

Interview: Dr Paul Evans, Academic Director, Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI), INSEAD

If Slovenia will not collaborate on talent management then the issue will remain theoretical and will never happen!

By **Tina Droic, M.Sc., MBA**

Launched in 2013, the GTCI is an annual benchmarking report that measures the ability of countries to compete for talent. According to Co-founder and Academic Director, Dr Paul Evans, who will be a keynote speaker at The Management Congress 2018, organised by the Managers' Association of Slovenia to be held in September, the level of talent management awareness is rising, but continues to be very unequal across countries. Singapore is the only country in the world that is always focused on developing talent for the future and 43% of its population is from abroad! "Slovenia is included in the countries that have slightly neglected its expertise over the years", says Dr Evans, and obviously the country needs to improve the quality of business – government relations because if they do not collaborate, the issues around talent management and innovation will remain theoretical and will never happen!



Q Why is talent management becoming so important for companies, cities and countries, and what is the level of awareness globally?

A The level of awareness is rising, but it is very unequal across countries. As innovation is something which is really important and the observation that the talent component of innovation is of national importance, it is becoming more and more important for prosperity, and that led to the discussion with various governments, notable with Singapore ministers, that the world needs a dedicated focused talent index. I would like to share a lesson from Singapore, a small country that 50 years ago was a third world jungle – a developing country with no resources, no oil, no minerals. Interestingly, Singapore has become one of the most developed countries in the world, more than the US in terms of GDP per capita and its only resource is talent! It is the only country in the world that is always focused on developing talent for the future and 43% of the population of Singapore is from abroad! Education in Singapore has always been the main importance, they have started tackling Industry 4.0 by building a

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Smart City. If you look at the method of teaching maths in London, it is based on the method from Singapore. And it is important to say that the ministries in Singapore (education, trade, agriculture...) are all focused on talent!

Q GTCI measures the extent to which countries attract, grow and retain talent, and how that translates into output. In 2017, Switzerland was on top, followed by Singapore and the United Kingdom. In which fields do the winners excel?

A The winning countries are all different, but what is common for them and also in the Scandinavian countries, which are among the top ten, is balance – balance between different aspects of talent competitiveness. First is attracting people (i.e. how do we attract the talent needed in startups, the blockchain technology we try to develop, etc.) and retain them. The second, balance (particularly distinctive for Switzerland and Singapore) in the type of talent that a country or a city needs and there are two: one is vocational talent – expertise; Slovenia is included in the countries that has slightly neglected its expertise over the years, and the other is more general talent – connected with people that are going to universities and it is associated with three things: leadership, innovation and entrepreneurship. And the third is the ecosystem, which is a very close relationship between a government, the business community and educational institutions. In the case of Switzerland, that is the most innovative country, 80% of all Swiss school children do not go to university! They go the vocational route, which is a route to a practitioner. You go to school three days a week and you work two days a week, and this is carefully managed through close collaboration between the Swiss cantons, local businesses and educational institutions.

Q What does the GTCI indicate for companies, entrepreneurs and the government about strengthening Slovenia's talent competitiveness—currently 28th in the world (from 119 countries)?

A I do not know Slovenia well but I do know Danica Purg and she has gotten me very interested in Slovenia. The biggest weakness in terms of Slovenia is the third balance, the collaboration with the ecosystem. If you consider the numbers – Slovenia is one of the ten worst countries in the world in terms of the quality of business/government relations and if government does not collaborate with business and education, then a lot of issues around talent management and innovation are only theoretical issues that will never happen! A lot of discussion went around in Slovenia and people got

fed up because nothing happened there. But it is not just government, it is not just business and it is not just education, it is collaboration. However, in Slovenia, many people talk about corruption, it is not the most corrupt country in the world (Transparency International place Slovenia currently 29th in the world) and I do not think corruption is an excuse for the inefficiency of the government of doing the things that promote the development of Slovenia and its people.

Q Can you share some 'lessons' on talent management from smaller leading countries such as Denmark, Finland, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Luxembourg, Botswana and Switzerland, that could be also relevant to Slovenia?

A Make yourself attractive as a place and Slovenia has a lot to show here; from its image to its quality of life. Pay a lot of attention to development, since the future is the name of the game. Based on the experience of the abovementioned countries, what Slovenia has to do is to create an entrepreneurial spirit and the ecosystem. Because entrepreneurship is not individual (i.e. just people who create startups). What you need is what Switzerland has: extremely good technicians from the vocational educational system. They are not just plumbers, but robotic and software technicians, medical technicians in hospitals etc. You need these people because your companies need them to grow. So that is an ecosystem and we will see more of that this year or next year in many countries in the world. Therefore, for Slovenia it is of great importance to invest in good vocational education oriented toward software technicians, medical assistance and the sort of skills that you will need for growth in the future.

Q How is digitalisation and technology changing the talent scene?

A It is changing it radically. Denmark is interesting because it is the most digital state in Europe in the sense of the government. Everybody has an e-box for dealing with the government, (e.g. paying electricity bills, voting and paying taxes) everything is through the internet. And their government told me the big challenge is in the education because to prepare ourselves for this digital world, the whole educational system needs to be reformed. Play schools look more like modern workplaces than the dated classrooms with the teacher up front and students passively behind. So how do you educate people for a rapidly changing world? You need so-called T-shaped skills. IBM has practicing T-shaped skills for 40 years. The letter T stands on a base, otherwise it falls down. So, the base

of the T is learning how to learn! What we know about high potential talent is that they learn fast and well from their own experience! The Finnish education system knows this very well, it is among the best in the world and they believe the learning how to learn happens at school between ages four and seven, before you start learning how to read, numbers, etc., and that is the bottom of the T, and the most important thing. People who do not learn how to learn will be stuck in the future. I believe, in Slovenia, the elite want their children to go to the Montessori type of a school. They can pay for it because a Montessori type of school is very good in teaching kids learn how to learn. Taking two global people: Jeff Bezos from Amazon and Sergey Brin from Google, they came out of Montessori schools. In addition, within the T logic, it is important to have vocational expertise too – that's the stem of the T! A lot of people come from universities, have no expertise and so it is hard for them to get a job because people learn through challenge! And at the top of the T, you have to collaborate with others; collaboration skills, co-creation, and the other top of the T is to have very good interpersonal skills – you have to have a very good critical ability to interpret information – what is real and what is fake! ♦♦

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