

#### **APPENDIX 4: Interview of Jaouad El Azzouzi – June 8, 2017**

**Jaouad El Azzouzi:** He is 23 years old and started as a volunteer in AIESEC VUB (Belgium) until 2015 as he decided to be part of the Belgian national board, a full-time position. He is now president of AIESEC Belgium (Member Committee) and leads a team of nine people to guide all the different Local Committees of Belgium. He works both physically with the national board and virtually with the Local Committees. He is also part of a global virtual team on the global level, which correspond to the European area.

Jaouad (Interviewee): J

Thibault (Interviewer): T

T: At AIESEC, what is your role, your experience as a manager of a VT (virtual team)?

J: My name is Jaouad, I'm 23 years old I studied applied Economics at the VUB. When I was studying, I was a volunteer for AIESEC in VUB as well until two years ago where I took the decision to be part of the national board. And the national board is a full time position. Last year, I was doing the financial management and the legal management of the organization, we are an NGO. Now, I'm the president of AIESEC in Belgium. I'm leading my team of nine people to guide all the different locals in to bringing as many exchanges as possible in the right way and by creating an impact for our society.  
Other things, I like sport, I actually love a lot of things, entertainments.

T: Have you been a manager of a VT already? When you say you're managing nine people at AIESEC Belgium, do those people work virtually or you meet them regularly?

J: Within our organization, we have physical and virtual teams. I, myself, with the people that I'm leading, they are part of the board. So, we are full time employees, we work physically at one office all together. But every single one of my members they have virtual teams as well. And I'm part of a virtual team myself, on the global level. And in the past I have been working on smaller projects with VTs.

T: Having worked in a virtual team, what would be the main challenges you face?

J: The main challenge is I guess the attention span of people. When you work virtually, you need to grab people's attention because on a screen, on a computer you can always have something else open, whether it is another website or working on something else simultaneously. So, the attention span of people usually are shorter. That is from the people side. Furthermore, you cannot always read emotion. It is difficult to always interpret the things that people are saying in the best way because the only way that you usually have is voice or just the face. But you won't have any body language. For people that usually read better with body language it is helpful to have this additional aspect.

Then the technological side, you have technological issues that causes sometimes frustration, delays, especially when you work with larger teams. Technology is not flawless. Internet connection. At AIESEC, usually when we talk with other virtual teams, with people from all

over the world, not only in Belgium. I have one of my team members on the national level he has 15 people working directly virtually with him. But these people are from India, Africa, US, so he has to take into account time zone, culture, many different things and virtually it is always a bit more difficult.

T: We can now move on to the success factors, what makes GVTs successful. The first one is trust. Is trust important in a GVT? Why?

J: I believe that trust is always very important because when you feel trust in someone then you can express yourself better. Because you feel more comfortable so you can either be more direct, you can talk about your honest opinion. And this creates more transparency so trust relates to more transparency as well. And it relates to more belief into having good success when it comes to working together. Transparency and belief in a good outcome are very important for any organization, so trust is important.

T: How do you build trust in your virtual team? In the literature, researchers mentioned 'swift trust'. It is when people do not know each other, they pretend to trust each other as they're working in the same team.

J: If I have to relate that within our own organization, I can indeed do it. The reason why swift trust is happening in the beginning of a team cycle is that you sign up for a certain responsibility together, whether you know each other or not. At that time, there is one clear thing is that you won't have to work together until you have a clear responsibility, until you have a common goal which is already predefined by the larger vision of the organization or the larger goal. So for that, in order to start working, you need to start already having some kind of a trust even if you did not know each other. This is then the initial step when it comes to the team cycle, they call it the "honeymoon".

But with virtual teams, I guess, here, it is more difficult to read because usually when you're physically together, you're more often together. And therefore, trust is being built faster but I guess when you would use towards swift trust, in a virtual team you might still not know the person after quite some time. I guess, you can call it a very long period of swift trust that is happening. And sometimes team cycles within VTs are not really moving forward. The team cycle depends from team to team, there are a lot of variables but sometimes of these phases do not happen at all. So yes swift trust appears at the beginning of a VT cycle but sometimes is not really moving forward.

T: Once you have established trust, how do you maintain it, how do you make sure people still trust each other?

J: Trust comes from a few different things. When you have success together, because you've achieved something then trust is being built. Trust already comes from the people within the team by knowing that they have had successes in the past. Then you can start trusting in people. I think this is the first thing, you look at someone resume or previous achievements and you're like "ha, they had these accomplishments, they have worked in these teams, they have experience", I can thus trust this person.

You have then working together and achieving things, so when you have achieved something, if you know how to celebrate those small victories, you can build trust. You build trust by getting whether you're a VT or not you can always build personal connection with everyone as a team leader by creating this environment. So you can have an online environment which is

not about work but just have one time to chat asking about different questions, trying to understand each other personal background, so giving the space for this is important.

These things, it is a continuous process, once you continue this process then people will be more transparent with each other and this then helps with building the trust. When you have a clear goal, clear responsibility and you're following up on this and you see you're moving forward, people will be more committed as well.

It's continuous process to try to figure out how to get the right achievements and get people to know each other better, making better decisions, and this is what help people to build trust.

T: Yes, actually there is a model that takes 'competence, integrity, transparency and commitment' to build trust.

T: Does trust have an impact on the performance of your VT?

J: Yes, in case there is no trust, people are less likely to do stuff. If there is trust, at least you will know what is happening or what is not. Trust is not necessarily leading to team performance directly but from knowing whether there is trust or not, with trust you know better the decisions you have to take as a team leader to follow up on the team or to work together. For example, imagine there is no trust in a situation and you are asking whether all the responsibilities have been fulfilled. Since you're working online, the only thing that you have is, sometimes, the word of someone, until a later stage where there is the actual deadline. So in case there is no trust, you might get a big answer or thing might not be directly clear, so you do not really know how to interact, or what kind of decision to take. If there is trust and the person says directly I did not do my responsibilities, even though at this point there is no clear performance because the people did not do their jobs, it still means you can take direct actions or immediate response to making sure that in the future this will happen. So, this trust will lead into team performance, indirectly then.

T: We can now move on to culture as a success factor. How do you deal with a virtual context in a GVT?

J: Yes, culture plays an important role because we all come from different countries, and therefore we are used to different behaviors. Culture is a set of behaviors that is being followed up upon by people, that they have learned or adapted. So in case you do not understand these behaviors, you might not always be able to communicate effectively with each other. This is why culture is important, it needs to basic principles of communication. If we have to deal in a multicultural context in a team, the organization of culture is very important. No matter what, as long as the organization of culture fits is adapted to people no matter where they are from. Usually you will have it less resistance and more adaptability from people towards this organization of culture. For example, within AIESEC, we have a clear vision, a clear set of values and clear ambitious goals that we want to follow. This set of values is what creates our organizational culture. Because these values is what needs to create the right behaviors in our day-to-day work. So, when you have people from different cultures coming together, whether it is online or it's physical, then this set of values is, in the end, what you organization stands for, what people have to follow. The organizational culture that we have is set for everyone because do not make any distinguish between where you're from, your religious beliefs,... This is how you already start dealing with a multicultural team as an organization. From that point on, it is understanding each other's culture and behaviors so that you can be more considered when it comes to the communication.

It is by knowledge that you can make better decisions, so learning of each other's culture is something that we frequently do. "How are things in your country?, What are the customs there?". Simple questions which are part of the 'get to know'. That can lead to understanding

each other's culture better. And by understanding we will have better communication and a better way of working.

T: That is non-related work communication?

J: Yes exactly, because even if it's in work you can ask how are business meetings happening in your country why is it that,....

T: Now, about communication, does communication play an important role in the success of AIESEC virtual teams ?

J: I think communication is one of the most important thing when it comes to VTs. Communication, first you need to decide what it is there communicating, how we communicate, how often. And then choosing the channel. Communication is a basic form of receiving and providing information and from that point on when it's decided and on the channel aswell. Yes it does play an important role because effective communication in this very big global context, global environment they will working with it is one of the most important factor of success. And this is one of the most difficult thing in organizations as well, communication.

T: You said that you have procedures, can you explain your communication procedures?

J: Within the Europe, I work with national president virtually of other countries within AIESEC and we meet only two times officially a year, there are two international conferences where we all come together. In here (AIESEC Belgium), we have weekly check-ins. Every week small update, how is it going, how you're feeling,...

As channels, we are using 'SLACK', as a communication channel, and here, we have different channels depending on the topic that we are following up. There is one who is leading, and basically every channel has a different frequency of communication and everyone has a different role in these channels, depending on the way you can contribute. Usually, in most of the VTs I have been working with, it is weekly follow up check-ins, having one to ones. In case you have a small team, you can have one on one meetings by a skype.

You have a tracking tool, there are spreadsheets or databases where we follow up on the goals that we have set. Currently we have 'hotspot' as our CRM. It is different depending on the task but you know that every channel relates to different frequency of communication and different responsibilities. So, when it comes to global presidents, we use 'SLACK'. We have weekly check-ins but at the same time we have different channels.

T: So, depending on the topic you use different channels.

T: Do you also use instant messaging tools like Whatsapp?

J: Yes, we use it for quick messages, quick communication. But it depends from culture to culture. For example, in China, Whatsapp is not the main tool. In Russia, China, it's not whatsapp that is being used the most. In China you have 'WeChat' that people are using. So you need to understand what are the main channels of each others countries. Because even though I say whatsapp is for very quick communication, I know that someone from China that is in the group maybe might not be the fastest communication channel. But overall, whatsapp or messenger (Facebook), if something needs to be quick. But official communication usually happens by e-mail.

So one of the other big challenge of managing GVTs is the communication channels because depending on the people that are part of team, depending on from where you work, there are so many different channels. I'm currently working with everything.

T: Still about communication you said that you use often social communication to better understand the culture, but do you use this for some other reasons?

J: Yes, also for work. Facebook is, no matter how you put it. sometimes the purpose of actual channels is being used differently just because of the xxxx. Facebook groups are more for the social aspects but the amount of time I would upload files to the local (I'm also managing the local presidents of AIESEC on each university, we mainly work virtually, we meet each other 4-5 times in a year). I know that there are still students and they usually spend more time on Facebook than e-mails. So, if I would put it on Facebook then I know I will have a direct reply. Just because of the way people use medias, I'm trying to use that in my favor to get quicker reply. Social medias have been used for work, for fun, to get know each other.

T: about the social skills, I guess you have strong social skills, and one of the first one is establishing relationships. How do you establish relationships between your members of your VT? And does it impact the success of your team?

J: I think it's frequent communication. The thing is that when it comes to virtual communication, sometimes there are periods when you have to send a lot of stuffs, we have to talk a lot and sometimes it's less. Sometimes you're not sending anything in one day. When it comes to VTs, they is to install behaviors of communication where people besides work are actually talking to each other. So, how do you establish relationships between members. For example, we had that meeting that was happening and I needed answers and I just wanted to have confirmation whether everyone has finished with their task. So, instead of asking 'did you finish in receiving a lot of yesses', what I asked was 'please reply with your favorite gift'. So people sent then their favorite pictures, whether it's a yes or no, since they are sending teir favorite picture, people will get to know each other, 'oh this is what they have sent' and this is how you create community by installing little behaviors within the work that might lead to knowing more things about each other and might lead to have a light atmosphere, sometimes, or a bit more fun within work.

When you do this, people automatically start communicating more often with each other, so, it is creating the right environment to build the community online.

T: Do you do sometimes team buildings, to create this atmosphere?

J: Besides having fun meetings and having different questions I was not able to have team buildings with VTs. The only ones with who I could do it, is with the one that are in Belgium. Beyond that, it is more difficult.

T: How do you motivate your members? How do you make sure they are still motivated with time?

J: Motivation is a word that is not always used in the best way, in my opinion, especially in Belgium because of its culture. The better word to say is "How to be inspired?" because the problem is that motivation is something that comes and goes. I can give an inspiring speech or I can send them an inspiring message then people will be perhaps motivated for that short period of time or maybe something else might happen then they get be motivated. So, how do you

motivate your members, is first to build resilience in them so that they at least have a certain level of motivation which continues, understanding the differences between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. This comes from getting to know each other whatever there is all the external factors that hinder motivation, they are usually shorter. But if you understand someone's true values and you're connected with the work they have to do, then you do not need to motivate further with other things. This is for me very important to understand the intrinsic motivation of someone. There are plenty of things you can do from an external site: scoreboarding system, ok these are our goals and see how far we can get and every time we reach a certain milestone there is an award, you have that.

You can deliver recognitions, depending the achievements people do I will send short messages saying they are doing a good job, so motivating the good behavior, awarding the good behaviors that are happening so that people focus on those instead of the things that are not going well. I can give thousands of example on how to motivate but I think the most important is to understand the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations knowing how to award the good behaviors but focusing more on the intrinsic motivation so that someone is self motivated. Building resilience so that, at least, people won't get demotivated is important so for them to understand: you won't have always a lot of fun, things are not always gonna go very well, but it is your responsibility to make it happens so do not let your motivation go up and down. Try to be inspired at least, because you do not say 'Oh I lost my inspiration'. Inspiration stays, motivation comes and goes.

T: To motivate or inspire your members, do you use incentives?

J: Yes, within our organization, we have incentives systems. It's basically a score board of different actions that are happening. So whenever you go on it, you see this entity is doing this, this one is doing that. The incentive system work through a follow up but all the people they have to report every month 'this is the things that we have done, this is how it looks like' so that we can track the result.

At the same time we have an award application. This is when you're working with a lot of people, with different teams. So every local entity was able to apply for awards so we got submissions online and then we read and analyze, we review and then we put a final nomination list. When it comes to individuals members, it is following up on the responsibilities and awarding when things are happening very well. Most of the incentives are recognitions. It's not really like I'm gonna send you an award, but it's more about the thought that they really count here. I make a video to share my recognition. But no physical value.

T: About another success factor, mission & goal clarity, is it important to make sure that people understand their mission and their role at AIESEC? How do you make sure?

J: It is by creating the right documentation first. As a leader, it has to be very clear for you as well. It is also, as a team leader, to study it. The documentation needs to be accessible, so you send it to people that are in your team and from that point you also, first, educate, by doing an online seminar and, two, you ask questions. You ask questions so that you can get the answers from people to see whatever they reply it's actually connected to the mission and goals that are being set. Imagine that you have a vision and you ask question "ok, what kind of goals would be related to this vision and those that are not related at all?" then you know you have to educate more or explain more.

It is important for the success of a team because in case you are working together but you are not working towards the vision then you can ask yourself what is that I have been working for. When people know they are actually building/ working towards the goals and vision, it is

already an additional **motivation**. It will lead into the success of the team because the team only exists because of the fact that there is this big goal.

T: During the selection of your new members is it also important to make sure they understand their roles and mission?

J: The best example is for national support teams that are happening virtually at AIESEC in Belgium. The first thing that we do is to launch an application, in this application we have a general description of the organization, we have a general description of what we, as AIESEC in Belgium, stand for. Then we have the role explanation, we need someone for this, and someone for this. And within the role explanation we have this specific job description, the specific working hours, the ways of communicating, the people responsible for the team and so on. It starts from having a clear application and then we do interviews. And even in here we are still able to clarify questions in case.

T: about leadership, being a leader requires lots of competences and skills, what would be the specific skills a leader need to manage effectively a VT?

J: For me it's always adapting. You can of course use the current leadership styles that exist.

T: Do you have any examples of leadership styles in mind?

J: It depends on the purpose of the team, if the people in your team are just there to execute, and they have a very clear job description, then there is not really a point of being a democratic leader and to build consensus because it's just following up and tracking on whether the responsibilities are happening. The role will be more as coach: you say to your members you need to do this and this and then you follow up. But sometimes when things are a bit more broad, you might have to be a democratic leader because you have to set up the goals together, you have to set up the team direction together, so a democratic approach would work better.

T: In the theory the call that "management by objective".

J: Yes, I think the management style always changes by objective and by the situation.

T: We have already talked about the technologies and tools, so you said that you need to adapt the tools to topic and the people who you talk with.

According to Karina, she added another success factor which is the selection of VT members. At the very beginning of your VT it is important to select the right people for the right job. What would be the specific competences and skills you're looking for when you select a new member?

J: In a VT what is needed is someone who is able to communicate effectively. Someone who can be independent as well. I think those are two key aspects that are important. These two things will lead to the person able to perform. Their understanding of their role and their expertise is important, someone who has no experience in marketing I will not select him for marketing. So, more functional based selection. Because in VT, the educational part is more difficult because you have a limited amount of time and space. You're not always there, so you can't always follow up and teach, so you want someone who has already the functional expertise needed to deliver.

T: Do you have any other success factors in mind?

J: The ambition all together, collective ambition to the bigger goal.

T: Only collective or individual as well?

J: Collective ambition will lead to more success than the individual ambition.

T: The performance of VTs, how do you evaluate? Through scoreboards? Do you do it individually or collectively?

J: We have the objective and that is our goal. So that one is the first thing that people would see, how far do we stand when it's our common goal. And then each other's contribution individually will then be followed up upon. So it is not necessarily by individual person but more in area: those responsible for this, those for that.

T: At what moment you can say that a team is performing? Is it because they have reached their objective or the atmosphere is great inside the team?

J: I think the team is performing when the objectives are being not 100% reached. Because sometimes you have external factors. A team is performing when the only thing that will still affect the goals are external factors that the team can not do directly anything about it.

For example, imagine you export to a certain country and suddenly the government is putting a very big tax, at that point you might know that your income might drop, however as a team you did perform. Because you were able to make it happen.

So team performance happens once external factors are the only things that are keeping the team from reaching its objectives and even then sometimes they still reach their objectives because the team is then in a stage where they can adapt very fast and quickly.

T: Ok, great thank you!