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»IF YOU ASK ME, INTEGRITY AND ETHICS IS THAT “THIN RED LINE” THAT WE, AS RESPONSIBLE MANAGERS AND LEADERS, SHOULD NEVER CROSS».

First time we met was in Moscow, in 2010. The Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia was kindly hosting the school's masterclass in its premises and Denis was my point of contact. Surprised by his fluency in Russian, I was at first guessing whether he is one of the locals working for the Slovenian embassy or not. It turned out, Dr. Mancevič, the Economic Councillor at the time, was a perfectly bilingual professional, in fact, born in Minsk and raised in Slovenia. Before deciding to upgrade his knowledge with an MBA degree at IEDC and complement his collection of two bachelor, a masters and a PhD diplomas, Denis had worked both in a corporate world and in the governmental bodies and has lived in four different countries. Nowadays, he is his own boss, working in a consultancy business and together with partners building a new business consultancy and communication agency. If you are from Slovenia, most probably in the last year or two you read one of his opinion pieces in newspaper DELO.

Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova



What are you doing nowadays? How happy are you on the scale of 1-10 at the moment with where you are and what you are doing and why?

I'm working in a consultancy business, together with partners building a new business consultancy and communication agency that will provide full scope top edge services to domestic and international clients. On the scale of 1 to 10 I'm definitely very close to 10, since my current role allows me to further develop managerial and leadership skills, and at the

same time combine different competencies and knowledge I've acquired in the past throughout consultancy projects.

By the time you decided to enroll into MBA, you already had two Bachelor degrees, a Master and a PhD under your belt. Why did you decide to do an MBA on top?

I wanted to get new knowledge outside of classical university programs, especially in areas of leadership, business administration (including business finance and accounting) and

strategy. MBA is perfect for that, plus I have several IEDC MBA alumni among friends and all of them told me the same story – it's a great experience, do it. So, the decision was rather simple. Plus, I really enjoy the learning process, so I knew it will be fun.

In the beginning of 2017, when you were still in the program, your company was going through the turbulent times, which made a number of your colleagues and you as well to decide on giving a notice and quit. Looking back now, would you say it was the right

decision? Why?

Turbulent time, indeed. Those are tough decisions, something that Ruth Chang characterizes as “hard choices”. I definitely do not regret about how I decided at that time, I believe it was the right decision. I would do it again. At that time we came into a situation in which we had different views and opinions with the shareholder, not only about the vision and strategy, but even more importantly about values and culture. It was about personal integrity. And if you ask me, integrity and ethics is that “thin red line” that we, as responsible managers and leaders, should never cross.

You have experience of living and working in other countries than Slovenia. To start with, you were born in Minsk. How many countries did you live in so far, how did living and working abroad impact you, your perceptions, your experience? Any issues with identity? Do you consider yourself a Belarusian or a Slovenian or a citizen of the world?

Yes, so far I’ve lived in 4 different countries. I believe all experiences that come along while living and working abroad shaped me a lot. I’m more open-minded, trying to have different perspective on the same problem or challenge, can adapt fast and operate efficiently. I don’t have issues with identity and consider myself as citizen of Europe, since citizen of the world would be an overstatement. There is still much to learn, travel and experience to be able to really say “I’m a citizen of the world”. For example, in Europe we often see ourselves and behave from Eurocentric perspective. And that of course has multiple consequences, among them issues with adaptability to new realities. China, for example, has

totally different perspective on this. They may not be so strong in really breakthrough innovations as most advanced innovative hubs are located in the west, but once they see the potential of a new technology, a new paradigm or new business models, they will move with enormous speed, improving processes, efficiency and quality on the way. Despite the huge size of their country they are able to transform very fast, put enormous resources in a well coordinated system. That’s fascinating.

Throughout your career, you had a chance to work both in the governmental organisations, as well as corporate world. Would you say you would prefer one over the other? Why? Are leadership principles/styles



used in both worlds different?

Here we are talking about two different worlds. If you would add a third perspective – start-ups or agile small private companies, you would see three different “realities” that have significant impact on leadership, management, motivation and efficiency. Governmental organizations in Slovenia generally operate on the basis of “OK is good enough”, and this applies both to public services as

well as to the candidate selection. There is not enough motivation at all levels to improve, move forward, look for opportunities and be ready to fight for implementation. No benchmarking.

In corporate world those rules are different, while there is an issue with too hierarchical organization, you can’t “hide” forever. If you underperform, sooner or later you will have to improve, adapt or leave. What I miss the most in Slovenian incumbent large corporations is the ability to innovate and leverage internal resources for transformation. As a consequence, many are missing opportunities for new business models that are out there. I see high potential in it, since those companies are still quite small in comparison to MNEs. And if those can change fast, than our corporate world should be able not

only to follow, but also to lead. I really miss that.

If you think of corporate leadership, any person that you would name that, in your opinion, represents a good leader? Why?

I really appreciate leadership style of Satya Nadella of Microsoft and his ability to move such large organization from vision to constant innovation. And to do that in a humble

manner, supported by open communication and strong leadership.

Your father was a famous swimming coach, Dr. Dimitrij Mancevič. Thanks to him, some of Slovenian swimmers reached impressive success. What did you learn from your father? Did you ever consider doing a career in sports too?

Actually I did, not surprisingly in swimming. But thanks to my parents somewhere at the end of high school I realized what my strong sides are and moved away from sports career. Swimming gave me a lot, though. Once I've met a C-level manager that told me: "If you are looking for new employee with very good organizational skills and a feeling to how to prioritize tasks, look for an ex-swimmer". There is a lot of truth in that.

My father was an outstanding professional swimming coach, 24/7, all year round. He gave



everything to this sport, constantly developing, learning and pushing the borders. He was the best swimming and life coach that you can find. And I was lucky that he was my father.

What would you say is your biggest achievement so far?

Probably, being able to adapt to changes around me, constantly growing with every experience and being able to build meaningful relationships.

MEET DENIS IN PERSON

My friends would describe me as stubborn and goal oriented.

My favourite free time activities are traveling with my family and outdoors running.

The last book I've read is "AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order" by Kai-Fu Lee. I found it interesting because it gives great insight into key cornerstones for exponential digitalization in China, including AI recent developments.

My favourite song of all times would be Amerika by Rammstein. It really captures the era we currently live in.

The country I have not been to yet and would like to visit is Canada because it's vast landscapes and fascinating mix of cultures.

An advice I would give to my children is stay humble, dream – plan – realize. And invest into knowledge.