In football, the playing field and its characteristics and conditions can have some influence on the result of a game. Within a certain rule, all playing fields are different. Some are narrower and some are longer. In some, the crowd is further back because there is an athletics track around it, in others the crowd comes right down to the edge of the pitch. Often the weather can affect the condition of the pitch.

Companies talk about the playing field to symbolize the markets or industries where they compete to win or lose. The characteristics of the industry, this symbolic playing field, are: the size of the market, the demand, the products available and their alternatives, current and potential competitors, the profitability generally obtained, etc. For entrepreneurs, being able to choose the playing field upon which they want to play, the industry in which they want to compete, is critical, but all too often this is a privilege not open to them. Instead, the best you can do is to understand the pitch available for play, in sufficient detail and depth.

**The industry: choose a jungle**

In business schools, when students are asked how they would organize an expedition into the jungle in the 18th century, they often respond by drawing pyramidal structures, with the head of the expedition at the top and those responsible for carrying all the material at the base. In the middle, and situated hierarchically, are all the people that one might imagine would form part of an
expedition of this nature: coordinators, lookouts, branch cutters, logistical staff, etc. But the majority of students tend to forget the most important person in the expedition and overlook the most essential requirement for the enterprise to be meaningful and successful. Few mention the person who is most probably in an office in London, perhaps a wealthy, philanthropic aristocrat, who decides to organize the expedition after identifying an unexplored jungle on the continent of Africa. This is the person who will probably fund the expedition. The jungle chooser takes the most important decision for the success of the expedition. It is the geography of the region, the fierceness of the natives, the climate, and the animal life that will determine, to a great extent, the success of the mission and on which the lives of the explorers will hinge.

In the same way, in business, making up your mind before anything else as to which jungle you want to explore, in which industry you want to compete, is the first and most crucial decision. Everyone has seen and has experience of a team with very talented managers that does not achieve the success one might expect, given its make-up and ability. Conversely, people who are far less prepared can become, unpredictably, extraordinarily successful managers. Often, the main reason for this apparent anomaly lies in the type of jungle that different people have decided to explore: small markets; saturated or very competitive markets; or big markets, which are growing or with weaker competitors.

Naturally, it isn’t always possible to choose which jungle you prefer to explore. You often need to go out and play on whatever field you are assigned, and under the conditions you find there, which could be mud and rain. However, the task we can never leave to one side is making as much effort as we can to get to know the field and understand all its details, in the greatest possible depth. You need to understand the potential clients, their requirements, who you are competing against and how, the size of the current and future market, the suppliers available, and the regulations with which you need to comply.

This approach is also necessary for people who – like me and my co-appointees, when we became directors of FC Barcelona – wanted to manage the club and explore the football jungle. The