

APPENDIX 2: Interview of Miron Lukac – May 6, 2017

Miron Lukac: Miron is part of Operation Support Team (OST) in Europe, he is part of the regional level. During his 2016-2017 term, he is responsible for the entities development of half of the national offices (Member Committees) within Europe. He is working virtually, together with five other AIESEC members located each in different countries. They are in charge of giving advices as consultants to improve entities' operations.

Miron (Interviewee): M

Thibault (Interviewer): T

T: First of all, can you present yourself? And what is your role at AIESEC?

M: My name is Miron, I'm currently based in Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I work as part of Operation Support Team for AIESEC in Europe, so I'm part of the Regional level. In AIESEC, my role is working with entity development for half the national offices within Europe, So, what it means is that I'm in charge for working with national offices when it comes to their internal structures, when it comes to the organizational culture, when it comes to the function of the organization overall. So it covers the things that you need to have a successful operation within the entity and to be their consultant and to help them with improving the situation.

T: Do you manage these teams virtually?

M: This is actually a virtual team more or less because we're based in 5 different countries and people are part of operation support team. It's actually kind of hybrid because we work online with each other but we also have touch points at least once per month. We see each other quite often in different places, different conferences and so on. Or in plannings, we plan those kind of things.

Also in the previous half a year, so from July until New years we also have our own teams which were our support team, underneath the OST structure. It was kind of like one member in one VT and also team leader of the other.

T: Let's move on to the challenges, what would be the challenges for GVT leader at AIESEC?

M: For global leaders, the first obvious thing is the time differences, because for example I had a person who is from Mexico in my team and also a person who was from Georgia. So there is like 12 hours difference between them, so you can never put them together to work.

But except from that, the biggest challenge with working in a VT is that you do not get to see the people every day so you can feel isolated and it's very difficult to maintain the motivation at work when you do not see the people you're collaborating all the time. I think that's the main challenge.

T: About the success factors, the first one that I've studied in the literature is trust. Does trust play an important role in managing a VT at AIESEC? Why?

M: Trust does play an important role because you do not get to see the people so you need to put your faith in what they are saying and actually trust them that they did something. But it's more about accountability in the system that you have where people do it intuitively and they just move in way that everybody is always in the loop and understand what's happening, that's how we build trust itself. I think yes it is important but it is more about accountability itself.

T: How would you build trust in your team?

M: By creating smaller taskforce and project team where a few people are in charge of one thing and in that way must communicate with others, it's not that you're working by yourself, but people are giving each other accountable and that's how we build trust because you just work together. Once you go through an experience of creating something together that's how we build trust and start understanding people.

T: Have you already heard about 'swift trust'? Does this trust appear at AIESEC?

M: It happens but it is not necessarily something forced. When you are in AIESEC you have a very similar mindset with the people who are outside, who are in other countries, who are in other places and it's very easy to connect with other people in AIESEC even if they are from a different side of the world. There is this kind of trust from D-1 when you work with people even if you do not see them. But it's not because you need to force it but because you trust the person who is from AIESEC will deliver their part. It's like if you meet someone from your family you will trust them more than a random person in the street that you will find. The trust is being built because of the same values that you have.

T: So trust comes from the fact that people are part of the AIESEC community.

M: Yes exactly

T: That is because of their selection, you make sure during the selection, you select the right people?

M: Yes, especially if you get to a GVT it means that you went through multiple selections, you have a lot of roles and usually the best people are filtered through it.

T: About the culture of GVTs, does the multicultural environment impact the way the manager leads his team at AIESEC?

M: Yes, it does a lot. One of the things that people need to take into consideration is that different is just different. For example, there is something you have to compromise about small thing that people will find very annoying but if you're leading a multicultural team you need to let go off them. For example, in some countries it is very normal to be 15-20 minutes late for a meeting and they do not understand why you're upset when somebody is late. So those kind of small things.

When it comes to culture, it is also about finding patterns between people because as unique as every culture is, most of cultures have very similar understandings, similar concepts. So, it's finding the pattern that fits everyone and then making it broad enough for all the people in the team. It's finding these things in common and using them as a strength.

T: How would you deal with that multicultural context? Do you do cultural training?

M: Yes in the organization itself we have less time to building the team itself wo what exactly: getting the team to know each other, creating the team, learning about each other and so on it's actually part of our team standards. By implementing the team standards you also provide spaces for people to get to know each other, to understand each other culture and so on. It's part of the "obligatory" thing that should happen in each global AIESEC team, all around the network. With that you can insure that people understand each other and they can work together.

T: Does that happen at the very beginning then?

M: It should happen from the beginning. In my case it did. But I can not guarantee that everybody in the whole network, it happens but in the case of, for example, AIESEC in Europe, it does happen.

T: Now about communication, does it have an impact on the performance of GVTs at AIESEC? Do you have procedures?

M: We have this very simple thing, we use only one platform for all the business related communication, in our case, we use SLACK. It is very easy to communicate through that with different stakeholders.

For example, you have channels which are from European Support teams to national presidents of AIESEC in Europe, that's one channel. There are other channels with Operation Support Teams for other regions: America, Asia-Pacific and Africa.

Then communication between ourselves, like private chat, social communication we use then Whatsapp, Facebook or whatever.

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

M: Yes a lot. People who work in a VT do not have those in between breaks or talking to people and just having fun or something else which would happen if you were together in the office, small coffee and so on. But you can do that by just having an informal chat, discussion on, for example, Facebook, or Whatsapp. So yes, I think it's very important.

T: About social skills, how do you establish relationships between your members? (between the leader and his members)

M: the way how we do it is through one on one meetings. We do monthly one to one meetings; the team leader is having a meeting with each team member. We discuss about the current state of the team but also about the goals of the person, where they are at when it comes to achieving them, what do they need. So it's kind of like short coaching between the team leader and the team member.

T: And that happens every month?

M: Yes

T: And do you also have weekly meetings?

M: We have weekly meetings, but that's the meeting with the whole team. It's the Monday meeting where we review the priority of what's gonna happen.

And then we have daily check-ins. Each day until 10am, we check-in putting our priorities for the day, what's gonna happen and what are things that we finished or did not finish since last day. All of this is on SLACK.

T: And how do you establish cohesion between your members?

M: The thing is that you have multiple touch point during the year, so when you see the people you get to connect with them. The thing is that the virtual work is in our case something that happens in between seeing each other.

T: How would you motivate your team members? And does it have an important role in the success of the team?

M: Yes of course it does. There is one thing, once you get to be part of the global teams that we have, the thing is that you're mostly self-motivated and self-driven because you know why you're doing it. So, it's not like you need to be constantly motivated but the only motivation that you need is to celebrate success with people and to be able to see if other people appreciate what you're doing. There's no need for anything big because in our case, in the team with 5 people, 3 of the people were national presidents last year in AIESEC in their respective country and 2 of them are Vice President. So they actually went through quite a lot and they know what they are doing.

T: About mission and goal clarity, it's important for them know what to do to keep them motivated?

M: Not the mission but the vision because the mission and vision are quite a different thing. It's very important in AIESEC because we base our actions on. And this is why the organization exists. Our vision is: peace and fulfilment of humankind's potential. And of course we understand how to do it by developing young leadership. And that's something we try to incorporate in each of the things that we do. That's also connected to the motivation itself because most of the people who stay in AIESEC long enough to get to be part of one of the global teams because they truly care in what AIESEC stands for. Then you more or less know why you're doing and what you're doing. The vision plays a crucial role, especially if you think about AIESEC is a network overall, is a volunteer organization. So, people do not get paid when they start their career at AIESEC as a Student but they volunteer because they believe in the vision of the organization.

T: So, you start as a student first and then you apply for the global team?

M: Yes, you go through multiples roles, then you first apply to be a team leader of your local office then you can become part of the executive board in your local office, you can become president of local office after some time. Then you can move to the national office itself where you can be part of national team as Vice President or a manager and the top position that you can have within one country, so for example AIESEC Belgium, you can be MCP which is Member Community President, so president of that national charter. And then once you're done with that, if you want you can be part of these Virtual Teams which are regional level for now on. So, it's kind of the transition between opening the regional office itself as a physical space. You have four regional teams for four regions in the world: Europe, Americas, Asia-Pacific and Africa/Middle-East. And then on top of that, you have AIESEC International which is in

the Netherlands and it's not a VT but a physical team with 20+ people and sit together and work for a year.

T: So, that the structure of the organization. Now, about the vision & goal clarity, is it important that the people know clearly their role and how do you make they keep understanding their goal?

M: One of the thing is that our term is one year. Every year, when we have a planning, what we do is that we create our national plan our national goal for a year: "what do we want to do?". And how it works that people are aligned with the global vision of AIESEC and we see how our one year can contribute as a small piece of the puzzle in the overall thing, how does it contributes to the overall vision. Then you also have local offices, when they plan, they plan based on the national vision which is aligned with the global one and see what's happening. And then, as I told you about the team standards that we have, one of the team standard is to put the team stand for people to know, like my team, I'm part of the marketing department, where is our stand, what should we accomplish in a year. It really boost people, especially when it's young people. We create a cool graphic about it. And through all these levels, people are getting connected to the AIESEC vision itself. That's how they understand it overall, so they do not just go somewhere and listen about, making keynote about it which is something high in the air. But they actually manage to connect it in their job description link. For example, if I answer this email, how do I contribute to peace and fulfilment of humankind's potential. It's in a way that if a person answers an email than maybe somebody will go on one of our leadership experience through exchange will change a person's life, they will come back and make impact in their home.

It's actually understanding how small steps contribute to the big picture.

T: how do you evaluate the advances in a project and clarify the mission?

M: Yes, we have check-ins and so on. Except from that we have quarterly report, a three months report where we evaluate what's happening with our plans somewhere in the middle. And then there is a six months report, there is a big planning review, we actually have a replanning which is a process where we figure out if there is something that needs to change, if there is something that we need to shift, change our projects and so on. And then at the end of your term, you have a big evaluation and transition to the next team and also giving them all the information they need to know.

T: About leadership, what would be the specific skills and competences a leader needs to manage a VT at AIESEC?

M: AIESEC in itself is a leadership development organization and actually have this pretty clear on what are the skills a leader needs, there are four qualities that we defined on what we need which is being self-aware, being able to empower others, be able to zoom where you care about what's happening in the world and being solution-oriented. (See picture)

There is three qualities defining elements of each of them. It's actually very simple for people to understand that it's not just a prime minister that can be a leader but also a person who works in a bakery and every student.

We are developing these four qualities in each and every person who go through AIESEC experience.



T: Do you have in mind another success factor that is important to the success of VT in AIESEC?

M: One very important thing with people who work in a global team, regardless what their job description is, they need to understand the long term direction of the network, they need to understand how things connect, to be able to translate the plans, the things that need to happen in a very simple manner so that each person can connect to the organization. So, I think it's about understanding, having an overall view.

For the team itself, it is very important to put trust in the process. Trust that 6 people are smarter than one person.

T: What about the selection of people? Select the right people for the right job also positively improve the performance?

M: How we do it, it's through personality assessments to figure out what kind of person they are. There are a couple of things to review during the interview. But yes select the right people is very important.

T: Through the whole stage as AIESEC member, is there any personal development procedures?

M: Yes, of course because one of our ideas, our very long term goal is to engage and develop every young person in the world which naturally means that we have to engage and develop every young person within AIESEC itself. How we do it is that through our leadership development model (the four qualities). Our model consists of these four qualities. The standards that we provide for our stakeholders, our people, so people who go on exchange but also for our members.

By going through AIESEC experience itself, by being a member of AIESEC in providing and creating opportunities for others you are also developing these four qualities that we believe are essential for a person to become a leader.

How we also do it, is through a lead program. You can consider the catalyst for leadership development where we actually work on each of those qualities and through different seminars or groupworks, I do not know there are a lot of things involved in coaching as well, we develop those qualities within people. So yes we work on the development of people.

T: AIESEC is based on young people, students, does that have an impact? Team composed of young people rather than more experienced people.

M: One thing is that why AIESEC is so unique. Sometimes it creates challenges and performances of the organization because every year when the time shift, so when the new generation comes, there is a slight drop in the results because they need to figure out how to do it. But at the same time it makes the organization very very dynamic, it makes people work much faster because they know that they only have 12 months to accomplish something. So, on the long-term it's something that brings much more benefits to AIESEC than the cost itself.

T: Would the way you lead a VT changes whether if it's composed of young people or experienced people?

M: Nobody in AIESEC will be over 30 years old. In the virtual team itself it's not students, well you can be a student but working in a VT is a full time position. So your student studies do not really matter anymore as you're full time. When you get to that level of being part of those global teams it's about the competences of people itself of being semi-professional.

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

M: It's both of it. One time it's through one on one meetings and the other ones is through those reviews that I mentioned. So 3 months review, half a year review, the Monday meeting and so on.

T: At AIESEC, what shows that the team is performing? Is it at the end of the year if you have reached your objective.

M: There is a lot for what you want to accomplish, but in the planning itself you put the measurement of success of what you're actually supposed to do, so you can be able to measure it.

T: How do you measure it then?

M: It really depends because for example you have people who are in charge for the products that we have, so global volunteer, global talent who are overseeing that and for them to measure it's very easy to measure by number: drop or growth. On the other side, such as my position, my position is called entities development, which is the development of national charters of AIESEC. In order for me to measure, I have my own projects and each project has deliverables. One thing will be deliver to the network, another thing will be the organization of culturship that I work on, I need to count what's the percentage of entities that need to complete the pilot stage.... Those are non-tangible objectives, you can't put a number on it.

But overall the measurements that you have is to have growth when it comes to operations overall in the region, so to provide more leadership experience for the people there, need for outgoing exchanges, incoming exchanges, interships. So, at the end of the year we just figure out if there is a growth or a drop and that how you can figure out if you were successful or not.