

APPENDIX 6: Interview of Katarzyna Nabrdalik, June 12, 2017

Katarzyna Nabrdalik: She started seven years ago in AIESEC and she is now part, two years in a row, of AIESEC International team. In her first International term, she was responsible for operations in Central and Eastern Europe. In her second term, she is responsible for all Europe and its entities. During her AIESEC experience she managed VTs in multiple ways. Currently, in her 2016-2017 term, she manages two VTs. One is an OST for Europe composed of five people. The other one is composed of all the MCPs of Europe, thus 45 people that she is managing virtually in AIESEC's European network.

Katarzyna (Interviewee): K

Thibault (Interviewer): T

T: First of all, I would like to know a bit more about yourself. Can you present yourself? What's your role at AIESEC? And in what way do you manage VTs?

K: My name is Kasha, I'm part of AIESEC International team, I'm already in a second term in AIESEC International. I'm responsible for Europe, last year I was responsible for operations in Central and Eastern Europe. I'm already 7 years in AIESEC, I'm finishing my AIESEC experience in 3 months. I managed VTs in multiple ways. Currently, I'm managing two VTs. One, is my Operation Support Team for Europe, there are 5 people that I'm working with since July 2016, it's almost a year. The second one is MCP network of Europe, so it's 45 people that I'm working with directly in the Europe network.

T: As manager of VTs, can you give me the main challenges you face in AIESEC?

K: I think, in AIESEC, very basic challenges are Time Zones, simple as that because most of the team, in terms of MCPs, there are 10 different time zones that I'm dealing with, so it's quite challenging to manage people and send them communication in a way that everyone receive the information at the proper time.

A second one, I think it's connection. At the end of the day, it's much more easier to understand another person when you are in one room and you can as well look at the body language and how people behave. It's much more easier to understand intention when you are interacting with that people physically. So when you are working virtually, you are limited to written communication or verbal communication without seeing and interacting with people. And it's causing a lot of communication issues and misunderstandings because of that.

Third one, the purpose of corporation, I think it's when you're working with someone in one office and you can see that person every single day, it's much easier to remind about the purpose why you were working together, why you have started working together because human interaction is there. But virtually you need to find the way of keeping the purpose working together alive in more creative ways. Because people can't see themselves. Moreover, the last point, even though the person might be very capable and very competent in a job that he or she is doing, it does not mean that virtual communication is his or her strength. And that's sometimes affecting performance because your job is never your job when you have a team, it's always connected with someone else responsibility. And when virtual communication skills are low it causes issues as well.

T: About the success factors, can you upfront give me the main success factors for virtual team in AIESEC?

K: I think a very clear accountability system to make sure that you have weekly, monthly meetings, quarter reviews and also that team standards are fulfilled no matter if it's a virtual or physical team. I'm using exactly the same team standards for my VT like I was using for my physical team when I was MCP 3 years ago. That's definitely one of the key to success to make sure that there is frequency of communication and that everything is consistent, so actually that you're following all of the accountability elements.

Another one, is definitely have a clear plan and direction.

And to complement virtual communication with a few physical attached points. So, what I've done with my Operations Support Team, for example, we met in July, we had a replanning, we set plan together, we divide responsibilities, we connected as human-beings and then we were working for the next 6 months virtually. One physical attached point in a conference in October but not everyone was there. Then we met in January to replan and then, again, we were working on this plan for the next 6 months. So, even though that team is virtual, it's good to complement the fact that the team is virtual with some physical phases.

T: According to the literature, researchers speak about trust as a success factor, do you think that trust is important for the success of a VT? Why?

K: In every team I think it's very important. I think it's harder to keep the trust when communication is virtual and you can't see that person all the time. But that's why it is so important at the beginning of working as a VT to have this small physical attached point if possible or if not, to organize virtual bootcom and take care of environment and make the atmosphere of the VT planning in nice way so people can get to know each other and trust themselves. Because like trust is there when you know that person, because if there is no interaction and human connection, you will never trust that person. So, definitely it's important, especially when you are a team leader and you can not look at the hence of that people every single day, you need to trust them that they are doing their job. But that's why you have an accountability system that is helping you track performance without looking and checking on them every single day. So, a lack of trust is affecting any team whether virtual or not.

T: So, you mostly base trust on people being accountable?

K: Not only, I think you can trust someone based on different levels. You can trust because you feel someone is capable of doing something or that person is competent. You can also trust someone because of the integrity and values that this people represent. And, being honest, myself, I do not think I can trust someone only if that person is competent but I do not see that the person has a high integrity or other way around as well. If that person has a high integrity but work-based he is not competent enough to make the job, then there is no trust. So I think it's very important to balance those two.

I think it's also the selection process of your virtual team, you need to select them based on both aspects. You need to make sure that your people have a high moral and they represent values you like to see in your team, so you will trust them because of their integrity but aswell because they are capable and competent.

T: Yes, actually there is a model in the literature that sums up competence, integrity, transparency and commitment as pillars to build trust.

K: Yes, I think commitment is more approach the way to work and transparency is very connected with accountability that I mentioned before.

T: How do you make sure that trust is maintain in a VT? How do you maintain trust?

K: I think first of all, you have team standards to deliver and those team standards are supposed to help you being connected as a leader with your team members and that's how you able to build trust. Second thing, you provide space for the team to get to know each other better throughout the experience and throughout a journey and build the trust no matter if there a physically not together.

And another, a very important factor that tells me why I'm feeling that someone is trusting me is when I get responsibilities. I'm trying to show to my people that I trust them by giving them more responsibilities in their work and even giving them some part of my job as team leader so they feel like I trust them enough to do some things that I'm supposed to do.

Recognition and appreciation always build trust as well because it means that you as a team leader you are recognizing work and effort of your team members and it always results building motivation and commitment to work as well.

T: Does Swift trust appear in VTs in AIESEC?

K: I think in the team that I'm working in, with Operation Support Team, it did not happen because before we were working together physically. But I believe that it is happening in many teams in AIESEC, definitely.

T: Now about culture, does culture play an important role in the success of the VT ? And how do you deal with culture?

K: I think culture is all about diversity and how all people accept it, how open they are. With VTs, one thing that brought little issues for us was the fact that people were used to different ways of communication for example. We set up communication channels that is "Slack". For some cultures that are more developed, more 'innovative', and they Internet is even better, working with a tool as Slack was perfect. For some cultures that are more old fashioned, more risk covers, working with virtual tools was something that wanted to see for our communication. That was the first issue that we faced.

Second one, was the way of communication, there are cultures that are more direct, some less direct, extraverted, introverted. So, something that I have done in the beginning of working with my team was like we had a culture understanding space. So, we had the space where we understand our cultures and how they are affected, the way how we communicate with people, the speed of communication, the language that we are using, and so on. And it helped a lot. And after 6 months, we repeated this culture understanding space just to see if there are new things that popped up and that we did not realize before. And as well, we adjust our way of communication and working for it.

T: So the big deal in culture difference is mainly communication?

K: Yes, because for me Virtual Team is all about communication, especially written communication and oral communication but in lower scale.

I think the biggest factors of culture that is affecting your communication are coming from the extraverted/introverted, direct/indirect, or power distance. If you have cultures that have very

low power distance, they will interact with you completely different as a team leader, or there are cultures that want to have more freedom, independence, or cultures that want to be controlled. And for me, all of this is affecting how people are communicating and how fast people are communicating, how much responsibility they want to take on daily basis, do they expect from me to track them or maybe not at all.

Moreover, there are cultures that love planning, that brings the excitement but you have cultures that hate to plan and that just want to act without having certain directions.

T: But then how do you deal with that?

K: I think you always have to go on compromising when you are in the team but we had this understanding culture workshops at the beginning of working together. There my members told me that, like they are very direct, or they are not direct, or they are lacking some confidence or they are very process-oriented because of the culture they are coming from. And we map it out and based on that we create our accountability system and we map out also possible challenges that might face during the year. So we knew about these challenges before they came up, so we could be more proactive. Plus, as well, I was trying to connect my team based on the weaknesses and strength of each member. If I knew that these people are action oriented and likes planning I then connect them and I was trying to give them space to learn from each other.

T: So, there is a culture training before the beginning of the VT?

K: Yes, at the beginning, and after 5-6 months as well, just to review. But as well, we have a lot of conversations about that, so I did not wait for the official training to speak about culture but we had some conversations about it. I had some member that was very slow with working towards his plan or in general, when he planned, the realization of his plan was done after 4 months of work. And I did not understand that because I'm more action and execution-oriented, so I would like to see results after a month. But then we had a conversation and he told me that he is coming from that context and that's how he works, and for him seeing results after 4 months is already fast. So, based on those conversations, we are just increasing understandings of each other.

T: About communication now, through what you have said, communication plays a crucial role in VTs, but what are the communication procedures in AIESEC?

K: I think it's very different from teams to teams. But with the two teams that I'm working with, we have Slack which is more for formal communication; we decided to switch from Gmail to slack because when you work with VTs and still want to drive cooperation Gmail is very hard cooperate, to have conversations. Usually (on Gmail), it's one side communication or people just confirming receiving an email. And I really want my people to talk, to have conversation, to come up with ideas, to have a space where they can communicate and talk, that's why slack is much better for this purpose. So we use that for work related topics. And for more fun and random things, we are using whatsapp. In case we are somewhere with limited connection, in order to be inclusive with communication, we are sending Gmails because in some spaces, slack is not working because it requires faster internet connection. So, to be more inclusive and make sure that everyone is receiving the message, if it's something extremely important, I'm sending emails as well.

T: Do you think that social communication is important in VT?

K: I think of course it is, because without that people are just machines and they are working. I think without the social connection people are not doing their job.