

EDDEA¹

"We are at a new crossroads. Our Plataforma Atlántica partners do not see things as we do, and I fear that this friction may increase in light of the symptoms of a recession in Russia. In order to compete abroad, we need scaling, and we should assess whether the current Atlantic model is our best option.

Over all these years, we have frequently resorted to formulas for collaboration and association that seek technical, operational, and financial capabilities. We have always looked for partners that provide work and knowledge, with a straightforward level of involvement. This is the formula that we predicted for the Plataforma Atlántica. How can we resolve our partners' restlessness?

If the current Atlántica approach does not work, we must assess how to proceed. I can see three alternatives: (1) For work that requires local adaptation, subcontract local studios, which will also aid us in financing projects; (2) turn to venture capital firms to gain financial backing, or (3) explore an association with a large construction company or service company that understands our potential for growth based on the technological solutions we are developing."

These were the words spoken by José María de Cárdenas Domínguez-Adame, managing director of EDDEA and the Plataforma Atlántica, to the EDDEA team in March 2016. A tense meeting had been held with the Atlantic partners the previous week, and he knew that he was facing one of those moments that decide the future. He recalled when, in 2009, the decision had been between going forward or closing...The situation then was much more dramatic, but once again, the future of his company was in play. He needed to carefully analyze the pros and cons of going forward alone or with company; and in the latter case, who would be the best travel partners, and under what model for association?

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THE ORIGINS

At the age of 18, José María decided to go "on the road" in the USA and began to develop a global view of the world. Later, José María, from a business-oriented family, studied architecture in Seville, but once again decided to "escape" to spend a year studying in the Czech Republic. Upon finishing university in 1992, along with his classmate Luis Ybarra, he decided to set up a small technical office in Seville under the name DeCYA.

"The activity lined to the '92 Expo allowed Seville to delay the effects of the global crisis² for a year, but the crash came later. Our first years were marked by necessity and ingenuity. A family member's house, an acquaintance's business...any project was an opportunity to get rolling. We made our first substantial investment, an A0 plotter with pens paid for in installments that we were able to afford only because we started printing blueprints for other architects."³

Acquiring jobs was based on intense networking. José María was entirely devoted to the sales aspect of the business. To recognize the different levels of involvement, both partners agreed upon a 60/40 division of the property in favor of José María, something quite unusual for architecture firms at the time.

DeCYA began to increase their service portfolio, including the specializations of urban development, building, and project management. To take on more significant commissions, part of the work was externalized by specialization. Collaborators needed to be technically sound and possess the financial capacity to contribute towards supporting part of the project's financing.

Working with this formula for collaboration, they met José Luis López de Lemus, founder of LTC Architects, a firm specializing in integral project management. After six years of continuous collaboration, in 2002 LTC architects was absorbed by DeCYA and integrated into the organization as a department under the name IDDIP (Integral Project Management Division).

In 2002, DeCYA had a staff of over 30 employees and turnover greater than 1.5 million EUR. That was when the company had to confront its first organizational crisis.

"The absence of a protocol for tasks and responsibilities created communication problems, errors in project management, and eventually a growing sense of de-motivation among the employees."

² In the beginning of the 90's there was a global financial crisis caused by a crash of the Japanese real estate bubble and tensions concerning the price of petroleum caused by the Gulf War, which had a significant impact on inflation. Furthermore, in those years Andalusia was undergoing its largest period of drought in the 20th century, reaching a peak in the year 1995 that caused the cutting-off of the water supply in a considerable number of cities and enormous losses in the agricultural sector.

³ Unless otherwise indicated, quotes are ascribed to José María de Cárdenas.

The task of re-organization was entrusted to someone in-house, Maria González, a psychologist with prior experience in human resources management. Maria supported her efforts with an outside consultancy in order to develop a program for Performance-Based Management.

The new organization was based on the redesign and standardization of processes, adaptation of resources to tasks, and recognition of each employee's contribution. Three complementary approaches were developed:

1. **A system for Performance-Based Management.** The objective was for each employee to know exactly what their duties were, and to assign people in charge of each distinct task being carried out.

Company processes were revised, focusing them towards customer service, and a matrix structure was proposed. On the one hand, the process was standardized from acquiring the client all the way until the project close. On the other, three cross-sectional tasks were defined:

- a. Strategy and planning. Where decisions corresponding to general management and general studio management were made.
- b. Resources and support. Where resources used for projects (people, facilities, etc.) were managed.
- c. Measurement, analysis, and improvement. Where indicators of client satisfaction, production, and auditing, etc. were regularly revised.

In addition to defining each post, the Performance-Based Management System helped to adjust compensation according to the contribution of each. The objective was to promote the career of the technicians, from their incorporation into the company having recently graduated, through their growth as team leaders, or even all the way to being in charge of business development. As well, and above all, it sought to improve the working environment.

2. **Quality Management System**, which completed process standardization.
3. **Implementation of an ERP program** (e-Synergy). Standardization also allowed for the automation and digitalization of processes.

In 2004, Carmen Barrionuevo joined the company to develop the financial management aspect of the company and distinguish the position of manager. Until then, José Maria himself had carried out this work. Carmen's primary job was to control the financial requirements for growth. Her work allowed for better control of project resources and more flexible, agile management.