

Date: October 2017

**Iskra Reić, Executive MBA 2006-07, Executive Vice-President of Europe, AstraZeneca PLC**

## »LEADING PEOPLE IN DIVERSE CULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS TESTS YOU CONSTANTLY«

*Knowing Iskra for a decade, I can easily say that it is a privilege knowing her. She is a kind, smart, professional lady and above all a fantastic friend. She keeps amazing us with her impressive career steps and we are happy to see her coming back to School, nowadays as a PhD candidate. Here is her story.*

Iskra Reić is Executive Vice-President of Europe in AstraZeneca PLC one of the biggest pharmaceutical companies in the world. Iskra is responsible for AZ commercial operations across businesses in 30 European countries, managing a team of more than 6000 employees.

Iskra graduated as a doctor of dental medicine and joined AstraZeneca in 2001 and has held a variety of in-market, regional sales and marketing and general management roles, including in Europe as Head of Commercial Operations for Croatia and Head of Specialty Care for Central & Eastern Europe and Middle East & Africa. In 2012 she joined AstraZeneca Russia as Marketing and Strategy Director. She was appointed General Manager in 2014 and, under her leadership, AstraZeneca achieved a leading share in its three main therapy areas and became a top three prescription medicine pharmaceutical company. Iskra's responsibilities were expanded in 2015 to cover both Russia and the Eurasia Area, where she drove strong performance from a 1500-strong team in a complex and dynamic region. As of May 2017 she is a Vice-President of Europe, based in London. Iskra has graduated from the International Executive MBA in 2007 at the IEDC-Bled School of Management, Slovenia and is as of this year also an IEDC PhD candidate. Her research focus is on Cross Cultural Leadership.



**By: Iva Eibel, Head of Corporate Communications, IEDC**

**When one looks at your CV for the first time, amazement is probably the first reaction. After graduating as a dentist, you joined AstraZeneca in 2001. Since then you have developed your career in different managerial positions in different countries. How come you decided to switch your career from medicine to business?**

At the time I joined AstraZeneca (AZ), the pharma industry was expanding across Eastern Europe. It was exciting to join a growing sector and the move also enabled me to satisfy my curiosity about the world beyond the immediate patient setting, to build business acumen and to develop by working with different cultures - while staying in an industry committed to improving patient care.

**You have been away from your home in Croatia for a while: you moved to Brussels in 2010, then to Russia in 2012 and now just recently moved to London. How did all this experience influence you? What are the cultural differences that you have to bear in mind to work successfully?**

Leading people in diverse cultural environments tests you constantly. To motivate teams outside your home culture, you need to gain deep insight into how different nationalities think and behave. This develops you rapidly both professionally and as a person.

To succeed, it is important to understand local contexts. After heading AZ's Commercial team for Croatia, I became Marketing Director Specialty Care for the Central & Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa

region. Here, I gained invaluable experience of marketing brands and motivating people across countries with varied commercial conditions, healthcare systems and economies. I learned a lot by listening to teams on the ground and encouraging them to develop impactful strategies in line with our global goals.

You also need to be flexible and adaptable and role model those behaviours. Leading a team of 1,500 people across AZ's Russia & Eurasia Area market cluster meant I had to motivate large groups to drive our agenda in often tough operating conditions. In Russia, faced with economic crisis, we adapted to constant change to become the no. 2 pharmaceutical company, by building leading market share in AZ's three key Therapy Areas. We were also recognised externally as a 'Best Employer.'

I am now applying these learnings in my new role as Executive Vice President Europe. Once again, I have started by developing insights into how to motivate leaders across 30 markets. Ultimately they need to inspire a team of more than 6,000 to ensure our innovative new medicines reach patients in every corner of the region.

**You have a great career and for such success, you definitely need to prioritize things in your every day. How do you manage to balance your private life, frequent travels, continuous education and a career?**

Achieving the right work-life balance is a matter for each individual. Every person has to understand his or her own needs and find the right approach.

For me, it is key to recognize where you get your energy. I find mine both through work, particularly building strong collaborative partnerships with my colleagues, and by making time for hobbies and spending time off with family and friends.

**Besides having to deal with serious issues at work, you seem to find time for continuous learning. Nowadays, you are pursuing a PhD at IEDC. Why did you decide to do it and what is the focus of your dissertation?**

Continuous learning is critical to successful career development. I have always prioritized this for both myself and my teams. I aim to lead by example and demonstrate that I make time for learning around a busy schedule, to encourage others to do the same. The focus for my thesis is Cross Cultural Leadership, particularly how to deliver this with impact i.e. how to bring strategy to life in multicultural environments.

**You graduated from the Two-Year EMBA program 2006-2007 at IEDC. How did it help you at that point of your career? Do you still keep in touch with your classmates?**

The EMBA was a tremendous learning experience and a huge eye opener on how sectors beyond pharma operate. We studied how several very different industries work in detail. This gave me a broader perspective on business administration, strategy and leadership. It also validated what I had learned in my own career while stimulating many new ideas.

Through the program, I got to know many outstanding people. Some are now good friends and we remain in frequent contact.