

# Room for **improvement** in business

**W**e have listed Catalonia's business strengths in dealing confidently with a new state. Now we'll analyse the other side: the aspects that need to improve. There is a growing number of Catalan businesses with a level of success inside and outside the country. What follows refers to the rest. The aim is to increase the number of firms able to overcome prejudices and focus on a future of opportunity. So, what are the weaknesses of a typical Catalan business?

Firstly we have a problem of size; Catalan businesses are small. And, it seems they want to be. A variable to consider is that there are two attitudes: that bigger is better and that it isn't. A look around shows that Catalonia is in the second group. When we apply this to business we see that insufficient size is a limitation when it comes to competing in world markets.

Another consideration is a tendency to individualism. Catalan businesses have difficulty accepting projects involving collaboration and other forms of cooperation. Even our sayings support this: "it's better

to be the head of a sardine than the tail of a codfish". This attitude reinforces the minimalist business model.

We also have a weak management model. Catalan businesses have a pronounced family component. The family business is universal and almost all businesses start up as personal projects, imbuing them with a family spirit. But the problem arises when the founder cannot satisfactorily resolve the family-business dilemma. Normally the patriarch, and founder of the business, tries to align the two elements. The result is a firm filled with family members. It is said that all those who can't do better elsewhere stay in the family firm. This means that the best members leave. And the resulting business has little chance of survival.

There are very few Catalan companies with a long-term plan with aims over several years. The same is true of short-term planning. For many businesses the creation and monitoring of an annual budget is still unexplored territory. Similarly, the typical business is not very organised.

Growth is almost always makeshift. The organisational structure is a result of lack of planning, with people lacking in application, with ill-defined skills and shortcomings in motivation and productivity. Another consequence of poorly planned growth is poor financing, with family involvement when it comes to guarantees.

Catalan businesses also need to adapt better to a globalised world. They are not really aware that Spain is no longer at the centre and that they must act wherever our products and services are valued.

Yet this need comes up against two practical difficulties. The first is the population's poor language skills. The second is the reluctance to move. Someone from Girona feels like an exile in Lleida or Tarragona and vice versa. Companies meet resistance if they send employees further afield. In this, university graduates are an honourable exception, especially if they have foreign forebears.

In a future article we'll address the opportunities an independent state can offer Catalan businesses.

## RANDOM THOUGHTS

TERRY PARRIS Writer

# Living **life** to its fullest

**I** read with sympathy in April's Catalonia Today how many young Catalans feel forced "to seek work abroad". Sympathy, because some of my own family have had to leave recently due to a lack of work. Also, because the article 'Generation in exile' cited those who didn't want to leave. But of course, people have always had to leave homes for different reasons: war, economic crisis, lack of housing.

And what an exciting prospect! Leslie and I left England (1947), recently married, but with no house. The Second World War and its aftermath left young people with no hope of a house. I had lived with my

parents near Oxford, and Leslie had lived, after demobbing, with his family in London. But, we were young, I was nearly 21 and he was 24. Sad to leave our families, yes, but excited to find a new life abroad. After a turbulent voyage, we journeyed by train to Johannesburg through the bleak grandeur of the Karoo desert. In the city we saw for the first time the cruelty of so many white people against black people.

We first had to learn Afrikaans, while our first home was one room. Leslie worked as a junior consulting electrical engineer, and I tried teaching with my halting Afrikaans. To earn more money I tried

modelling, I tried advertising, and finally I became an actress with the Johannesburg Repertory Company. Then children, six children came along, while we moved to Cyprus, then Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), to Jamaica. Experiencing challenges, ups, downs, illness, triumphs along the way.

Life is change, at home or abroad. Nothing stands still. If there was only the usual education, work, family, retiring, a pension with no change or challenge we would atrophy, stagnate. But life integrated with confrontation, risk, joy and despair is life at its fullest. It enlarges us, expands us. Isn't that worth having?

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*"Spain didn't win the World Cup, Catalonia did"* Eric Cantona, French former football player

It was a kung-fu kick to the Spanish pride, but it is an undeniable truth that the winning team was full of Catalans. Well said, Eric!