



IEDC Alumni Success Story

MITJA KOLBE: »TO COMMUNICATE OPENLY, TRANSPARENTLY, AS DIRECTLY AS POSSIBLE IS KEY IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES.«

June 2020

First of all, sincere congratulation on becoming the President of the IEDC Alumni Club Slovenia. Please tell us shortly why did you decide to get nominated and what would you like to focus your attention on regarding the work of the alumni club and the alumni community?

Thank you very much, serving as the President of the IEDC Alumni Club Slovenia is a privilege and an honour for me. Everyone who went through one of IEDC flagship educational programs has some great memories from Bled and ties with the school. I wanted to give back to the community, building on top of the great work that has been done in IEDC Alumni all previous years. There is so much value in our Alumni network! We would like MBA Alumni clubs

to become the leading networking platform in SE Europe, leveraging a common IEDC learning framework and upgrading it with experiences of business leaders and professionals in the region. In this context our priorities are to include and activate as many Alumnus as possible to participate in the club activities, provide them with a platform to connect across generations and country borders and give them an opportunity for life-long learning and sharing experience.

Many things happened in your professional life since you graduated from the IEDC MBA program in 2014. You are currently serving as a Digital Advisor in Microsoft Slovenia. What does your role imply? What kind of support you provide to companies in Microsoft? What are the common challenges

of companies that you are helping address?

I have joined Microsoft in the beginning of 2019, after spending 4 years at SIJ – Slovenian Industry of Steel. Microsoft is a great company to work and as a Digital Advisor in Central Easter Europe, I work closely with the manufacturing industry, helping companies to create an aspirational digital vision and embark on a transformation



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journey. My focus is to drive innovation and business change, supporting executives with the planning and realization of key initiatives focused on the value created with digital technologies. In many cases I facilitate sessions with business and technology decision makers to ideate and prioritize scenarios that significantly improve their business by using the cloud, their data, and Artificial Intelligence. This spans across optimizing operations, engaging customers, empowering employees, and ultimately transforming product or services of an organization.

All of us found ourselves at the moment in a very ambiguous situation because of the coronavirus pandemic. The economic repercussions are yet to be seen in all its magnitude in the upcoming months and probably years. How did your company deal with the crisis situation in Slovenia in particular?

We were very quick to adopt remote working as we were used to work remotely even before we were faced with recent challenges. In the initial response, a lot of organizations needed assistance in adopting to new ways of working. Microsoft provided tools and helped organizations to quickly enable remote working for their employees and to engage with their customers. In Slovenia

we've organized free webinars and trainings on how to use tools that support online teaching and collaboration, specifically addressing schools and teachers in setting-up the new way of delivering classes. Moving from immediate responses, we are now helping companies reimagine their business and identify opportunities to reshape their industries.

to overcome the crisis. In any case what I believe is key in such circumstances is to communicate openly, transparently, as directly as possible, and regularly.

It is probably hard to find anyone nowadays who does not know what videoconferencing tool is. This current crisis forced many companies accept a new reality - either embrace



They say that any crisis situation brings out the best and the worst in people. When talking about business world, leaders become the focus of our attention. What would you say are the traits which are crucial for leaders in order to navigate such situations in the best possible way and keep their business afloat? What is the key to a successful communication in such circumstances?

Leaders play a crucial role in helping to overcome uncertainty. We have seen different styles and approaches; some leaders have become more directive and adopted a command and control leadership style. Other leaders have taken extra measures to make their employees feel secure and provide them additional support

new technologies, or „face extinction“. Which companies, in your view, are the ones that usually lag behind in moving forward? What are the usual culprits and what are the „survival rates“, in your opinion?

There was a very strong acceleration in use of online meetings and video-conferencing tools in the last 3 months. In the first instance, organizations adopted those tools to handle internal meetings and for remote collaboration. It quickly turned out that also their customers and suppliers were using similar tools, so now a lot of people realized some business activities could be easily done remotely without major compromises in quality. Microsoft helped many companies on that journey so they were not lagging behind and have accelerated adoption of modern workplace tools.

New circumstances have brought a lot of uncertainty among us. As it is difficult for people to accept it, leaders play a crucial role in helping overcome uncertainty.

Many companies nowadays realised the benefits of work from home. Do you think we will see more of that? Where do you see challenges in such organisation of work (legal, technology, leadership)?

We have seen a quick jump in working from home practices which is now getting slowly reduced as many organizations reopened their offices. I think we will see working from home as a much more accepted practice than it was before.

Last but not least, having a busy professional life and a big family, what is your approach of keeping things working out and having everyone on board and happy?

There is no one-size-fits-all approach; what works for someone, might not work for somebody else. However, to keep things working out on a long run, one needs to balance well between professional, family, and personal aspects of the life. There were times where I was putting a lot of effort to have everyone in the family on board with my ideas, my priorities... I realized this was unsustainable as was not

providing everyone in the family with the opportunities to develop herself/himself. So now I'm much more mindful to give space to the

diversity of our family members and I think that contributes to the balance we need.



MEET MITJA IN PERSON



Mitja Kolbe EMBA 2013-2014
Digital Advisor, Microsoft Slovenia

My friends would describe me as... organized and reliable.

My favourite free time activities are... running, doing sports in general and meeting friends over some good food or drink.

The last film I watched was... 'Jungle', a survival drama based on a true story. I found it amazing to realize how small and helpless can human be in front of nature and how strong the human will to survival really is.

My favourite song of all times is ... I don't have one. I love all sorts of music, but I enjoy the most when I hear my children sing or play their instruments.

An advice I would give to my children is... be yourself, everyone else is already taken.

The country I have not been to yet and would like to visit is... Egypt, to experience some of the roots of our world civilization first-hand.

One habit I acquired during a „self-isolation“ period in Slovenia is... to go for a long walk every day – preferably in the woods.