

## Overseas exploits

Paulo Lopes' career has taken him across the world and back since joining JTI in 2000. Now based in the Canary Islands, where he runs a tight ship, there's nothing insular about this cultural voyager's approach.

If there's such a thing as a travel gene, Paulo Lopes must have received a double dose at conception. It's probably no surprise, considering the fact that he is from a seafaring nation, Portugal, perched on the westernmost edge of Europe, and that his grandfather was a naval officer. Based in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria as Director of Finance for the Canary Islands market since 2008, Paulo has crossed the oceans several times over the past 16 years.

Having completed his degree in Corporate Finance at Lisbon's Technical University in 1990, Paulo worked briefly in banking before joining the pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly as a financial planning analyst in 1991. Why pharmaceuticals? "I'd always wanted to be a doctor," Paulo explains, "but I couldn't stand the sight of blood! Working in pharmaceuticals was at least related to the medical profession. But there was another, more important reason – Eli Lilly was a highly regarded international organization and offered opportunities to go abroad. And Portugal, having lost her colonies, was very small and isolated, offering few opportunities at home. I had always been fascinated by tales of my grandfather's exploits overseas and caught the travel bug at a very early age. I'd look at postcards from around the world over and over again... So working for a multinational company like Eli Lilly was a natural choice."

After progressing through various positions, the decisive move came in 1995, when Paulo transferred to Geneva as the Accounting Manager for Eli Lilly Export. By 2000, he had also gained valuable experience from his responsibilities as Credit and Commercial Manager for Central and Eastern Europe. However, Paulo left Eli Lilly in June 2000: "I decided to join JTI rather than move back to Eli Lilly's Lisbon office, which I didn't want," he explains.

### Peripatetic lifestyle

In July 2000, Paulo arrived at JTI in Geneva as Head of Consolidation, a position he held for three years. "I had the pleasure of having a Japanese supervisor for the first time – Seiji Osa. This was just a year after JT's RJRI acquisition, and very early on I got to know how Japanese culture worked in the business world, and how it could blend with

North American corporate culture (Reynolds, and in my case Eli Lilly) to create a unique multinational organization," Paulo explains. Having successfully completed the OneERP transformational project in 2003, he accepted a new post in August of that year, moving with his wife and two children, who had been born in Geneva, to JTI's Rio de Janeiro office as Director of Finance and IT for Latin America. "I remember someone saying that it was 'to spend a couple of years' vacation'," he laughs. In fact, Paulo's stint in Brazil was anything but a holiday.

"The Latin America office was very small, with only ten people," he remembers. "But I bore considerable responsibility, managing the joint venture relationship with BAT for countries like Mexico, Peru, Brazil and Argentina, with a volume of four billion units. It was a true case of David against Goliath in an enormous region," he remarks. After five years in Rio, during which time Paulo's marriage ended, he moved to his current post in the Canary Islands in 2008. "The expat life is tough, and can be very hard on families," he says. "It's about more than being flexible or open-minded. You really need to embrace the peripatetic lifestyle, so I am very fortunate that my second wife, Priscilla, who is Brazilian, also loves to travel. We met in Brazil, but Priscilla had lived abroad too, having worked for Michelin in France for three years."

### Cultural voyage

What Paulo terms as "the Canary Islands adventure" has also been intense. "When I arrived, some bad habits had crept in," he says. "People would work long hours – sometimes till 11 pm in the evening – but were inefficient. I would say to them, 'I may not be Martin Luther King, but I do have a dream: finish at six, but make sure your work is well done.' SAP had been available since 2004, but people appeared to be allergic to it and continued to do things the old way. What's more, bringing together five different corporate cultures – local Iberian JTI employees, ex-Gallaher, CITA, and EMCADISA people, as well as expat JTI employees – was quite a challenge! This is

where my cultural voyage from a Latin country to Central Europe – Geneva, the home of Calvin, and back to Brazil and then the Canary Islands – gave me the opportunity to blend the best characteristics of these different cultures into a management style that has evolved over time, combining Portuguese adaptability and Swiss rigor with Brazilian optimism, humor and 'joie de vivre'.

It's no coincidence that my Spanish colleagues see me as the Brazilian from Headquarters," he chuckles. "It took me a year to turn things round, improving communications and creating a new team. I now have the pleasure of working with a diverse group of dedicated, hardworking, competent and supportive people who are proud of doing the right things, correctly, and at the right time. Besides the Spanish members, my 31-strong team includes British, Germans, Austrians, Venezuelans, Colombians and Portuguese as well as a Spanish woman of Korean origin and a Paraguayan woman of Japanese origin, both of whom speak Spanish as their native language! I call us the United Nations," Paulo notes with a smile.

"Having started in one market, moved to Headquarters and then back to two very different markets – since there is no price regulation, the Canaries is a particularly complex one – I have had the opportunity to understand different points of view and to see how each function, be it central or local, fits in as part of a system. There's no place for an 'us and them' or 'we've always done things like this' mentality. My life is interesting, indeed thrilling, but not hazard-free. You have to be adaptable and flexible, as things rarely turn out the way you think," he muses.

After three years and a job well done, is Paulo perhaps ready to hoist the sails again? "I wouldn't say no," he says enigmatically. "Preferably not a cold country – but what about Malaysia, Korea, or even back to South America?" His grandfather would be proud. □



Paulo's grandfather was a naval officer.