

# IVANA HERETIK VAČOKOVÁ

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Expert in recruitment services and experienced manager, with over 20 years' experience on agency side including international exposure (Romania, Lithuania, Hungary, Czech Republic). Specialties: people management, interim management, project management, process implementation, performance management, green field projects, foreign direct investment consultancy, tendering process, training & development, SSC, RPO, HR consultancy. As an all-rounder, I am passionate about driving business success through strategic planning, effective leadership, and fostering a culture of innovation.

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### **IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE, WHAT SHOULD SLOVAKIA PRIORITIZE TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE WITHIN THE EU AND GLOBALLY?**

Slovakia should focus on developing a clear vision and strategic framework centered on progress, innovation, and the creation of favorable conditions for companies and employers. This should be supported by strong institutional backing rather than a fragmented, profit-driven approach at the individual level.

From a labor market perspective, taxation should be reduced for both employers and employees, and the current approach to transactional taxation should be reconsidered, as certain cost components particularly payroll-related burdens are higher compared to some other EU countries and may hinder economic growth and employment potential.

Finally, legislation related to foreign workers remains slow and overly complex, which limits the country's ability to fill positions that are less attractive to the local workforce.

### **DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IS RESHAPING LABOR MARKETS ACROSS EUROPE. HOW SHOULD SLOVAKIA RESPOND TO AGING, TALENT SHORTAGES, AND WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION?**

First, Slovakia should adopt a more inclusive approach by addressing structural barriers and biases affecting workers aged 45+, as well as minorities and other underrepresented groups willing to participate in the workforce.

Second, the country must become more attractive to foreign talent by implementing a fast, transparent, and ideally fully digital process.

In addition, Slovakia must acknowledge and prepare for the impact of AI, which is reshaping entry-level and administrative roles. The development of AI hubs and supporting infrastructure could play a key role in retaining talent, creating high-value jobs, and building a sustainable innovation ecosystem for future generations.

### **IF YOU COULD DEFINE ONE BOLD REFORM OR STRATEGIC SHIFT THAT WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE SLOVAKIA'S BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

At this stage, multiple reforms are necessary, and a single change would likely not be sufficient. However, prioritizing the development of AI hubs and innovation ecosystems could be a game-changer, particularly when

combined with a gradual reduction in employment-related taxes.

### **WHAT ACHIEVEMENT FROM 2025 ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF, AND WHY?**

Despite challenging market conditions and ongoing consolidation, our company successfully achieved profitability.

### **HOW DO YOU FOSTER INNOVATION WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION—WHETHER THROUGH TECHNOLOGY, PEOPLE, OR BUSINESS MODELS?**

We have invested in training of our team and implemented solutions such as RPA and AI, and we are currently piloting an AI colleague named Alex. While we actively adopt new technologies, we also carefully evaluate their return on investment. Given the wide range of available solutions, not all deliver tangible value. Therefore, rather than positioning ourselves as pioneers, we take a pragmatic approach selecting effective solutions that align with our business needs and deliver measurable impact.

### **HOW IS AI OR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CHANGING YOUR INDUSTRY, AND HOW ARE YOU RESPONDING?**

AI is significantly transforming HR processes by increasing speed and efficiency, while also introducing new challenges and reshaping the roles. At the same time, the human element remains essential in HR, as there are both advantages and limitations to the use of AI in this field. Ultimately, organizations must be willing to learn and adapt otherwise, they risk becoming obsolete.

### **WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITIES DO YOU BELIEVE ARE MOST IMPORTANT?**

I believe effective leadership is grounded in integrity being consistent, transparent, and trustworthy in both decisions and actions. A hands-on approach is equally important, as it helps leaders stay connected to the reality of the business and build credibility with their teams.

In today's fast-changing landscape, the ability to continuously learn and adapt is critical, enabling leaders to respond to new challenges, technologies, and market dynamics with agility.

Finally, effective decision-making is key. Leaders must be able to make timely, well-informed decisions, often in situations with incomplete information, while taking responsibility for the outcomes. Balancing analytical thinking with intuition and experience is what ultimately drives results.