

APPENDIX 5: Interview of Karinna Calin – May 16, 2017

Karinna Calin: She is part of the International board based in Rotterdam and is responsible for partnership development and account delivery specialist. That means she is working with AIESEC's global partners and she is delivering, with her team, services from the global office to MVPs that are delivering the exchanges with global partners. She works virtually with an OST, composed of 8 members, on the global level and were responsible for recruitment Global Exchange Partners (GEPs).

Karinna (interviewee) : K

Thibault (interviewer): T

T: First of all, can you describe your role at AIESEC?

K: My current role in AIESEC is working for AIESEC international team and partnership development and I'm account delivery specialist. This means I'm working with global partners and we are delivering service from the global office which means I have to collaborate with the network like the MVPs that are actually delivering the exchanges with the global partners or help to manage the GSTs in order to insure the promotion of the opportunities that our global partners are opening or the event engagements when they are coming. Generally, I'm a sort of consultant for global partners in insuring the delivery from the AIESEC network.

T: In that role did you manage virtual teams?

K: With GST teams which is like talent specialist. They are helping us in the recruitment for the global partners. GEPs (Global Exchange Partners) they are looking for more specific profiles when it come to global talent that AIESEC sources. So they want AIESEC members that have been in that position, that have some experience, are more mature. Generally, we are looking from the minimum which is the local president or the national teams in the board. Usually that is the term that we are trying to source for the global partners but even if it's not necessarily those, at least it is people who have had AIESEC experience and leadership experience at AIESEC while also having professional experience. So, we need global support team in which they are maintaining the relationships with those entities, targeted entities that have those profiles. They are actually supporting us in delivering the talent sources strategy that we are having. We are usually a team of seven, together with the team leader.

T: The team leader works then in another country and interacts with his members?

K: Yes

T: You, as a manager of these members, what would be the main challenges you face when you lead a remote team?

K: I think it is tracking, as for virtual teams it is very difficult to have an effective tracking system and the level of motivation for the purpose of the team or the job. Consistency is also a challenge, when it comes to the workload. But this challenge comes more from our side than

theirs. Because as we recruited talents or specialists they would help us to deliver the service but then we are also dependent on the partners. They are some times when it's very calm so it's hard for them to keep engaged.

T: Through the literature I have identified six main success factors that lead to higher performances. The first one is trust. In what sense is trust a success factors at AIESEC?

K: I think, of course, it is important, but it is less important from where it comes from. Trust is more about a consequence that you get from specific actions that we are doing with the team. So of course trust is important, but trust is done by having expectations set from the beginning or alignments meeting every week or being available and being integrity as a value. There a many factors that lead to that trust. So trust is more about and end result that you should get to if you want to have an effective virtual team management.

T: Once trust is established, how do you maintain trust between your members?

K: By being available, I think this is the most important or giving consistent feedback. Not only positive feedback but also negative ones. Than you're having sort of a clear strategy of personal development for your members. Personal development is very hard to be done or tracked with virtual teams. You need to make that development a priority and then you build up trust and keep trust because they see that the person is growing in his role and not just being outsourced. This is the biggest issue, sometimes the virtual teams they just feel they are being outsourced for random work that you do not want to do.

T: In the theory, researchers wrote a lot about 'swift trust'. Does that type of trust exist at AIESEC?

K: Yes, I think that's actually the main reason that virtual teams work better. Because we have similar values, we base ourselves as a AIESEC. It is a foundation trust, you trust already someone from the same organization because we are driven by the same values, the same ethics, work ethics.

T: A second success factor is culture. As most of virtual teams are composed of people form different countries, different cultures, how would you deal with a multicultural context at AIESEC?

K: There are two ways you deal with that. First, there are some aspects that have to be unnegotiable. For example, specific deliverables or deadlines are not something that can be banded. But there are some other things that are negotiable, the way people work, the way people learn that has to be approached one on ones with specific people. For example, if you work with people from South Asia you need to be a bit more personal, they need to know you as a person so that they can work with you. If you are in Europe, then they know you are professional, they do not need to know you personally. They just want you to be professional and ethical. For South America, it is more about being passionate of what you're doing and being driven and being seen the fact that you have to motivate people around you is a must. So, some things have to be approached one on ones but som things have to be unnegotiable. We, upfront, agree on things that are unnegotiable and some things we realize they need to be approached either case by case or person by person.

T: About communication, we know that GVTs only work through technologies. How do you make sure people communicate effectively between each other? And how do you communicate?

K: In our case, we are having a whatsapp group, for example, any mobile communication tool is very important because for emergencies or last minute situations it is quite vital to have a channel/ communication for mobile. In terms of weekly communication, we have weekly meetings, usually via skype or hangout. It has to be with a camera so that you can see each other, having a visual contact is important so that the person can have personal attachment towards the teams. (.....) (11'50'')

T: Do you also use 'social communication'? There exists task-related communication, but social communication helps members to feel part of the group.

K: Yes. We have selfie check-in for instance. Small things that are building our team culture. We do some meetings during certain periods when there is almost nothing to do because it is very calm; we then organize meeting during which people talk about themselves, what they're doing in their life. It's a very relaxed talk between members and sharing their life together.

T: About social skills, how do you establish relationships between members? Do you organize a first meeting during which everybody introduce each other?

K: Yes. We have an onboarding process. Technically, the moment you recruit the people you have one on ones during which you set the expectations and get to know why they are joining the team, better understand why they are there. Then we have a common meeting in which the whole team meets. People then get to know each other backgrounds, establish first contact and everybody gets comfortable with each other. I think social skills are very important because there are not just about being asked all the time but you need to be very assertive. Because with virtual teams tracking can be hard because generally it is a task that has to be done in a deadline and that's it, so you do not have any physical contact with the person, you do not have that random check-ins that are not necessarily implied. You are in the same office, you say "hey, everything's ok?". Well in GVTs you do not have that, sometimes it's hard and then people have to be assertive, they have to come themselves and ask "How do I do this?". We have faced some troubles with that, people going over the deadlines because people did not know how to do it.

T: Still about social skills, how do you motivate people?

K: First of all, during the recruitment of virtual team members, we make sure the person is aware of what they are applying for. They do not just put you in a VT and then try to convince you that it is a good thing. People know what they are applying for. And once they are there (at the recruitment) we make a personal assessment to understand better why they are there, what they want to learn, how the job that we are having can comply with things that they want to learn. We tell them the skills they will not be using, to make sure they will be aware of the fact that there will be skills that they will not use. TO avoid at any moment if there is self frustration that comes out of it. No job can fulfill completely the skills you have. We are trying to be very clear in setting expectations that we know that in some moments people will be frustrated and make sure people talk about it. Generally, it is the whole onboarding process that is structured in such way that sets the ground. It does not always work because some people might be excited in the beginning, and they would say yes to everything, but the majority of time it works.

T: When you recruit people, what are the main competences/skills you're looking for?

K: There are basic skills people need at AIESEC such as a very good English, manage effectively emails, Xpower. Then we ask them if they have worked in VT before, what they have learned out of it. Because it can be successful or not successful no matter, but if they have gone through that experience. We are trying to see what are their expectations, see if they are having healthy and realistic expectations in VT and based on that we try to understand if they are applying for the right reason or not. Then we are having a few questions to try to assess self awareness. This is one the key skills that a person needs to have, to be self aware, because in VT it is very difficult to give a feedback unless you know how to process yourself. In most of the time you have to be able to do self evaluations as you're not able to have very effective feedbacks sessions in a VT. Discipline is also processed and commitment which comes with motivation so we do not really assess that this way.

T: Are those skills and competences the same for the team leader?

K: For the team leader, I would add extremely good social skills. He has to be the glue of the whole thing. He has to have one on ones with each of them, interact and manage conflicts. So if it's a person that does not have very good social skills, not a good communicator than it will be quite hard. So it has to be a person with high developed skills and this how we also select team leaders.

T: Regarding the mission and goal clarity, how do you make sure the mission is understood? What is the procedure?

K: The very first thing is that from the recruitment, we use promotional materials to recruit the right people. Then we make clear why they are there, why we need people for this position and then give a very clear definition of the vision and mission of the whole team. Of course, it helps when you have one on ones, we are doing a personal assessment for their skills, motivation and then we set the expectations and in that moment we are not only telling their tasks that they will be responsible for but also how they will contribute with those tasks to bigger goals, like AIESEC international, to the partnership team, to our partners. So then they see the piece of part they are contributing with to the entire vision. And then consistently we try to make them feel part of that vision. We are having feedback session, we're trying to make sure that they are aware that whenever they are doing something whether it is good or bad, it affects the outcome.

T: How often do you ask for feedbacks or advances in a project?

K: Usually it is based by task, so if something is not happening, then we ask "Why can't you do this? What happened?". It is not very scheduled, but usually based on tasks and the accomplishment of the tasks then we directly give feedbacks to each other. Usually at the end of their experience, we have a feedback session about the entire experience to see if it worked, what was wrong, what worked good.

T: Which technology or tools do you use?

K: On WhatsApp, the whole team is on this app. So that's basically the most used one. Then through emails because a lot of good GSTs use emails when they talk with a third party for collaboration, they often use "cc" in their emails to give the tasks to the different collaborators

involved in events. Skype, when we have the weekly calls, or “Google Hangouts”. It depends which one is available on one app or not.

T: What are GSTs?

K: Global Support Team.

T: Finally, about the performance, how and when do you evaluate the performance of your team? Do you do it individually, collectively or both?

K: Generally, we do it individually because each other have different tasks. The team leader has a tracking sheet (a spreadsheet) in which they put their weekly task or what they are working on and the percentage of job completion or what is ongoing. For example, if there is a task that takes two hours and it is completed then you just “100%” at the end of the week but like if its and ongoing job like promotion or checking with the global coordinator, we measure it per month. So there is a check-in sheet and then we usually evaluate personally if there any person who has not been available or we cannot reach out for more than a couple of weeks then the team leader will have to have talk with that person to see exactly what’s happening whether it is the level of motivation,...or if its something interfering, anything external they may actually not be plenty in the job, then after two months we prefer to tell that person that this job does not suits him and stop from there.

T: So you do not do team performance evaluations?

K: No, only individual evaluation.

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

K: The biggest learning that we have had is that each people should have a very clear personal development strategy because while you’re working in a physical team the personal development is implied, you do not have to think about it. You’re there with the team, it is up to you how you talk with the team, how you see people react to your behavior and develop self awareness, you’re growing. In a physical you do not even have to bring it up. But when it is a VT, you really have to put more effort into it because it is very hard to implement anything. I remember that at some point I have had a personality task and assessment based on personal skills, how do they feel about using their skills if they feel motivated, it’s a deep coaching This is something that was really missing. This is something that should be done earlier and be done more consistently and more often as the level of motivation would be much higher.

T: Does the manager get involve in this personal development?

K: Ideally it comes (the coaching) from someone in the office, from someone of AIESEC international. So that they see a lot of value into it. Someone from a higher position is giving their time.