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Marc Murtra

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"To create a culture of innovation you must assume risks and provide incentives"

Marc Murtra | Chairman of Indra.

Born in Blackburn (Lancashire, UK) in 1972, Murtra is a graduate in industrial engineering specialized in Machine Mechanics, from the Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingenieros Industriales de Barcelona (ETSEIB) of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. He also holds a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) with a major in Finance from the Leonard School of Business at New York University.

He began his career in the nuclear industry, at British Nuclear Fuels Ltd in the UK, and then worked for the strategy consultancy Diamond Cluster, where he worked for large technology companies. He worked in the Spanish civil service for several years, where he was a specialist in Digital Strategy, Digital Transformation and Public-Private Partnerships. After several years occupying different positions in the public sector, in 2011 he returned to the private sector as an investment banker.

He is currently the chairman of Indra's Board of Directors, and of its Strategy Committee.

As well as chairing a leading global consulting and technology company, with a local presence in 46 countries, you have had a successful professional career in technology, finance and the public sector, ¿how would you define your leadership model? In your experience, what qualities should a good leader have?

I would not know exactly which leadership model defines me from a theoretical point of view. But I can talk about how I try to exercise the responsibilities I hold. Firstly, it is very important to have a very clear idea of where the organisation should be going and what our strategic objective is in a clear, simple and credible way. Secondly, it is essential to have a road map for reaching that target, and to clearly understand the difficulties and the risks. You must also have "sensors" that allow you to be aware of how the market is reacting to your forecasts and how the organisation is progressing towards attaining the targets set. And, of course, you have to have the right people, the right talent, and a team with the right drive to implement this leadership plan.

In terms of leadership, who have been your mentors? Which leaders or important people have inspired you along the way?
My mentors can be divided into two major groups: the famous ones who are well known to the public, and leaders who I have paid attention to and have inspired me. In my opinion, Winston Churchill was a noteworthy historical leader, as a benchmark for leadership based on values; he was able, in very difficult times, to lead and build a new Europe.

Nelson Mandela was another extraordinary leader. After spending 27 years of his life in prison for defending his principles, he was then capable of leading a society in transition with unbelievable generosity.

On a more personal level, I remember certain teachers at school - strict, coherent, inspiring people, who wanted to do things well. I also remember bosses who knew how to combine demands and tension with coherence and explanations. And another undisputed leader, in my opinion, is Isidro Fainé, who converted a provincial savings bank into the leading industrial investment group in Spain.

In the current context, Europe has become a new playing field where companies' technological and digital capabilities play a critical role. The Next Generation EU funds provide proof of this, as they foster greater digitalisation of the economy. How can leaders harness this historical opportunity to transform the Spanish economy and the model of production?
The Next Gen funds are a considerable amount of money with pre-established objectives, and the mechanisms for using them are very specific. Their aim is to transform the economic fabric of Europe. To achieve this several components are needed, and one of the most important is the leadership of the various organisations that participate in that process. From the business standpoint, it is understanding clearly the amount of money that will arrive and to what end, and adapting the organisation so that it can be achieved. This necessarily requires the drive and leadership of many people to ensure that these things happen. The key to managing these funds will be implementation. I believe that the conceptualisation has been done very well, that the legal instruments are those that exist in the various countries, and I think the key is for those who lead the public sector and those who lead the private sector to reach an agreement with generosity and flexibility in order to ensure it is implemented.

Indra is a company notable for its innovative effort and every year it continues to lead the business innovation rankings prepared and published by the European Commission. How can this culture of innovation be fostered within companies?
Innovating is extraordinarily difficult. And to ensure a culture of innovation we need to activate and boost various matters relating to with what is looked at and what is incentivised. Hunters' success is not measured in the number of shots they miss, but rather the amount of game hunted. But the reality of many organisations is that people's progress is capped by the number of errors. The essence of innovation is that without risk there is no return. Risk means the ability to make mistakes. An organisation that wants to be innovative must ensure that the mistakes that have to be committed are made for the right reasons. And you have to reward those who assume risks in a systematic way, for a reason, and who analyse the risk well go ahead.

This change of paradigm also generates enormous opportunities for young people; however, they need to develop the competencies necessary to enter this new labour market. What educational and technical training challenges do we need to encourage talent and the training of tomorrow's leaders?
University training challenges are reasonably well covered, although there needs to be continuity in training in more modern technologies and in more soft skills, such as teamwork, etc. The internal challenges we have relate precisely to teamwork, management with the customer, understanding what a boss is and developing highly specific technical knowledge.

"The key to managing Next Generation EU funds is for leaders, both in the public sector and in the private sector, to reach an agreement with generosity and flexibility in order to ensure it is implemented"

The defence industry has a highly positive effect on society as a whole, as it generates top level technological and industrial capabilities and creates quality jobs, most of which are in STEM subjects. However, we still see few women working in these disciplines. How can we increase women's presence in STEM careers? Which initiatives by companies and public authorities would be most effective?

As regards women working in STEM fields and working at Indra, we have a systemic problem. Today only 10% of students of STEM subjects are women, and that means that in 20 years' time only 10% of engineers with 20 years' experience will be women. So, it is a short-, medium- and long-term problem that is difficult to solve. Everything suggests that this has to have something to do with culture and mentality: you must work with families, in schools, in businesses... If we want to change this, we have to start with five-year-old girls. It is a problem of ethics, justice and fairness: we cannot leave half of the talent pool outside STEM courses.

In addition to diversity, sustainability is another of the big challenges facing us as a society. How can leaders convey the importance of sustainability among their stakeholders?

At Indra we take sustainability very seriously. In our opinion, there are two angles to it; one is more cultural and mental, of explaining to all our stakeholders and enabling the whole world to understand what the importance of sustainability is. And the other angle is incentives: if there are no incentives, it is very difficult for an organisation to adapt. We notice pressure from investment funds that increasingly require companies to be sustainable, and if they are not, then they do not invest. For this reason, at Indra we are working a great deal in this area.

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Finally, Young people are once again the hardest hit by this new crisis marked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the last trace of the pandemic and the acceleration of the digital revolution that in certain sectors is generating a digital and social gap. What positive message would you send to future generations?

There are many things that it would have been very useful for me to have taken on board when I finished my degree. The first is that all the important things, both in your personal life and in your professional life, require a lot of work. Progress tends to be exponential: many years of work, efforts, doing things well, learning, when it looks like there might not be a return... But then it appears. Coincidence is also very important in professional life. And if you want to have an impact, you have to know something that most people don't know, and you obtain that by spending a long time learning.

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