

APPENDIX 3: Interview of Marco Dias – June 6, 2017

Marco Dias: Marco is 22 years old and is originally from Brazil. He started working in AIESEC in Brazil in 2015 as a member, then he became a team leader. He decided to study abroad, in Belgium, where he, again, entered AIESEC as a member, and two years after he became president of AIESEC Louvain-la-Neuve University. He, then decided to go back to Brazil still being president of the Belgian University. Thus, he managed his team virtually until the end of his term. He was responsible for supervising his VPs of each department and give them instructions to achieve the annual objectives.

Marco (Interviewee): M

Thibault (Interviewer): T

T: Can you please present yourself? What is/was your role at AIESEC? In what way did you manage a virtual team?

M: My name is Marco Dias, I'm from Brazil, I'm 22 years old, I studied Engineering. I started working for AIESEC in 2015 in Brazil, I was just a member and then I became a team leader and I continued to grow and I moved to Belgium to study there. I stayed in Belgium for almost 2 years and there I entered AIESEC as I saw it as the first way to get to know people in Belgium, since I did not know anyone. Then I started all over again, first as a member, then a team leader. After you had the elections for president of AIESEC Louvain-la-Neuve. I applied and I became president. Then a question appeared: I can stay for this long but then I'll go back to my school in Brazil, so I can't stay my whole term in Belgium. Thus, we figured a way to work and I guessed it work after all. I finished my term last month. So I'm not the president anymore. But we managed to do everything online while I wasn't there (Belgium).

T: What are the main challenges you face when managing a virtual team at AIESEC?

M: I had experience in AIESEC managing virtual teams in two different positions. The first one, it was a three-months grow and it was the whole time a VT. So, we never met face-to-face. So, everyone was already compromised to do it. It was really ok but it was just complicated whenever you need to tell people like : "you gotta to do this" and people just do not answer you, that's really bad. But when I was president in AIESEC and I had to leave Belgium, there was a problem because people were used to see me everyday and we used to have a way of working and then changing from one way to the other, at the beginning, was really complicated. I tried to have many tracking tools and other things that I could follow and I tried to align every single thing we will do. So, we did like a planning of every single step we will do. Sometimes, whenever I was in the other virtual team, we were all in Brazil so the time zone is the same but the time zone is different (GMT-3 vs GMT+2). That's a really big issue. Moreover, sometimes the wifi was bad and you depend on it. There is always those small issues and keeping control is quite difficult but if you have good tracking tools and if your whole team is aligned you can work well.

T: So mainly technological and communication issues?

M: Yes

T: What about the success factors, before listing the main success factors of the literature, what are, for you, the main success factors in managing a VT?

M: I think, first, you gotta work with people that you trust and people that are compromised to what they do. So, they're really involved because it's really easy to lose yourself and not do something just because you do not have anyone telling you the whole time you have to do it. So, having the right people. No matter if you have the right or the wrong person, but at least you got to align with them every single step of what you're going to do and you got to be able to track this and find a way to follow this because you are far away and you got to follow what's been going on. You got to have everything clear

T: You mentioned the first success factor which is trust. Why is trust important in a VT?

M: Basically, when you have people you trust, you know they gonna deliver at the time. Also, for my case, people were doing things physically in Belgium and I was here virtually, so I needed to trust them to do those things physically that I wouldn't be able to do. There are two different situations, whenever I was doing my other role in AIESEC which was virtual as well, nobody needed to be physically doing something, it was more online stuff. They work in a way that you do not need to trust people that much because they have their roles, they all do it. But I need people in Belgium to deliver what they got to deliver and to all my members and to the future EPs (the Exchange Participants) or the partners or companies. I need to trust them that they will be able to do it. I was responsible to have all the talks with the university and I needed to trust somebody else to do it for me. Also to maintain the team, because I think you get so close during this time because you work a lot together and then you need to maintain this and if you do not have people you trust I think it just breaks the whole team that you have.

T: Have you heard about 'swift trust'?

M: Not really

T: Well, swift trust is trust that appears at the very beginning of a VT when people pretend to trust each other because they do not have the choice to work together. They work as is if people are trustworthy. Does that happen at AIESEC?

M: Probably it happens, even virtually or physically because every time at the beginning, you do not know anyone, you are going to trust because it's normal.

T: How do you build trust in your VT?

M: I used to do three ways of doing this. First of all, we used to have team building activities just to ensure that we are trusting people and we do trust exercises. Once we booked a whole weekend to stay together and work in a bunch of stuff and we have a bunch of exercises at night or whatever. And we were really doing those team building activities sometimes doing something very personal and emotional and at the end we knew we could all trust everyone there. So, we always say in AIESEC, we become a family because you end up living so much together, doing so much stuff together, all those activities, you learn to trust each other.

The second thing is also everyone showing they're able to do stuff. So, I had an issue that my elected VPs, some of them did not know me so they were not sure they should trust me or not. They did not know my potential so they way of doing it that is by saying: "ok let me show you how I do it" and then they would realize. Once, I had a funny situation where one of my VPs who works with companies, partners. And one day we were in a meeting and I said: I'm gonna let you say everything that you want and I'm not going to say a word but only watch you the whole time. He started talking, talking and talking and I saw that it was not going anywhere so I started talking and then the partner in the middle of the meeting said: ok I will definitely sign a contract with you but I wouldn't sign it with your VP. That was the first time this VP started trusting me and like: "wow he is able to do things". By being accountable for everything you do, knowing that people can count on you.

And thirdly, another thing I used to do is to coach every single one of my VPs.

So, I do not know how team works in AIESEC, but my main focus was only the VPs who lead the team leaders who lead the members. I, most of the time work with VPs, which is 8 people. I used to coach everyone of them, once every month or once every two months just by taking one hour and talking about everything, about goals they had, following their development personally. I think every time that you get in touch with them more personally and emotionally instead of only work work work, they feel like they can approach you with other things and they feel like they can trust you more.

T: So, do you think that at the end, trust brings team performance?

M: Yes, I think so. When you trust everyone, you can engage more your team and you can definitely increase the team performance. It weights much more as working as a team because you have to do that. We had a situation and that's one of the values of AIESEC, you always have to work as a team. In my term I had one situation as a president that I had to fire one of my VPs because she did not trust her members so she did the whole job herself but she was getting overloaded of work and she couldn't do the other things she had to do. She was doing what was the role of her members instead of doing her own role and she wouldn't understand that. That's already an issue, she does not trust her members that made her fall apart. I think whenever you trust people you can divide things better and you can empower people as well but if you do not trust them I do not think it works.

T: Can you quickly explain how teams work in AIESEC, in Belgium for instance? What is the structure of the organization?

M: In our community Louvain-la-Neuve (LLN), we are divided in 7 departments which are two outgoing exchanges and two incoming exchanges, one finance, one marketing and one that is team management (HR). There we have something that is different, so in back office which is team management like HR, and finance we just have the VP leading a team of people like 4 or 5. And then we have the other teams which are the outgoing ones. For an outgoing one, you have one VP and then two projects: send people abroad for a volunteering program and send people abroad for professional programs. We have one team leader for each. So, basically the VP is responsible for these two team leaders and those team leaders, each one of them have a team of 4 or 5 people. That happens in outgoing exchange, incoming exchange and marketing which we divide also into digital marketing and events and stuff like that.

Then you have the president which has 5 vice presidents. But last year they were 8 VPs. We are one AIESEC in LLN. There are also 8 other committees in Belgium. And then there is the

national AIESEC Belgium which they are not volunteers anymore, they get paid and it's a real full-time job. They have a president of AIESEC Belgium and then the VPs of AIESEC Belgium are responsible for the projects. For example, an outgoing exchange responsible he would have to help with trainings, with all the resources to all the committees and the President of AIESEC Belgium decides leading all his VPs, he also needs to lead all the presidents of AIESEC in Belgium to align how everything is supposed to be going. So we have like monthly meetings and we also skype a lot. And then there is AIESEC international, the national board.

T: A second success factor is the culture. How do you manage cultural differences? In your case you only managed members from the same culture (Belgium).

M: We, in our committee, I was probably the first one being a foreigner and another guy from Ecuador but he has been in Belgium for 6 years, there was also a VP who was Mexican but has lived in Belgium for 18 years. We do not have this huge difference in culture because people come from the same country. But, we are always in touch with it because we have people who arrive, like Exchange Participants (Eps) who arrive in Belgium and we get in touch with them. That's a key factor to be motivational to our members like seeing someone coming here from a different culture.

T: You do not feel that the culture is very problematic in your team?

M: Yes, because just of the way it is in Belgium but if you see for example the AIESEC National, the whole team is composed of 12 people and only 2 of them are from Belgium. That's different for them and so it plays a role for them.

T: How about communication, does communication play an important role in the success of the VT?

M: Just linking communication and culture, I think something very different for me is like: I have my culture AIESEC in Brazil, of being a Brazilian and sometimes I wanted to do some stuff that I normally would do in Brazil but that it wouldn't work in Belgium.

T: Do you have an example?

M: All of our meeting for example they used to be quite boring and I'm like: No, we do not do like that in Brazil, so we are going to do a bunch of stuff and include dancing and other stuff just to get people more involved. Also to get people more into it we tried that in Belgium but some of them were not the best ideas so it did not work with Belgian people because it's normal, people are not like that. But other things works perfectly. I think it was really good having a term with somebody from another country that could contribute with different ideas from their culture and change some things. Sometimes people just do not know some stuff that they could do and when you have somebody else with a different knowledge as well, me like knowing how the market works here, etc, it helps a lot.

T: Do you think communication is important to a team?

M: Yes, it is definitely important and something really important is also to chose the right channels to work because you can get lost by using mails, whatsapp, facebook, slack and others. You got to be able to chose.

First of all, it's defining the roles for communication: when we are going to communicate, which ways we are going to communicate, what means important, what means 'I can do it later'. I think it plays a huge role in AIESEC virtually and physically.

T: Do you have communication procedures?

M: First of all, you got to realize that, as a leader, what's my team needs. Check that first and then align them. Because for example AIESEC in Belgium as a national platform decided to work with all the presidents with "Slack". But it did not work because we were not interested in doing that and there were other ways of communicating as well. So, they did not define, they just gave us a bunch of ways of communicating, but they wanted us to use slack but we had so many other options that we always ended up on Facebook, and some information got lost, on mail, whatsapp. At the end you end up losing a bunch of information. So, I think for us, you got to see the reality and align with your team from the beginning: "ok we are going to work with this". Something important is that in our team if I want to contact you, after a certain hour at night, I can only call you if I text you first and get a response that it is ok to call, because we do not want to bother people with work.

You got also to be organized, for instance if you want to exchange files or send very important information you got to do this by mail because it's the only way you can save it. Instead, facebook communication will never be about something important, in our facebook group we only speak about some things that are smaller and not very important.

T: Do you also use social communication? And not only business related communication.

M: Yes with my team we had this chat on facebook, and there we talked about random stuff and sometimes we ended up talking about AIESEC but often about random stuff: "who want to go eat, who wants to go work out, etc".

T: Do you think it's important to use social communication?

M: Yes definitely, because we spend so much time together talking about work and other stuff that you need sometimes to release all the stress and you need those kind of things. And even sometimes you need to talk about something that's happening but it's not really important information, having those kind of network it always helps. So, sometimes there are a bunch of things that are going on and you just want to tell someone and maybe tell the group that information even if it's not really important.

T: Do you think that social communication has an impact on the team: trust, performance, cohesion?

M: Yes definitely. I think the more you participate on those random topics as well, the more engaged you get with the team and the more we also get to know each other. I think it plays this role in the beginning from the trust and from getting to know people better, people that you work with. But sometimes it can be stressing as well, it's not always perfect, we also have like fights.

T: A third success factor is social skills, for instance, establishing relationships between your members, how do you do this? And does that impact the success?

M: We have very different people in AIESEC but we have a culture that we accept every person no matter what. I always think that those team building activities and exercises help a lot, you get to know people, and sometimes we are used to ask to work with somebody else to get to know everyone. So, for AIESEC LLN, when you have our conferences then we would go for a weekend staying somewhere or during our meetings once a month we always mix the teams, we do not want people the whole time together because they need to know other people, they need to know how things work and they need to get this knowledge in order to perform as well.

T: What about motivation, how do you motivate your members virtually?

M: In AIESEC we always want self-motivation which we think it's the most important. And so, from the beginning we establish goals and those goals are attainable, not something that is impossible and we establish how we are going to achieve them, step by step, and you work towards that. You're gonna work your way of motivating yourself and do those stuff by your own. But something I used to do as well whenever someone was performing really well, I think sometimes to things really small, you always gotta to feedbacks, and small things help a lot so I used to do with my team like with my VP was performing a lot and would just post something funny on her facebook, I used to do photoshops. After that, they all wanted to their photoshop.

T: So, it's a recognition way to motivate your members?

M: Yes, because virtually you do not have many ways of recognizing someone. So, for example, I had my VP, she worked for outgoing exchange and whenever you had someone who signed a contract you say that you're matching someone and then for example I would do a funny photoshop with her face. Another example was with VP Incoming Exchange, he used to go to companies and get partners etc. And he was doing really well and he likes Pokemon a lot so just put his face with "Got to catch them all" (partners). It was funny and it worked.

T: Fourth success factor, mission and goal clarity, how you make sure that people understand their role? Do you think that a clear understanding of their objectives impacts the success?

M: Yes, that is something that we remind all time quite often. At least once a month I would have a meeting to do a review of the whole month and remember why you're here, remember why we're doing this and get all those things very clear; remember what are your goals. Everything works with what you planned at the beginning it's what you gonna deliver and I remember them the whole time. If you told me that you could do it, it means that you can do it. There is always those motivational speeches.

What we do in AIESEC, they really got to have a clear vision of what is AIESEC, our vision and our mission and from that, their goals and we keep aligning the whole time.

During the coaching of my members we used to talk more specifically about their goals and their growth, that plays a huge role as well.

T: Do you also do daily check-ins?

M: Sometimes yes, sometimes not. But sometimes you understand your members really need some time away so you do not want to bother them the whole time. It really depends on the members because when you got a really good relationship, you'll normally going to talk with this person for random stuff and ending up asking the questions about AIESEC, the person won't even feel it.

T: You have new objectives every year?

M: Yes, what we do is that we do a planning at the beginning of the year and then after the first semester we do a “replanning”, we can either increase our goals or just make them more realistic but normally we never decrease them it because does not make sense.

And whenever a LCP get elected which is the committee president, he, from the election, tells his plans, the huge things he wants to change and then the VPs get elected. When I was a member, I had real ideas but I wasn’t able to make the change, so the higher your position, the more impactful. So you end up defining your goals, objectives.

T: As a manager, what’s the best way to lead a team? You said that you act more as a coach and let people work and ask regularly for feedbacks. Is that the best to work virtually?

M: Yes, I think those are one of the ways. Also, people gotta know that you’re there for them. Even, you can take a day and help them for whatever they need, do it together so they feel they do it really by your example. “If I can do it, you can also do it” but I show you the way. I’m gonna help you, I’m gonna give you support as well. It’s being by there side, of course not doing their job because you got to let them be able to make their choices, do their job. It’s important not to get in between. But really empower them.

T: what are the main competences and skills that you as manager should have when managing a VT?

M: You should be organized, that plays a huge role and have everything clear for yourself first. You got to have empathy with your team because you know all of them come from different situations or are in different stage of life. You got to be able to being a “boss”, ask people and not run after them, but you need to find a way to make them do it. For that, you also got to be creative and defining other ways that they would do instead of the usual way so that they still get motivated. I think being creative it’s a huge thing.

T: And, in the other sense, what are the main competences and skills you’re looking for when you engage a new member in your virtual team?

M: I think people that are committed and dedicated, plays a huge role when you see that they are able to do stuff. People that can work independently, they need to be able to work in a team but they also need to be able to work by themselves. That they do not need to listen all the time to somebody to do stuff. So, they need to be proactive is really important.

T: About technology, you already told me that technology needs to fit the communication and the channels you use. Mainly Facebook, Slack, Whatsapp.

M: In my team specifically, we used to focus on mail for important stuff. We use our Facebook group for things that are not very important, for example to remind a meeting that day or giving an update. And then we use the Facebook chat instead of the Whatsapp just to talk about random stuff, sometimes we talk about work but not things that are important. So, if you miss the conversation you won’t miss anything important. We used to use “hangout” and Skype, it’s really important because you got to communicate virtually.

Those are the main things we use, we decided not to use whatsapp because we already were using facebook chat. And then emailing for really important things.

T: So you never use slack in your team?

M: Yes, we did not put slack in my team. I use it with the national board, so it depends on the people.

T: Finally about the performance, how do you evaluate the performance of your team?

M: I think, we come from a different situation as we used to work face-to-face and since I moved back to Brazil we had to work virtually and no one was ready to do it, no one really know how to do it. So, obviously we saw a decrease of performance with that change. But we kept it going even though it was very difficult because it wasn't planned. I did not stay for a long long time away, 3 months max. We did not feel like it was the most important thing to focus on. Like, whenever we were doing all of our stuff, we were yeah everything is so urgent right now, we have so many emergencies that we never stopped thinking about it. And then the day that I had to leave, like two weeks before that we actually started planning. And two or three weeks whenever we had the replanning weekend, then we were talking a lot, and we were like ok things are going to work like that. So, I gave like a bunch of online sheets, where they need to fill this, like tracking sheets., I created them all before I came back to Brazil and I taught them how we were going to work. So, I explained step by step what they needed to do, we aligned everything. So, evaluating the performance was thanks to them who help me tracking and making sure everything was going ok. So, things kept going ok, but it could have been better. It wasn't the same thing when I was there physically.

T: Would you evaluate them individually or collectively?

M: For some of them it did not change a lot to work virtually or physically because they were ready for both things. But some of them were not. I did not have all the profiles I wanted in my team to work virtually. That plays a role as well. Some of them are totally able to perform virtually and physically and some are just not ready to do it. If I could have selected them based on that, then it would have been different.

So, I think the selection of people who you are going to work with is really important.

T: What shows you that your team is performing? Is it only the fact that they have reach their main objective or its also the performance of the team itself? The way they work together, the cohesion, the trust, etc.

M: Yes, I think the cohesion is very important. To make sure that we, as a team, stay as a team. "We are a family and we stay as a family until the end". That's what we plan. But sometimes I feel like I had to choose between increase the productivity of the team and 'fuck' the environment of my team or should I keep the environment of my team and stay like ok. A lot of time I ended up choosing for the cohesion of my team because at one point you can increase the productivity but then the rest of the time it's gonna fall apart or you can get something stable. I think you should always maintain both sides.

In AIESEC, we always have those times to stress out, to chill out, so you hang out with people to maintain that cohesion.

T: How often do you have those "chill out times"?

M: Well, virtually it's more difficult but we used to just chat on facebook and talking about random stuff that keep the environment of the team.

