



“A sheet of paper does not tell the whole story” – Jozef Papp, Managing Director Stanton Chase Prague, in an interview with a leading Czech business magazine.

Various forms of diversity, an unsustainably distorted view of the over-fifty generation, the persistence of managers who are struggling to come to terms with the fact that the crisis is over, and how companies can "sabotage" their own recruitment. Jozef Papp, Managing Director of our office in Prague, talked about these topics with "HR Profi", a leading Czech business and HR magazine.

Is diversity for you, given the field in which you operate, an issue at all – leaving aside the quotas from the European Commission concerning the representation of women in the statutory bodies of companies?

I've been following this issue for about ten years. In the Czech Republic, it is often black and white. Everyone addresses gender diversity, and nobody acknowledges the other diversities. Diversity has many more dimensions - if I simplify it, it's not just about male and female, but also age, sexual orientation, and physically challenged. As for quotas, last year we conducted research among women and found many of them are not in favor of quotas. As a Father to 3 daughters, I recognize women have it harder than men, and gender equality is very important. I personally do not discriminate between men and women or young and old. It's all about a candidate's capabilities.

How does the situation in the Czech Republic compare to elsewhere in Europe? I often hear if someone advocates diversity here, it is primarily the foreign, multinational firms.

Czechs are skeptics and pragmatists. I think Czech companies are not concerned with it. We see the diversity issue at large, multinational corporations. For them, diversity is required. We have been asked to present gender diversity candidates to our clients, as well as candidates from the broader categories.

Much has been written about how women are earning less than their male counterparts. My view is it varies country by country. For example, in the Czech Republic, there is definitely a gap. Salaries for women are only about 77 percent of men's. The good news is that the overwhelming majority of our clients do not differentiate. Compensation is based on the position, not their gender.

What about age? What experiences have you had, filling positions for your clients?

Although very uncommon, we have been asked to look for candidates who are within specific age ranges. This is not something we would agree to, and I do not understand the thinking behind this. When asked to understand why a potential client has such a preference, they usually cite cultural fit, flexibility, and adaptability.

Yes, it is extremely illogical to deprive people who have plenty of experience and energy ...

I agree. It seems to me that our country is not recognizing the value of the older work population. Basically, we are suffering from a lack of education. We have a critical shortage of good, qualified people, yet, we overlook the 50-ers. Soon, we will not have anyone to work. Today, when you ask students what they want to do, 60% of them answer, "To become a manager." I'm not sure there is a clear understanding of the duties, responsibilities, and requirement to be a leader, a manager. Some Czech companies already understand it is necessary to educate their talent pool.

So, you think that firms here are substituting something that should conceptually be addressed by the state?

Yes. it will take at least ten to fifteen years, but we must begin working on it today. The state should promote the employment of older people.

It is necessary to create awareness of this issue. How does one imagine a 50-er? In America, corporate boards normally include people who are 70 or 80. A 50-er is considered young. Why not accept something that works in Western markets? How old do you think Warren Buffett is? (Buffett, a prominent American businessman, is 85 and still active - Ed.).

I think this is a serious problem. I believe the state should promote all forms of diversity, not just gender.

But, in our country, we face a problem of continuity. It is often argued that, in some sense, the development seen for several decades under the communist era is over, and that education or experience from that era is "invalid", as if the people who have long worked under other conditions had nothing to contribute.

I don't think so. Take your doctor. When you go for an appendectomy, do you want to be operated on by an intern or resident, or would you prefer the chief of surgery? This is a routine procedure. The chief of surgery could be around fifty. In medicine, it takes time: you don't get a second attestation at the snap of a finger. It's not like an MBA. Today's 50-ers finished college twenty-five years ago. They have those twenty-five years of experience in the market economy, after the collapse of socialism. They most definitely have something to contribute.

If those are not virtues that arouse more concern ...

That's another thing. I hear, from those 50-ers, that when they go for an interview and meet a younger manager on the other side of the desk, they sense the younger manager's concern the candidate could be a threat to the manager's own job and is reluctant to offer them the job.

Some experts warn that, in the Czech Republic, it's a big problem if someone wants to move to another field, to 'reboot' their career at a later stage ... is it so?

It is. In some roles, it is indeed harder to transfer knowledge from one person to the next. We've always tried to be creative. As an example: when someone sells Coca Cola well, they could sell mobile phones or any other product. We have to convince the client that, in selected cases, this makes good business sense. Of course, we only pursue the matter if the candidate really is willing to make that change and their capabilities line up.

On the other hand, I have indeed noted the interest of some of the top recruiters and companies to acquire people from completely different disciplines, precisely because it brings a new perspective to a position. That they can contribute something new; something that those within the "clique" might not see. Do you come across this as well?

Not too often, but sure, it happens. In our current climate of low unemployment, employers are more open to this. Of course, there are also some fields where it's not possible. I agree with that and I support it. It's another form of diversity; this new team member brings something completely new. A new view on things, new contacts, and fresh thinking.

Is it usually the request of the client, or is it rather you, who recommends and introduces someone?

For me, it is important to understand who the client is looking for, what the culture is, and what the expectations are. Then we look for the best candidates. Usually, it's we who brings it up. I always try to explain to clients, look beyond that sheet of paper, the CV. I make candidate recommend based upon our mutual understanding of their business needs and the role the candidate will play. It's a successful formula.

Over the years, have you perceived from company management, your clients, a shift with respect to your job as an executive search consultant? To what extent do clients know what they want, are able to express it, and are they realistic?

Typically, our clients know what they want. We are there to help find their ideal candidate, yet also to provide insights and trends in the marketplace, so they can be informed as possible. A current problem is the hesitancy by firms to compensate new candidates above and beyond their desired compensation ranges. It's a buyer's market. If we want to recruit a talented professional away from from a competing firm, it's not uncommon for the candidate to demand a significant rise in salary. Some firms are not mentally prepared or unwilling to do that.

What do you find most, in communication with your clients?

What used to take two months, now takes six. The decision-making process involves both local and foreign headquarters, so it takes time to find the time and consensus. Companies want to fill the positions quickly, but its been taking longer. We specialize in filling challenging and difficult positions, so its not unusual for searches to take some time. Most importantly we stay in communication with our clients to keep the exchange of information going. Without it, the process becomes very difficult.

That never occurred to me. I expected problems such as misunderstandings, different points of view ...

Clients are obviously selective, but they have a right to be. We present candidates, and the client eventually makes a choice.

What are the most critical factors?

A profile has three components: hard skills, what this person must be professionally able to do; soft skills, so the candidate fits well into the company; and compensation and terms of employment. If these three components do not come together, then it just does not work.

We often come up against a situation where a client likes a candidate, but there are compensation challenges. The second problem is when the client has a specific profile in mind, and is fixed in their thinking about what they want. Often, the client insists on a combination of high expertise in some technical area, along with strong managerial or sales capabilities. Our goal is to manage

expectations, and come up with a mutually acceptable range of skills so there is a positive outcome to the search.

You characterize your company as a "leadership partner." What would you recommend the directors of companies who are your partners – how they should approach partnership?

Partnership is a good analogy. It's a triangle where the client is on top, that is, the company's management and Human Resources. At one angle is us, the executive search, as a supplier. At the third angle is the candidate. It is very important to understand the relationship between the candidate and the company. We connect with people who are gainfully employed in their jobs and are not actively looking for a new one. We make them aware of the opportunity and present the compelling nature of it, then present a small list of qualified and screened candidates to our clients.

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