

Human Resource Practices at ARISTOCRAZY

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Aristocrazy is a jewellery firm that was incorporated in 2010 by the third generation of the Suárez family, consisting of Emiliano Suárez, Gabriel Suárez (chief sales officer at Suárez), and Juan Suárez (CEO at Aristocrazy).¹ The new jewellery brand was a blend of tradition and innovation, designing handcrafted jewels made of the finest materials, albeit retailing at affordable prices.

From the start, therefore, its remit was that jewels should be a fashion accessory that could be purchased in the main shopping areas in major cities, with their maxim throughout the entire process being “quality, exclusivity, design and perfection”. Furthermore, this jewellery brand seeks to convey “authenticity, evolution, transformation, transgression and freedom” (Aristocrazy-About us, 2022).

The company’s CEO, Juan Suárez, defines it as follows: “we are jewellery and we are fashion. We are tradition and we are transgression”. Hence the reason that from the very start the company has sought to be identified by its own personality, with this leading to the creation of the Aristocrazy snake, as one of its brand icons (Borras, 2016).

It has more than 80 outlets distributed throughout Spain’s largest cities, which constitute its main market, although it has also opened stores in different parts of the world, such as Mexico and Paris, always upholding its family essence and finding its niche among the country’s foremost jewellers.

Known as the company of the millennial generation, a definition that also applies to its owners, it has always sought to take part in events related to this age group. Accordingly, it was the first jewellery firm to appear on the catwalk at the *Mercedes Benz Fashion Week* in Madrid (2012). It has also adapted to new markets by opening a piercing studio inside one of its outlets, and together with HBO it created a collection of rings inspired by the series *Game of Thrones* (Emprendores.es, 2016).

¹ The offspring of Benito Suárez and nephews of Emiliano Suárez, representing the second generation of the jewellery firm Joyerías Suárez -founded in 1943 by Emiliano Suárez.

Human Resource Management

According to Aida Ribalta, Human Resources (HR) manager for Aristocrazy in the Suárez Group, the key aspects of her position involve being wholly focused on her work: “it’s vital to experience a personal commitment to each project and surround yourself with a dedicated team of colleagues”, and she goes on to say that “teamwork is essential, they are my support, my inspiration and my go-to people, I would be completely at a loss without them”. Her work at Aristocrazy basically involves rolling out HR policies both in recruitment and in development and equality. Ribalta affirms that 94% of her team are women and she enjoys welcoming men into a sector that has traditionally been female-oriented (Huguet, 2020).

Her hiring technique involves a recruitment day that is based on a group selection process. It consists of gathering a group of candidates for a specific position at a given venue for one or two specific days, when different activities are held together with group recruitment tests. With a view to dealing with today’s widespread issue of overqualification, a distinguishing trait is identified in each candidate -some quality or inherent capability that sets them apart from the rest. This means the recruiter must be able to single out each candidate’s differentiating features.

Once the new recruit has been invited to join the team at Aristocrazy, the brand does not overlook the importance of direct contact with customers, as shown by its specific induction policy: every new employee, regardless of the area in which they are going to work, is required to spend at least a day in one of the company’s outlets. The reason for this is explained by the CEO, Juan Suárez, as follows: the shop is “where things happen”. Suárez notes that customers were precisely the ones that made a “brand icon” of the snake that appears on a ring in the *Sauvage* collection, which was the first one Aristocrazy launched.

The company is wholly dedicated to internal promotion through major training and development schemes. As the HR manager explains, the figure for internal promotion stands at around 68%. At Aristocrazy, therefore, filling positions in outlets and offices tends to first involve considering internal staff promotion (Huguet, 2020).

Furthermore, one of this company’s main aims is to ensure that its employees feel comfortable in their jobs: “it is my duty to ensure staff are happy and work their hardest. They need to be happy and see Aristocrazy as the perfect place for developing the best years of their careers, making them as rewarding as possible” explains Ribalta (Huguet,

2020). The staff team led by the HR department “never gives up”, and often works “outside its comfort zone”, as the feeling is that there is a need to innovate every day. This is possible because the company follows an *up-talent* approach, whereby even when things are running smoothly, they can always be improved -and talent can always be honed just that little bit more-. It is precisely this level of self-demand that ensures the company is always evolving and has made its presence felt as it looks to the future (Huguet, 2020).

The effort the HR department has made to ensure the company’s employees work with enthusiasm is encapsulated in their awareness of being successfully engaged in a common project. They achieve this via a policy of transparency in which each department’s targets are very clearly defined, thereby involving them in the company’s overriding goal. They are all pushing in the same direction and striving to ensure that not a single day is wasted, but instead endeavouring “to make things happen”, as the manager affirms; in short, “to make each day count” (Sáez, 2016).

In other matters, the company understands that liquidity and talent are the tools it has to weather the storm following the pandemic. Accordingly, Juan Suárez explains that talent is crucial: “after two months of lockdown in which retail sales fell to zero, we have grown the online business very quickly because we had done our homework by hiring very strong talent in the digital sector”. The result “is that we have not laid anyone off, and we have already withdrawn all the staff from Spain’s furlough scheme, the ERTE” (Furundarena, 2020).

Aristocracy is, moreover, a family business, so it is important to acknowledge the commitment made by the Suárez family. Ribalta used to work for a multinational, and points out some significant differences: “within a family environment, the concept of collaboration is clear to everyone, in my specific case I have a very strong sense of commitment and loyalty” (Huguet, 2020).

The company is facing problems of succession. In 2017, Emiliano Suárez (a member of the family’s third generation) left the company to launch his own project: a creative agency. In June 2018, Clemente Hernández Sánchez left. He had been the company’s COO since 2015, when he took over from Guillermo Padellano (Gestal, 2018). To fill the vacancy left by Hernández, in 2019 Aristocracy hired Borja Zamácola as new CEO. According to Zamácola, this is an opportunity to return to the fashion business, as he is a member of the family that owns *neck & neck* (Modaes.es, 2019).

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Case date: June 2022.

Keywords: human resource management, internal promotion

Questions about the case:

1. Identify the HRM processes mentioned in the case.
2. Analyse the types of staff recruitment used at Aristocrazy. Do you agree with them?
Please explain your answer.
3. As a family business, what issues are the company facing regarding the replacement of its top management?

Acknowledgements: This case has been prepared within the framework of the 2020 Teaching Innovation Group: FRH-GID-14. *Teaching Innovation Group Fundamentals of Human Resources* of the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos.