents an important opportunity. My advice to those young people is not to be discouraged, because they form part of a generation that is going to have many opportunities, although it is true that in recent years they have suffered complicated economic and social turmoil. But, if you apply yourself, are well qualified and have a little bit of luck, the net balance is positive.

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