

# IEDC alumni Success Story



*A School with a View*

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## DO MEN AND WOMEN LEAD DIFFERENTLY?

“If we include measures of people’s happiness in the main macroeconomic indicators, economies will be better off,” claims Dijana Kobas Dešković, IEDC’s GMP Alumna who dared to be different and was brave enough to bring gender equality and corporate family responsibility issues to corporate agenda.

Throughout her corporate and later on entrepreneurial career she had firsthand experience with gender inequalities in the workplace and market in general. After the birth of her second child, she lost a big client and was faced with severe consequences for her business. Such an experience brought her to the topic of gender equality in the workplace, motherhood and career. Her own story made her realize the importance of corporate cultures for women in business. Starting from that point she developed the MAMFORCE METHOD®, an innovative assessment and business certification method integrating corporate family responsibility and gender equality. It took her five years



to bear the fruits of her work. MAMFORCE COMPANY® is now a recognized sign of quality which confirms an employer’s competences in implementing the so-called corporate family responsibility and ensuring gender equality. Through her innovative approach and professional excellence, Dijana became a recognised expert in the field and respected influencer. In 2016, IEDC awarded her with Generali AAA award for demonstrating and representing the highest ideals that personify outstanding individual career achievements, leadership, innovation, service to the community, as well as the contribution to the school’s development.

By Tonja Blatnik, Head of Corporate Communications, IEDC

**In the recommendation letter for Generali AAA award, written by IEDC Alumni Club Croatia, the first sentence is the following: "Out of her own story she had realized importance of corporate cultures for women in business." Can you share your story with us?**

Looking backwards I'm aware that there were many situations and experiences which influenced my professional journey and brought me to the topic of women in business and leadership. Starting from my very early professional experiences in corporation, where I, as a very young woman got a clear, though, friendly advice from my boss at that time that: "Top positions are not intended for women." Such an attitude was coming from a woman, not a man!

Although she was very competent and capable, it was her life choice not to aspire too high because of the 'strong winds up there'. In her opinion top position would not allow her to pursue other interests in life and a women's lifestyle which she admired. Such an opinion from someone whom I respected at that early stage of my professional development had a strong impact on my own career plans. Also, it says a lot about male dominated corporate culture which was characteristic for the company at those times. Later on, as an entrepreneur in services sector I unfortunately experienced negative consequences of motherhood. One of our biggest clients cancelled their long term contract with my company a month before the term of my child birth. The underlying reason was lack of trust that the service will be performed on the appropriate level during my maternity leave. Also, it was impossible to land jobs with new clients while I was pregnant. Needless to say

that the majority of people around the table were men, who of course do not have their personal experience with pregnancy.

**From your own experience: is it harder to have women or men as a boss?**

Great question! Being a boss for most of my professional life and having both men and women as bosses, I can say that it is harder to have a female boss. In my experience, women are more dedicated to the tasks execution and an employee is the task, as well. Also, women's sense for details is different which has its consequences in management and everyday tasks monitoring. I mean, it is harder to fool female bosses if you don't perform! You know the saying, the devil is in details?! On the other side, my experience with male bosses is that they are better in getting a broader view on business. While they didn't have much focus on day to day activities they were very interested in a broader perspective. It was my experience; even though it really depends on one's personality. Also, I was mostly challenged to give more by male bosses which probably influenced my own management style – you can do it! And my employees do more than they ever believed they could...

**Female employees have different needs than men: Yes or No. Why?**

Yes. First of all, the majority of care and obligations for family members and household are still in women's hands. The proportion of unpaid job is still much higher on the female side of the coin. It means that women need very efficient working environments which allow eight hours worktime, in order to be able to

leave workplace at supposed time without necessity for extra hours. So called 'long working hours corporate cultures' are created by employees who do not have family obligations and can afford e.g. long lunch breaks, which can be easily substituted with two hours of extra work in the afternoon.

**What is the solution?**

Sustainable solution is a workplace and work time flexibility, which suits different employee's needs. Also, women more than men need performance management reviews and rewards based on it. There is a lot of research data which demonstrate that women believe in merit and consequently do not work much on personal self-promotion of their own results. Women mostly expect that someone will notice their efforts and acknowledge it. Most of working environments still do not recognise it.

Apart from organizational requirements, the business world is still dominated by men and corporate cultures are created on the foundations of men standards. It encompasses communication style as well, and there are differences in communication styles between genders. It happens that important point of views are not heard or perceived well only because of different communication patterns. Both women and men should be trained to become aware of those differences in order to make organisations more effective.

**Women that prioritize children over their job are often understood as weak. Or, simply not ambitious enough. What is your opinion on that?**

My counter question would be – who should take care of the chil-

dren, the most precious inheritance which we leave to this world?

Children are common responsibility of both parents and as in any partnership, roles between partners should be divided on equal terms. But everyday practice still demonstrates unequal distribution of parental duties with higher burden on women, who (un)voluntarily take over a higher proportion of child care either due to tradition, social norms and expectations or their own will.

Nowadays, when mothers mostly take maternal leave and take over most of the childcare during preschool years, they might be perceived as less dedicated and ambitious – because it is not easy to have it all, as it might seem. But someone has to do it! The real question is, are children the sole responsibilities of their mothers, or fathers as well? Moreover, what about governments which are concerned about demographics and companies which are interested in stable and sustainable customer base? A broader view demonstrates that childcare should be everyone's job!

In my opinion organisations should have understanding during that specific, not long-

lasting period of their employee's careers to support them in their efforts to be responsible at home and at the workplace. Introduction of family responsible measures are an efficient way to keep its best talents satisfied and engaged which has proven positive effects on productivity and business results. Also, employers could contribute to wider community change by internal promotion of equal parental distribution of duties and equal proportions of parental leave. In a world where more than 60 percent of graduates are women we should find a way to adjust working practices to that pool of talents in order to enable prospect and growth of our economies and, in parallel, ensure sufficient birth rates. We can't divide educated and ambitious pool of women from their maternal role. It is a complex issue that has to be the primary agenda of today's leaders and policy makers.

**You have developed the MAMFORCE METHOD© an innovative assessment and business standard. How does it work?**

The method encompasses six main areas that cover the most

relevant policies and measures for reconciliation of private and professional life of employees:

- Communications,
- Work organisation,
- Flexibility,
- Family services,
- Leadership,
- Talent management.

Several sources of data are used through assessment - existing management system, organizational data and perception of work experience in the company - employees' opinion providing insight into the way of day-to-day work. Results are benchmarked against the standards (the best practices and peer organisations). The final step is an action plan with concrete activities which lead to improvement, culture change and wider community impact. The whole process helps organizations implement changes in two phases which lead to basic or full MAMFORCE COMPANY status.

**Which companies are using your method and in which countries? What are the outcomes?**

There are 20 organizations, private and state-owned companies, governmental agencies and bodies, ministries and associations, employing more than 20.000 people who underwent the assessment and earned MAMFORCE Standard. Responsible employers and change leaders are telecom operators (VIP net/ Telekom Austria, Hrvatski Telekom/Deutsche Telekom), banks (Privredna banka Zagreb – part of Intesa Sanpaolo Group, Zagrebačka banka/UnicreditGroup), INA – oil company, Coca Cola HBC, 24 sata – media company/ Styria Media Group, Lidl, Janaf, Agency for Science and Higher



Education – governmental agency, Ministry of Labour and Pension System, HAKOM – Croatian Regulatory Authority for Network Industry, HEP, HBOR – Croatian Bank for Reconstruction and Development, HUP- Croatian Employers Association etc. Organizations are operating mainly in SEE region, namely in Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Macedonia and Serbia.

The most important short-term outcomes are increased satisfaction and employee engagement due to the introduction of flexible work time and workplace practices, introduction of family services and development of specific leadership programs for women. The final, long-term outcome is productivity increase and overall better business performance. Also, we should not forget future effects on better demographics in respective countries.

**What is your prediction for the future of work? More and more people are out-sourced, self-employed, and it seems**

**that classic job 9-17 is disappearing. Why? What does it mean for economy and how will it affect family lives?**

The recent Gallup research has shown that the one thing that people want the most is – a job. On the other hand, we are witnessing the above mentioned changes which are leading to unsecure times and less classical jobs and workplaces. We are already very mobile and most professions do not require 9-17 work time or a fixed workplace. But people still need communication, which can't be 100 percent replaced by virtual workplaces. It is obvious from the rising trend of co-working places for start-ups and small businesses. Workplace and work time flexibility also require high level of self-management which is not inherent to most of the people. In general, people need order and structure and work should continue to be efficiently organised, virtual or non-virtual. Millennials are setting a new trend with higher personal flexibility requirements which should lead to higher busi-

ness productivity, but also could have negative impact on family life which continuously overlaps with work life.

Actually, looking backwards, not long ago, before industrialization, work was overlapping with family life in e.g. agriculture and family owned crafts. At the end of the industrialization era we surrender the dominant form of work of those times and are looking for new forms that are more appropriate for the requirements of the workforce and new types of jobs. Economies should be better off, especially if we succeed to include measures of people's happiness in the main macroeconomic indicators worldwide.

## MEET DIJANA PERSONALLY

**Business education gave me ...**

... courage to start my own business.

**My favourite memory of IEDC studies is ...**

... not easy to select one, but the Scottish culture brought to the classroom by the prof. Moutinho is among the best.

**I am ...**

... passionate about my current calling to change workplaces and organizational cultures towards better reconciliation of professional and private life and advancement of women careers.

**I want to be ...**

... what I already am.

**I am inspired by ...**

... people who bring the change which benefits humanity.

**My favourite thought leader is ...**

... lately, Sheryl Sandberg. She was brave enough to open discussion about male dominated workplace cultures and position of women within it.