

2026

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# MARTIN BAKOŠ

CO-OWNER  
AND MANAGING PARTNER  
AMBERG ENGINEERING  
SLOVAKIA, S.R.O.



In 1988, he graduated from the Department of Concrete Structures and Bridges at STU in Bratislava. In 1994, he moved to Switzerland, where he worked for over two years at ETH Zurich as a research associate and assistant. In 1997, he returned to Slovakia to participate in the design and supervision of the first road tunnels in Slovakia. Since 2003, he has been the managing director and co-owner of Amberg Engineering Slovakia. He has worked on many significant projects, such as the Višňové Tunnel, D3 Čadca, Bukov-Svrčinovec, and many others. He has lectured at the University of Žilina and actively published dozens of articles at conferences both at home and abroad. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Swiss-Slovak Chamber of Commerce.

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

Without a doubt, it is the opening of the Višňové Tunnel. The Višňové Tunnel is currently not only the longest road tunnel in Slovakia (and also a twin-tube tunnel), but also the longest tunnel in Slovakia overall, regardless of its function. It is over 7,400 meters long. Our company, Amberg Engineering Slovakia, s.r.o., served as the general designer for the completion of the Višňové Tunnel and the adjacent sections outside the tunnel for the Skanska Consortium. For the entire design team, this task was a huge challenge and a source of new experience and knowledge stemming from the technical and organizational specifics of this highway section. It was an honor for us to be part of the final phase of completing this complex highway section, and we firmly believe that the solutions designed by our design team during this phase will ensure the most reliable operation of this unique engineering structure and its trouble-free use by motorists for as long as possible.

I am equally proud of the completion of the R2 expressway section between Kriváň and Mýtina. "It's a magnificent stretch of highway. It's essentially a highway in the treetops," said Transport Minister Jozef Ráž regarding the Kriváň-Mýtina section. A highlight of the section is also the longest overpass in Slovakia, stretching 4.374 km. In some places, drivers will travel 45 meters above the ground. This magnificent engineering structure was named Construction of the Year 2025, and our employees provided construction supervision on the project.

## WHICH ROAD AND RAIL SECTIONS NEED TO BE BUILT OR RENOVATED URGENTLY?

These are the projects we've been talking about for years. We need to complete the D1, D3, and R4 highways, then decide on the route for the north-south highway link in central Slovakia, and at the same time begin project planning for the D1/D2 connection, including via the Karpaty Tunnel. A comprehensive bridge renovation program must be launched immediately. This should be implemented through PPP projects (public-private partnerships), which will bring several benefits, such as the accelerated commissioning of the proposed bridge renovation project on first-class roads and the economic advantages of this model. As for railways, I will be happy if I live to see at least the completion of the reconstruction of the main railway corridor in the west-east direction. With a bit of exaggeration, it must be noted that after 20 years—it won't happen sooner—we will have to start the reconstruction of the main corridor for higher speeds from western Slovakia all over again...

## ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE QUALITY OF TRANSPORTATION PROJECT PREPARATION BY THE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, AND WITH THE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT PROCESS?

Slovakia has long struggled with the preparation of major infrastructure projects and the drawdown of EU funds, because the public procurement and permitting system here is very complex and often focused solely on price. The Swiss have been teaching me for 30 years that what is cheap or free is not necessarily the best. In many tenders, large, reputable firms with dozens of permanent designers and construction supervisors—holding certifications issued by SKSI and with experience from previous projects—compete against someone who has only a few employees.

How can price be the only criterion then?! Over the past 10–15 years, Poland has built five times as many highways as we have. I appreciate the steps being taken to improve the situation—the introduction of electronic procurement, the simplification of building permits, and the centralized coordination of projects—which are gradually speeding up processes and offering hope that Slovakia will be able to effectively utilize all EU funds earmarked for the completion of selected transportation infrastructure projects. For this to actually happen, we must still deal with one more problem: the constant complaints from individuals—I call them saboteurs—who live by the motto "The worse, the better."

Amberg Engineering Slovakia has been on the Slovak market for nearly 23 years. It provides services in the areas of design, supervision, engineering, property-related legal settlements, and expert assessments, particularly for large infrastructure projects. Our company is part of the Swiss AMBERG Group, which has been active in the most advanced tunneling market for 60 years. It is a leader in design, supervision, and audits and inspections of transportation tunnels, not only in Switzerland. It is very difficult to explain to my partner the sheer volume of questions that often arise in the context of public procurement, the constant objections and filings with the Public Procurement Office.

All of this comes at a cost. It's not just the preparation of the bids themselves. Just for the bank guarantees required for bids, we typically have more than 1 million euros tied up—and these funds remain tied up for the entire duration of the public tender, which can sometimes be very long. But to be objective. Often, the tender documents prepared by designers are not of high quality. Speaking for our company, we have been burned several times, and my clear goal is to minimize these errors in the future through more rigorous oversight.

## HOW SHOULD SLOVAKIA RESPOND TO AGING, TALENT SHORTAGES, AND WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION?

In my view, the key question today is not how many people we have, but how well we can work with human capital and its potential. How can we develop it, keep people economically active for longer, and connect their capabilities more effectively with the needs of companies and the economy.

I see education as the foundation. It is both a critical and a long-term issue. Slovakia needs a clearly defined and professionally led strategy for education development, one that remains consistent even as governments change. If we want to move forward as a country, we must prepare people systematically for a fast-changing world. This is not a task for one or two governments, but at least for one or two generations. Without meaningful changes in education, we will not address the causes of the problem, only its consequences. The first condition for success is the willingness of those in positions of greatest responsibility to take this issue seriously and address it with discipline and continuity.

At the same time, there are areas where progress can come sooner. One of them is the role of the "silver generation". In Slovakia, people over fifty are still too often seen as being past the peak of their working lives. I see it differently. With the right conditions, reasonable flexibility, and good work organization, older employees can be a highly stable, loyal, and valuable part of the workforce. If we want to respond to population aging in a sensible way, we need to look beyond stereotypes and recognize the benefits this generation can bring to employers and colleagues. Very soon, this may not apply only to people in their fifties, but also to those in their sixties...

It is also not enough to have job openings and people willing to work if the two cannot meet geographically. Workforce mobility within Slovakia and more flexible working models are still discussed less often than they should be. Transport, housing availability, part-time work, and other flexible work arrangements can all play an important role here. In my view, this remains an underused area with room for practical and relatively quick improvement.

Another issue I see very strongly is continuous learning within companies. The labor market is changing faster than formal education can respond. That is why ongoing reskilling and upskilling throughout a person's career are increasingly important today. In my opinion, companies need to accept that some of the talent they need will not simply be available on the market. They will have to develop it intentionally within their own organizations and then find ways to retain it.

This is closely linked to the quality of leadership and the overall way companies work with people. Talent shortages can be addressed in part through more focused and intensive search for the right candidates. But it is just as important whether companies can retain people, develop individuals and teams, and create an environment where people want to stay. In practice, results are often shaped by the quality of management, the ability to work with internal potential, and company culture. Many of our clients today do not only need help finding the right people. They also want to learn how to work with people more effectively: how to identify and attract the right talent, develop soft skills, strengthen leadership, and build a healthier culture and way of working across the organization.

In my view, Slovakia also needs to become more open to and better prepared for international talent, and more intentional in attracting people from abroad, including Slovak graduates of foreign universities. However, if we want to attract and retain talent from outside the country, Slovakia must become more attractive not only as a place to work, but also as a place to live.

To sum up, Slovakia's response to aging, talent shortages, and workforce transformation must be systemic, practical and long-term. Better education, longer economic activity, higher mobility, continuous learning, stronger leadership and company culture, and a greater ability to attract talent from outside. In this combination, I see a realistic path to continuous strengthening the competitiveness of both the country and the companies operating within it.

# ROBERT BALDOVIČ

FOUNDING PARTNER  
MENKYNAPARTNERS  
MANAGEMENT  
CONSULTING



Educated as a veterinary doctor, he began his professional journey in academic field. When new opportunities were opening across Central Europe, he moved into business in the early 1990s. He entered the pharmaceutical industry, where he built a career from frontline sales to top country leadership, later taking on regional and European responsibilities. Co-founding MenkynaPartners Management Consulting 20 years ago brought together his business experience with executive search expertise. Over time, his work expanded beyond pharma and executive search itself, into a broader advisory perspective mainly represented by in-depth interviews, coaching, mentoring, career partnership, and management consulting. Robert is committed to being genuinely useful through a combination of professional depth and human dedication.

# MATEJ BEŇUŠKA

MANAGING PARTNER  
PA MATTERS S R.O.



Matej leads PA Matters, a public affairs consultancy advising organisations in complex regulatory and stakeholder environments. Under his direction, PA Matters has built a strong market position and received several EMEA-level recognitions. His work has gained international attention, particularly in relation to ride-hailing policy and regulatory developments across Central and Eastern Europe. Matej focuses on regulatory intelligence, stakeholder engagement and practical policy input, helping clients understand evolving rules, anticipate risks and engage with public institutions responsibly. Known for his calm approach in high-pressure situations, he works with clients to navigate complexity and find practical, sustainable solutions.

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

Slovakia still has important advantages: its central European location, Eurozone membership, industrial base and technically skilled workforce. However, these strengths are no longer enough. The country's economic model, built heavily on industrial production, cost competitiveness and automotive manufacturing, is under growing pressure.

The outlook should be assessed realistically. Recent forecasts point to subdued growth rather than a strong convergence story. The OECD expects Slovakia's real GDP to grow by only 1.1% in 2026 and 1.8% in 2027, with sluggish trade, fiscal consolidation and uncertainty weighing on investment. The National Bank of Slovakia also expects public debt to reach around 63% of GDP in 2026 and, without further consolidation, exceed 65% of GDP in 2028. In April 2026, S&P downgraded Slovakia to A, citing elevated fiscal deficits and projecting the general government deficit to average 4.8% of GDP between 2026 and 2029.

This does not mean Slovakia lacks potential. It means the margin for error is smaller. Slovakia must focus on productivity, institutional quality, predictable regulation, innovation, education and talent retention. Without these, the country risks remaining a production base rather than becoming a higher-value economy.

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

The most important shift would be long-term stability and predictability in legislation and regulation. Businesses can adapt to stricter rules, higher costs or changing market conditions. What they struggle with is frequent legislative change, weak impact assessment and inconsistent implementation.

A stable and predictable regulatory framework is one of the most important foundations of competitiveness. If companies do not know how rules will change, how they will be interpreted or whether they will be enforced consistently, they become more cautious. That affects investment, hiring and innovation.

For Slovakia, improving predictability is not an abstract legal issue. It is a practical economic priority. In a low-growth environment, uncertainty becomes even more expensive.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?

Public affairs in Slovakia is becoming more important, but also more closely watched. This is a natural development. Companies, public institutions and stakeholders all need clearer, more transparent and more professional dialogue.

Slovakia is currently preparing new lobbying legislation, which will be an important development for the public affairs sector. We are curious to see how the law will be applied in practice and hope it will contribute to more transparency, clearer rules and greater professionalisation of dialogue between business, public institutions and other stakeholders.

For PA Matters, the challenge is to continue building trust in public affairs as a legitimate professional discipline. Good public affairs is not about avoiding regulation. It is about making regulation smarter, more predictable and more workable. Our role is to help clients understand the environment, bring practical input into policy discussions and engage with public institutions responsibly.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?

Calm judgment. Leaders today operate in an environment shaped by political uncertainty, regulatory pressure, technological change and public scrutiny. In such conditions, speed is important, but reaction without perspective can create more risk than value.

Good leadership requires the ability to separate noise from substance, understand different stakeholder interests and make decisions that are both practical and responsible. In public affairs, this is especially important. The best solutions are rarely created through pressure or confrontation. They are created through preparation, credibility, timing and a clear understanding of how institutions and people actually work.

# TOMÁŠ BÚRY

PARTNER  
ALLEN OVERY SHEARMAN  
STERLING S.R.O.



Tomáš has significant experience in all aspects of M&A and corporate law. He has a proven track record of successfully managing both cross-border and domestic transactions, including private and competitive acquisitions, disposals, corporate reorganisations, and joint ventures. In recent years, Tomáš has advised clients on a number of high-profile M&A transactions on Slovak and CEE market, in particular in the sectors of energy and infrastructure, technology, financial institutions, industrials, and private capital clients.

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

Looking back at 2025, I'm most proud of the depth and complexity of cross-border transactions our Bratislava team delivered. We advised on several landmark deals led out of Bratislava that required coordination across multiple A&O Shearman offices and jurisdictions, and what stood out was not just the legal quality but the seamless execution under significant time pressure. For a mid-sized market like Slovakia, being able to offer the full firepower of a global firm while maintaining the local expertise and personal touch our clients expect - that's something I take real pride in. It also validated the investment we've made in building a team that can handle truly sophisticated mandates without compromise.

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

Innovation at A&O Shearman is not a standalone initiative - it's embedded in how we work every day. On the technology side, we continuously evaluate and deploy tools that remove friction from our processes, whether that's in due diligence and document review, drafting, streamlining routine tasks, or client reporting. But for me, the most impactful innovation comes from people. We actively encourage our lawyers to challenge established workflows and propose better ways of delivering results. We also invest heavily in cross-practice collaboration - some of the most creative solutions I've seen came from putting together people with different specializations and letting them think through a problem together. The key is creating a culture where experimentation is welcomed, not penalized.

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

The legal industry is at a genuine inflection point. AI is no longer a future promise - it's already reshaping how we approach research, contract analysis, risk assessment and legal writing in real time. What excites me most is the shift in the role of a lawyer: as routine tasks become increasingly automated, we can focus more on what truly matters - strategic judgment, creative problem-solving, and trusted client relationships. At A&O Shearman, we've moved beyond the adoption phase and are now focused on integration and impact. We measure how our digital tools translate into tangible value for clients - faster turnaround, greater accuracy, and more competitive pricing. At the same time, we're very deliberate about data security and ethical use, because in our profession, trust is everything.

## WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE SLOVAK LEGAL MARKET IN THE COMING YEARS, AND WHAT ROLE DO YOU SEE A&O SHEARMAN PLAYING IN IT?

I see the Slovak legal market consolidating around firms that can handle complex work and deliver clear, concise, and commercially driven advice. Clients are becoming more demanding and less tolerant of purely formalistic legal input, which will push firms to be faster, more pragmatic, and more aligned with business realities. That's where A&O Shearman has a strong advantage. In that regard, A&O Shearman's global platform and established CEE presence position it well to meet these expectations - connecting international clients with the local Slovak market while delivering the kind of pragmatic, commercially focused advice the market increasingly demands.

# PETER ČIŽMÁR

SENIOR BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT MANAGER  
PENTA REAL ESTATE



Peter Čižmár is a Senior Business Development Manager at Penta Real Estate, specializing in the strategic and commercial management of residential development projects. He joined the company nearly a decade ago after winning the Smart Deal student competition, an initiative by Penta Group to identify young talent. His career started at Ernst & Young during his studies at the University of Economics in Prague, working in Audit and later in the Performance Improvement team, where he gained strong analytical and strategic expertise. At Penta Real Estate, he has overseen land acquisitions exceeding €100 million and is currently involved in key projects including Southbank, Etapy Vajnorská, Medze, and multiple phases of the Bory development—altogether representing more than 6,000 residential units. In addition, Southbank will deliver more than 85,000 m<sup>2</sup> of commercial space.

## **IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE, WHAT SHOULD SLOVAKIA PRIORITIZE TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE WITHIN THE EU AND GLOBALLY? DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IS RESHAPING LABOR MARKETS ACROSS EUROPE. HOW SHOULD SLOVAKIA RESPOND TO AGING, TALENT SHORTAGES, AND WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION?**

To remain competitive within the EU and globally, Slovakia must focus on several key priorities. Primarily, improving the quality of education, ensuring a stable economic and tax environment, and supporting high value-added industries. Slovakia has long faced a significant outflow of students studying abroad, with more than 60% not returning. However, this issue begins earlier—in primary and secondary education. The fact that education hasn't been a long-term priority is reflected in international assessments like PISA, where results show a negative trend. The consequence is a shortage of qualified talent, which directly affects competitiveness and increasingly influences foreign investment decisions. The availability of a skilled workforce remains a key factor, and compared to regional cities like Prague, Slovakia continues to lag behind. To stay competitive, the country cannot rely solely on traditional industries. It must actively support sectors with higher added value and create conditions for their growth. This is closely linked to the stability of the business environment. Frequent and uncoordinated tax changes—such as increasing the tax burden or introducing new levies—reduce Slovakia's attractiveness to investors, while rising labor costs weaken regional competitiveness. If Slovakia wants to close the gap with developed countries again, a return to long-term, predictable policymaking is essential, both to attract investment and to retain and bring back talent.

## **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING? HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN SLOVAKIA, AND WHAT ROLE SHOULD DEVELOPERS PLAY IN SHAPING CITIES? WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT IN SLOVAKIA TODAY, AND HOW CAN THEY BE ADDRESSED?**

The biggest strategic challenge we face today is managing long-term development projects in a highly uncertain environment, particularly in terms of timelines, costs, and regulation. Development has increasingly become a business of risk and capital management. The period between land acquisition and project delivery often spans several years, and in Slovakia, permitting can extend up to a decade. This limits the ability to respond to economic cycles and increases pressure on final

housing prices. This challenge is amplified by recent global developments, including the pandemic, geopolitical tensions, and rapid technological change. In contrast, slow and unpredictable permitting process remains one of the key barriers to development. At the same time, the nature of development itself is evolving. It is no longer about isolated projects, but about creating integrated urban structures that combine living, working, and services. We see the future of urban development in mixed-use districts that integrate naturally into the city, offering quality public spaces, accessibility, and long-term value for residents and investors. This also redefines the role of developers, who are no longer just project executors but active partners in shaping cities. The single most impactful change for the market would be faster and more transparent permitting processes. Without this, improvements in housing affordability and quality of the urban environment will remain limited.

## **HOW IS DEMAND EVOLVING ACROSS RESIDENTIAL, OFFICE, AND MIXED-USE PROJECTS IN YOUR PORTFOLIO?**

Demand across real estate segments has significantly evolved recently — not by weakening, but by becoming more demanding and selective. In residential development, demand has gradually recovered after interest rate shocks, but buyers now make more rational decisions. While price remains important, there is greater emphasis on quality, location, energy efficiency, and access to services. Successful projects are those that offer a comprehensive value proposition, not just housing units. At the same time, housing prices have risen faster than wages, driven by higher costs of materials, labor, and prolonged permitting processes, increasing pressure on affordability. In the office segment, demand has stabilized after the pandemic but remains weaker compared to residential. New demand is limited by lower foreign investor activity and slower domestic growth. Much of the activity is driven by relocations to higher-quality spaces, as companies seek modern buildings with strong energy performance and advanced technology. In the long term, especially top-tier projects will succeed—an approach reflected in our office developments. The most significant shift is in mixed-use development. Demand is increasingly moving toward environments that combine living, working, and services in one place. Clients and tenants seek functional urban environments with everything at hand. This confirms that the future of development lies in integration rather than individual segments. That's why we focus on long-term projects with a balanced mix of uses. At the same time, supply remains the key constraint. Slovakia—and Bratislava in particular—continues to face a housing shortage, which is deepening due to a decline in both completed and new projects. Without addressing systemic barriers, especially in permitting, pressure on affordability will persist.

# ZUZANA ČMELÍKOVÁ

LEADERSHIP & RESILIENCE  
DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL  
FORVIS MAZARS IN SLOVAKIA



Zuzana is a leadership and resilience development expert at Forvis Mazars, focusing on strengthening organizational culture, ethical leadership, and long term people and team development. With 15+ years of experience in teaching, coaching, and facilitation, she specializes in company culture, leadership development, self management, resilience, and soft skills training. She holds a PhD in Human Management from Matej Bel University and completed internships in Belgium and the USA. Zuzana is an internationally certified persolog<sup>®</sup> coach and earned a certification in Positive Psychology and Resilience from the University of Pennsylvania. In 2024, she was named Lecturer of the Year at the Learning & Development Awards. She co authored a preventive resilience building program for high school students developed with VÚDPaP.

[WWW.FORVISMAZARS.COM/SK](http://WWW.FORVISMAZARS.COM/SK)

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

In today's rapidly changing geopolitical and economic environment, Slovakia faces an important moment. As global competition intensifies, we must rethink how we prepare people, not only with technical knowledge, but with the character, adaptability, and resilience needed to thrive amid uncertainty. Cooperation with organizations that help individuals and businesses strengthen adaptability and long-term readiness can support a more future-proof society.

From my perspective as a leadership and resilience development professional, Slovakia should prioritize education reform that focuses more intentionally on character development. While our education system has traditionally emphasized cognitive performance, qualities such as perseverance, responsibility, ethical reasoning, and the ability to navigate ambiguity must now be equally valued.

Resilience has become a defining competence. Recent disruptions, from the pandemic to geopolitical tensions and rapid technological change, have shown that individuals and organizations must adapt quickly and continue to grow despite uncertainty. Embedding resilience in education means encouraging students to face challenges, learn from failure, and develop psychological strength, while supporting educators in fostering emotional and social development.

Character education should be integrated across all levels of schooling, fostering self-awareness, empathy, integrity, and a sense of purpose. These qualities help young people make responsible decisions, collaborate effectively, and support innovation and entrepreneurship, which are essential for EU and global competitiveness.

This belief is also why we at Forvis Mazars contributed to the preventive program Become More Resilient, focused on strengthening resilience among secondary school students. The program is now being implemented, helping to build a stronger future generation and contributing to a more resilient Slovakia through education.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?

In leadership, the complexity of today's environment demands a redefinition of what it means to lead effectively. Among many important qualities, I believe ethical leadership stands out as the most essential. In uncertain times, people look

to leaders not only for direction, but for moral clarity and trustworthiness.

Drawing on the work of Joanne B. Ciulla and Heidi Von Weltzien Høivik, moral leadership is not a static trait but an ongoing action. It is reflected in the everyday decisions leaders make, the behaviors they model, and the standards they uphold. Ethical leadership isn't about declaring values; it is about consistently translating those values into practice, especially when choices are difficult. In many organizations, this includes collaborating with trusted external partners who help strengthen decision-making processes, reinforce transparency, and cultivate cultures grounded in integrity.

Ethical leadership also requires courage. Leaders must be willing to take responsibility, act transparently, and prioritize long-term integrity over short-term gain, particularly in environments where pressures for performance may conflict with ethical considerations. Real leadership lies in navigating these tensions with clarity and conviction.

Another essential dimension is accountability. Leaders set the tone for organizational culture, and their actions signal what is truly valued. When leaders demonstrate fairness, respect, and honesty, they create environments where trust can flourish. This trust enables collaboration, innovation, and resilience. Conversely, when ethical standards are compromised, the impact is far-reaching, undermining performance as well as reputation.

Ethical leadership is also closely linked to self-awareness. Leaders must understand their own values, biases, and motivations to act authentically. In my work at Forvis Mazars, I see that this requires ongoing reflection and dedication to personal growth. Professional partners can play a valuable role in supporting leaders through this process, helping them navigate complexity, broaden perspective, and strengthen resilience.

Ultimately, both education reform and ethical leadership are deeply interconnected. By fostering character and resilience from an early stage, we prepare a new generation of leaders who are not only capable, but principled. These leaders can navigate complexity with confidence, act with integrity, and contribute to sustainable success, both for their organizations and for Slovakia as a whole.

**In a time defined by uncertainty, our greatest competitive advantage lies not only in what we know, but in who we are and how we choose to act.**

# MEHRDAD DOUSTDAR

MANAGING DIRECTOR  
MERCK SHARP & DOHME



Mehrdad Doustdar has been associated with Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD) practically all his professional life. Before becoming Managing Director of the Czech branch of MSD, he worked for almost three years as the Business Unit Director Hospital and Specialty and additionally also led the Vaccines Unit at MSD in Germany. Prior to that, he gained experience in various positions at MSD in Austria and Switzerland as well as in the regional and global management of the company. He studied business management at the Wirtschaftsuniversität in Vienna, Austria, and at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. He has been a member of the Czech Association of Innovative Pharmaceutical Industry (AIFP) Board of Directors since December 2023. In December 2025, he was elected Chair of the AIFP Board.

## SHAPING THE NEXT CHAPTER OF MSD IN SLOVAKIA: MEET THE INCOMING MANAGING DIRECTOR

### **YOU ARE TAKING OVER THE ROLE OF MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MSD IN SLOVAKIA THIS MAY, WHILE CONTINUING AS MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MSD CZECH REPUBLIC. HOW DO YOU SEE THIS NEW CHAPTER?**

It is both an honor and a responsibility. In the coming weeks, my first priority will be to listen – to better understand the specific needs of the Slovak healthcare environment, the challenges faced by patients, healthcare professionals and policymakers, and the expectations of our partners. At the same time, Slovakia is not an unfamiliar landscape to me. As a native Austrian and someone who has already spent some years in the Czech Republic, I have followed developments in the region closely and understand many of the shared historical, cultural and systemic contexts.

Slovakia and the Czech Republic face very similar structural challenges, from demographic ageing to the growing burden of chronic diseases and increasing pressure on public budgets. My ambition is therefore to build on proven experience from Czechia, while fully respecting local specificities, and together with Slovak partners translate that experience into tangible benefits for patients, the healthcare system and society.

### **WHAT DOES THIS DUAL LEADERSHIP BRING IN TERMS OF LEADERSHIP, CULTURE AND BUSINESS IMPACT?**

Leading across both markets creates an opportunity to think strategically about impact rather than scale alone. It allows us to share expertise, leadership experience and best practices, while also creating space for further investments and faster delivery of innovation. Over the years, I have held various leadership roles across functions and markets, and one lesson stands out: sustainable success always starts with people and culture.

Creating an environment where teams feel trusted, empowered and purpose driven is essential – not only for business performance, but for meaningful impact on patients. Combining local insight with regional experience also allows us to engage more effectively with stakeholders and support a strong and diversified pipeline of innovation.

### **YOU HAVE OFTEN HIGHLIGHTED THE BROADER VALUE OF INVESTING IN HEALTHCARE. WHY IS THIS PERSPECTIVE IMPORTANT TODAY?**

Because healthcare decisions shape far more than clinical outcomes. Strategic investments in prevention, innovation and timely access to effective treatment generate long term value – healthier populations, higher productivity and greater economic resilience. Across

Europe, we see that countries taking a long term perspective on health tend to be better prepared for future challenges. Health should be viewed as a pillar of sustainable development, not only as a short term budget item.

### **AS YOU STEP INTO THE SLOVAK MARKET, WHERE DO YOU SEE THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A MEANINGFUL IMPACT IN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM? AND WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION FIRST?**

Slovakia faces many of the same pressures we see across the region – a growing burden of chronic diseases, an ageing population and increasing strain on the healthcare system. This also means there is a significant opportunity to shift the focus more strongly toward areas that can deliver long term impact.

One such area is prevention. Vaccination, screenings and early diagnosis can fundamentally change disease trajectories, particularly in oncology and chronic conditions. Beyond saving lives, prevention helps avoid complications that place long term pressure on both healthcare and social systems. Strengthening prevention is therefore one of the most effective ways to improve outcomes while supporting sustainability.

At the same time, innovation and data play a critical role in making healthcare systems more effective. Advanced analytics and real world data help move decision making from reactive responses toward more predictive and targeted approaches. At MSD, we work with health economic models, real world data and digital tools to better understand patient pathways, treatment outcomes and system inefficiencies. This enables evidence based decisions, more transparent use of resources and better value for patients and payers. These are areas where I see real potential to make a positive difference also in the Slovak context.

### **HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF BUSINESS, INCLUDING MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES, IN SHAPING HEALTHCARE AND POLICY DISCUSSIONS?**

Businesses should act as constructive, transparent and evidence based partners. In healthcare, this means contributing expertise, data and a long term perspective, rather than promoting narrow interests. Open dialogue between industry, policymakers, payers and patient organisations is essential to designing solutions that are both sustainable and socially responsible. Platforms such as AmCham play a crucial role in enabling this type of cross sector dialogue.

# VÁCLAV DUŠEK

COUNTRY MANAGER CZ/SK  
ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS  
/ MAVIE WORK



Václav leads a dedicated team of consultants and psychologists across the Czech Republic and Slovakia. With a remarkable 27 years of experience in the HR sector, he has spent the last decade at Assessment Systems, serving not just as Country Manager but also as a highly sought-after senior consultant. Alongside his team, Václav partners with clients to deliver tailored HR solutions, specializing in Hogan Assessments for talent acquisition and development, competency mapping, 360-degree feedback, comprehensive HR consulting, and Schuhfried computerized psychological diagnostics. A central pillar of his work is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)—a proactive, preventive support system designed to safeguard and enhance both the mental and physical health of employees.

WWW.ASYSTEMS.AS

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

In my view, one of the greatest challenges—and most urgent priorities—for maintaining our industrial and economic competitiveness is opening up the labor market. This means becoming much more welcoming to foreign investors and, crucially, to international talent seeking career opportunities outside their home countries. Compared to other EU nations, Slovakia currently ranks near the bottom when it comes to employing foreign nationals. This is a vulnerability that will have severe negative repercussions in the coming years as our current workforce continues to age. We are facing a stark demographic reality: the number of young people entering the job market is, and will remain, significantly lower than the number of older professionals aging into the retirement system. Furthermore, younger generations are entering the workforce with a fundamentally different set of core values. For instance, they place a massive premium on work-life balance, meaning we can expect a much stronger preference for part-time roles and flexible working arrangements in the future. To remain competitive globally, Slovakia must adapt to these shifting expectations while simultaneously attracting the international talent necessary to bridge our widening demographic gap.

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

When you look at demographic trends across the EU, practically every country is facing an aging working population. The talent pool is shrinking, and over the next 5 to 10 years, the situation will become highly complex. Additionally, state social expenditures will rise significantly due to the growing number of seniors. While technological advancements, AI, and robotics will certainly help in many sectors, nothing can replace the added value of human beings in numerous fields.

So, the question is: what do we do about it? Companies that recognize this risk have already started taking action, knowing full well that no one else is

going to solve it for them. A relatively simple and fast solution is ensuring comprehensive care for your employees. As we age, we increasingly face health complications, both physical and mental. In other words, it is far more effective to invest in preventive programs than to deal with the consequences later.

In post-communist countries, prevention is still perceived as less important compared to Western or Scandinavian nations. However, when employers realize how much time employees spend dealing with health or personal issues during working hours—and convert that into financial costs—it becomes glaringly obvious that preventive programs are the smart choice. The cost of such a service per person equals the price of just one or two cups of good coffee.

If we provide people with the right conditions to resolve difficult life situations faster and more effectively, we reduce employee turnover and the constant need to hire new talent. This solution also applies to employees approaching retirement. If we offer them support that enables them to stay in the workforce with us longer, that's one less problem we have to worry about.

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

In the middle of last year, we became part of the international MAVIE Work group. Thanks to this, we can now provide our services to clients across all of Central Europe—including Austria and Germany—and in all local languages. Through this partnership, we've also expanded our portfolio to include telemedical services in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Because of this, people no longer have to wait weeks or even months to get an appointment with a specialist.

Furthermore, we launched a new online portal for our clients. It allows individuals to easily select the specific issue they need help with, their preferred location, and, ultimately, a dedicated expert perfectly suited for their particular problem.



# WOLFGANG H. FISCHER

CEO, ZURICH BRATISLAVA  
COMPETENCE CENTER,  
ZURICH INSURANCE  
COMPANY LTD.



Wolfgang H. Fischer is a German citizen – born in Munich who studied law in Germany and Austria. He has qualified as FCII, PMP, and MBCI and gained many skills and experience over 32 years across 7 European countries he worked in. Since June 2016 he is CEO of Zurich Bratislava Competence Center with a demonstrated history of working in the (re-)insurance industry and insurance related fields. His passion for insurance and project work led him to obtain an additional degree in Insurance Management from Germany Insurance Academy as well as a certification as project manager. He came and stayed in Slovakia because he sees the potential in people in the labor market on the professional side – and he loves the country because of its nature, historical landmarks, people and last but not least local food.

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

Alongside many core business-related achievements, I am most proud that our local CSR team convinced the Zurich Foundation to support IPčko, a Slovak-wide NGO focused on the mental health of young people in crisis situations. With a grant securing their operations for the next three years, IPčko can continue their vital support work.

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

### Economic Diversification & Innovation

- Reduce reliance on single sectors (e.g., automotive) by encouraging growth in Business Service Centers, IT, green technologies, and advanced manufacturing.
- Invest in R&D and support start-ups and innovation ecosystems to boost value-added exports.

### Sustainable Energy Transition

- Accelerate investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency to decrease dependency on imported fuels, enhance energy security, and meet EU climate targets.
- Encourage public and private sector cooperation in green initiatives.

### Digital Transformation

- Prioritize digital infrastructure and digital skills to improve productivity and attract high-tech investments.
- Promote e-government and digital services for efficiency and transparency – and cost reduction on employer side

### Tax Policy & Investment Climate

- Maintain stable and predictable tax policies to attract foreign direct investment
- Simplify tax administration and reduce bureaucracy for businesses
- Align incentives with EU funds and sustainability targets.

### Labour Market & Education

- Invest in upskilling and reskilling, focusing on digital, technical, and green competencies.
- Strengthen links between education, vocational training, and industry needs to address workforce shortages.

### Regional Integration & EU Collaboration

- Actively engage in EU policymaking, especially on energy, trade, and digital regulation.
- Leverage EU funding and cross-border cooperation to support infrastructure and innovation.

### Resilience to Geopolitical Risks

- Build robust supply chains and contingency plans for potential disruptions due to global tensions.
- Strengthen cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection.

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

There is not just one measure, but a set of measures that need to be considered and wisely applied: avoiding brain drain, encouraging the return of experienced Slovaks to the country, making use of flexible pension age, upskilling the existing workforce, and using technologies like AI to increase efficiency and reduce the need for human labour in certain aspects of processes.

**Brain drain**, which often begins during the search for a university, and mainly after obtaining a degree or in the early years of a career before settling down with a family, can be managed to the desired extent – “desired extent” because some brain drain is beneficial when it results in a brain carousel, where people recognize they are working in an attractive job market with ample opportunities for development in a stable and predictable environment. While AmCham and BSCF member companies provide such an environment, promote opportunities, and increasingly collaborate with local academia, there is one element that requires much attention: a stable and predictable environment.

Before the boom of service centers around 2005, a significant number of well-educated Slovaks left Slovakia to seek job opportunities in Europe or overseas. Additionally, talents hired by international companies in Slovakia often continued their careers abroad. Now it is time to encourage specialists and managers with international experience to **return to Slovakia**, as the market is much more mature – and several international companies have even relocated Group roles to Slovakia. The only obstacle I see at the moment, as already mentioned above, is that such talents expect a stable and predictable environment.

Slovakia provides a flexible **pension age**, allowing staff to continue working after reaching the legal pension age without any obstacles. A mindset change is required here – instead of focusing solely on a specific retirement date, employees should be encouraged to consider their health status, opportunities to increase their pension, and mental health benefits if they remain engaged. Of course, it depends on individuals and the type of work performed, but given the increased life expectancy, voluntary full or part-time work by those who can and want to help minimize the impact of a shrinking workforce.

**Finally, upskilling and the use of technologies like AI** can free employees from repetitive tasks and less productive administrative work, allowing them to focus on parts of the job that require higher qualifications or human skills – thus enabling the existing workforce to deliver more.

## DESPITE ALL THE TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES, CONSULTING REMAINS A PEOPLE BUSINESS.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping the consulting landscape at unprecedented speed, yet experience, sound judgment, and the ability to understand context remain irreplaceable. In this interview with Lygia Fullbrook from KPMG in Slovakia, we explore the future of consulting, the real challenges of implementing AI responsibly, the growing importance of continuous education, and why – even in a technology driven world – success ultimately depends on people.

### WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF CONSULTING LOOK LIKE IN A WORLD SHAPED BY AI?

Consulting very much has and will continue to have its place. While artificial intelligence is undoubtedly changing the way we work, the core of consulting remains the same. Even before AI, we relied heavily on technology and analytical tools. The difference today is the speed and scale at which these tools operate.

What cannot be replaced is human experience – the ability to think forward, understand the broader market landscape, and interpret developments in the context of geopolitics, regulation, and constant change. AI can process information faster than any human, but it does not understand context in the same way. This is where the value of seasoned advisors comes in, bringing what I like to call “grey hair experience” to the table – judgment built over years, not minutes.

The future of consulting will therefore be a combination of technological capability and human insight. Those who can effectively connect the two will continue to add real value to clients navigating an increasingly complex environment.

### WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES BUSINESSES AND CONSULTANTS FACE WHEN IT COMES TO AI?

One of the key challenges is the speed at which AI technologies are evolving compared to the ability of legislation and governance frameworks to keep pace. In many cases, innovation clearly outstrips regulation, creating uncertainty around accountability, data protection, and intellectual property.

Another significant hurdle lies in implementation. While new tools and ideas are often developed quickly, embedding them within large organizations is far more complex. Concepts must go through extensive corporate governance structures, internal policies, and risk and compliance reviews. As a result, scaling AI solutions in a controlled and responsible way is often more demanding than it appears at first glance.

This is precisely why strong human oversight remains essential. Multidisciplinary teams – combining developers, business leaders, risk specialists, and legal experts – need to continuously review AI outputs, validate their reliability, and ensure that ethical and quality standards are met. Safeguarding intellectual property and ensuring responsible use are integral parts of this process. Moreover, emerging use cases such as autonomous technologies bring with them legal, societal, and ethical implications that extend well beyond technical feasibility. Navigating these areas requires experience, sound judgment, and a clear sense of responsibility.

### WHY IS EDUCATION SUCH A CRITICAL TOPIC IN THIS TRANSFORMATION?

Education is absolutely essential. Just as employers are looking for very specific skillsets to support their teams and projects, candidates should also be selective when choosing an employer – based on the learning and development opportunities available to them.

The ability to learn, relearn, and adapt is becoming one of the most valuable skills in itself. Technical knowledge will continue to evolve, but critical thinking, understanding context, and working across disciplines will remain relevant regardless of technological change. From a broader perspective, we must continue aligning our education systems with real market needs so that graduates are prepared not only for today’s roles, but for jobs that may not even exist yet. Lifelong learning is no longer a benefit – it is a necessity.

### WHAT CONTINUES TO MOTIVATE YOU PERSONALLY IN THIS RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT?

For me, it is still, first and foremost, about people. Consulting is not about tools or technologies alone – it’s about understanding clients, listening to different perspectives, and stepping outside of your own bubble. The ability to truly grasp context comes from engaging with others who operate in different areas and markets.

I am also highly motivated by working with colleagues who are curious, agile, and willing to continuously reinvent themselves. In an environment where change is constant, you need teams that are open to new ideas and comfortable with uncertainty.

Ultimately, despite all the technological advances, consulting remains a people business. And that is what makes it both challenging and rewarding at the same time.



# LYGIA FULLBROOK

PARTNER  
KPMG IN SLOVAKIA



Lygia Fullbrook leads KPMG’s Talent Solutions services in Slovakia and is a sector leader for Shared Service Centers. At the same time, she oversees our Clients & Markets function, with a primary focus on nurturing relationships and expanding our business development endeavors with our partners, as well as with existing and potential clients across US and UK markets. A cornerstone of Lygia’s skill set lies in her ability to guide clients through periods of transformation and change, providing them top-tier talent from the Big4 to help them with the execution of strategic projects. Prior to joining KPMG in 2006, Lygia held a position in London at a global risk management consultancy firm, where she supervised Corporate Intelligence projects in Central Europe.

[WWW.KPMG.SK](http://WWW.KPMG.SK)

# MARC GOMBEER

PLANT MANAGER  
VOLVO CAR KOŠICE



Marc Gombeer is the Plant Manager and Head of the Volvo Car Košice plant, leading the construction and launch of the state-of-the-art, climate-neutral electric vehicle plant in Valalíky, Slovakia. With over 30 years of international management experience in the automotive industry, he specializes in manufacturing, procurement, and large-scale project execution. Prior to his current role, Marc held prominent leadership positions within Volvo Cars globally, including Vice President of Manufacturing Americas (Volvo Car USA) and Vice President for the Chengdu and Daqing plants in China. He is a strong advocate for transparency, proactive problem-solving, and building highly efficient teams. Under his leadership, the new Košice plant aims to set a benchmark in sustainable premium EV production, with a planned capacity of 250,000 cars annually.

VOLVOCARS.COM

## **VOLVO CARS IS BRINGING A MAJOR INVESTMENT TO EASTERN SLOVAKIA. WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE NEW PLANT IN VALALÍKY, AND WHAT ARE THE NEXT MILESTONES?**

We are progressing at a very strong pace, proving that Volvo Cars is a highly active investor here. Anyone driving past Valalíky can already see the major buildings rising. The construction of all our production halls is now complete. We are actively installing advanced technologies across our facilities, including the paint shop and final assembly. In fact, we have already begun testing in the stamping shop and the body shop, where 600 robots are currently being commissioned. Our schedule is ambitious but strictly managed. We are on track for test production by mid-2026, which will flow into serial production in early 2027. The ramp-up phase will be steep, aiming for a planned capacity of 250,000 premium electric vehicles annually.

## **YOU HAVE EXTENSIVE GLOBAL EXPERIENCE, HAVING LED MANUFACTURING OPERATIONS FOR VOLVO IN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA. HOW DOES THAT EXPERTISE HELP IN ESTABLISHING A GREENFIELD SITE IN SLOVAKIA?**

Building a new plant from the ground up always comes with unique challenges, whether you are in Daqing, South Carolina, or Košice. One of the main lessons I've carried over is that success relies entirely on the team's ability to proactively anticipate issues. A high-performing team is one that actively looks for what could potentially go wrong, rather than just celebrating what is going right. Transparency is critical—both internally and externally with our suppliers and the public sector. If there is a bottleneck, we identify it early and

solve it collaboratively. We have a clear business case: to deliver a highly efficient facility with an optimal balance of quality, cost, and timelines.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IS A DRIVING FORCE BEHIND VOLVO'S STRATEGY. HOW IS THE KOŠICE PROJECT CONTRIBUTING TO THESE GOALS?**

This facility is designed from the outset to be climate-neutral. It represents the newest and most modern manufacturing hub in the Volvo Cars network. We are exclusively producing premium, next-generation electric vehicles here. This aligns perfectly with our global ambition to become a fully electric car company. Beyond just the final product, the entire construction and operational philosophy—from energy usage to supply chain logistics—is centered on minimizing our environmental footprint.

## **BUILDING A PLANT ALSO MEANS BUILDING A WORKFORCE. WHAT KIND OF CORPORATE CULTURE ARE YOU ESTABLISHING, AND WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM FUTURE EMPLOYEES?**

We are creating thousands of new jobs, and our recruitment is currently underway. We are looking for people across the board, from production operators to highly specialized engineering and management roles. I believe in a culture of ownership and open communication. We all must understand the purpose of this investment by Volvo Cars and carry together the responsibility to make it successful. For this, we invest heavily in the competence of our people through training and coaching. In return for our team's dedication, we provide a modern, inclusive, and technologically advanced working environment where people can genuinely shape the future of mobility. The energy in the region is fantastic, and we are excited to be part of Košice's transformation.



# LUCIA GRÖNEOVÁ

MANAGING DIRECTOR  
SWISS RE SLOVAKIA



Lucia has more than 20 years of experience in senior positions in multinational companies within high-tech and financial sector. Since joining Swiss Re in 2019, as HR director in Slovakia, she played a key role in strategic HR initiatives that prioritize both business objectives and employee well-being. In 2024 she was appointed Managing Director of Swiss Re Slovakia and in this expanded role, she is overseeing operations within the company's second largest location, driving locations strategy, talent acquisition and development, and building strategic partnerships. She also serves as vice chair of the Business Service Center Forum under the American Chamber of Commerce in Slovakia, contributing to the development of the wider business community.

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

Slovakia's competitiveness will depend on our ability to strengthen three pillars: **stability, talent, and innovation**. In a world shaped by geopolitical uncertainty and rapid technological shifts, companies need predictable conditions, future ready skills, and an environment that rewards investment in digital capabilities.

For me, the priority is clear: **building a resilient economy driven by human capital**. Slovakia must accelerate digitalization, support high value industries, and deepen collaboration between business, government, and academia. Only then can we continue to attract global employers and position ourselves as a strong, future-oriented member of the EU.

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

By treating demographic change as an economic opportunity, not only a challenge. The answer lies in a multi layered approach:

- **Upskilling and reskilling** people across all age groups
- **Enabling broader participation** – for example through flexible work, better childcare availability, and lifelong learning
- **Using technology responsibly** to augment – not replace – the workforce
- **Welcoming international talent** and simplifying mobility

As an employer, I see every day how much potential exists when people are given opportunities to grow. Slovakia must embrace a mindset that sees aging not as a burden, but as a driver for new forms of work and knowledge transfer.

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

In 2025, I was most proud of how Swiss Re Slovakia strengthened its role as an employer of choice and respected industry leader. We were recognized as the **Best Employer in the Banking, Finance, and Insurance industry** and as the **Healthy Company of the Year**, which reflects the culture and environment we create for our people.

We also deepened our partnership with academia by signing **Memoranda of Cooperation with two major business universities in Bratislava – University of Economics and Business and Comenius University**, helping us support future talent and strengthen skills development

in Slovakia. Together with our NGO partners, we contributed to **building societal resilience**, and we continued to **attract exceptional talent** across key areas of expertise.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?

Our biggest strategic challenge is the **successful integration of artificial intelligence into our business**. This means adapting our business model to new technologies, using AI responsibly, and at the same time **supporting our employees** with the skills and development they need to thrive in this changing landscape.

## HOW EXACTLY IS AI CHANGING YOUR INDUSTRY, AND HOW ARE YOU RESPONDING?

AI is reshaping the re/insurance industry at all levels – from risk modelling and pricing to claims handling and customer solutions.

For Swiss Re, this challenge has three equally important dimensions:

- **Adapting our business model** to harness AI in ways that strengthen risk insights, enhance accuracy, efficiency, or decision-making, and create new opportunities for clients.
- **Ensuring that we use technology responsibly**, with strong governance and a clear focus on quality, transparency, and long-term resilience.
- **Supporting our people** through continuous development and education so they can confidently work with new tools and shape how these technologies are applied.

By integrating AI thoughtfully into our business, investing in strong governance, and continuously developing our people, we ensure that digital transformation strengthens not only our industry, but also the resilience and trust on which it is built.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU CONSIDER MOST ESSENTIAL TODAY?

I believe the most essential leadership quality today is **the ability to combine adaptability with strong values**.

Leaders must navigate constant change, uncertainty, and complexity, while providing clarity and stability for their teams. This requires listening, learning, and adjusting one's approach – without losing sight of what truly matters.

At the same time, trust, fairness, and responsibility remain the foundation of effective leadership. When people know what their leader stands for, they feel safe to innovate, take ownership, and grow. In my experience, it is this balance between flexibility and integrity that enables organizations to succeed in a rapidly evolving world.

**PETER GUNDA**MANAGING PARTNER  
BDO SLOVAKIA

Peter is the Managing Partner of BDO Slovakia, where he leads the firm's strategy, growth, and overall direction in the Slovak market, a role he has held for nearly 15 years now. With 30 years of experience, he advises large multinational corporations as well as successful local SMEs across manufacturing, services, IT, and financial sectors. His expertise spans assurance, transaction advisory, and management consulting. He is known for combining strategic perspective with strong business judgment, translating complexity into clear, actionable decisions. Peter also holds several regional leadership roles within BDO. Prior to joining the firm, he worked at Arthur Andersen across Central Europe and the U.S., and co-founded a successful business advisory boutique.

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

Slovakia should start using its size as an advantage. We are not a large economy, and pretending otherwise leads nowhere. Our real opportunity is to act faster, decide faster, and adapt faster than bigger countries. In short, we should behave like a speedboat, not a cruise ship.

Competitiveness today is not built only on cost. It is built on speed, predictability, talent, and trust. Investors and businesses are looking for countries where rules are clear, institutions function, and decisions do not take forever. A smaller country can offer exactly that, if it chooses discipline over excuses.

Slovakia does not need to outscale larger economies. It needs to outmanoeuvre them. If we become known as a country that is agile, reliable, and open to innovation, we can remain competitive both within the EU and globally.

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

There is no serious answer to labour shortages without technology. Slovakia will not solve this challenge simply by hoping for more people. We need to use automation, digital tools, and AI far more decisively, especially in areas where routine work still consumes too much human capacity.

At the same time, we need a practical approach to attracting and integrating talent from abroad where the domestic market cannot meet demand. That is not ideology. It is a question of economic reality and long-term competitiveness.

The third pillar is support for families. If young people see housing, childcare, and financial stability as permanently out of reach, demographic pressure will only deepen. This is not a one-variable problem. The sensible response is a combination of technology, access to talent, and conditions that make family life easier to build.

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

If I had to choose one area, it would be education. And if I could add a second, it would be digitalisation. Education is rarely the most attractive reform in the short term because the real return comes years later. But that is exactly why it matters. Without a stronger education system, Slovakia will keep talking about competitiveness while gradually losing it.

At the same time, Slovakia should aim to become one of the most digitally advanced countries in the region. We do not need to invent the model from scratch. The Baltic states have already shown what is possible when digitalisation becomes a real national priority rather than a talking point.

A modern state, less bureaucracy, better digital public services, and a workforce better prepared for technology would improve the business environment more than another hundred partial measures.

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

At BDO, one of the achievements I am most proud of in 2025 was building our internal AI capability in a serious way. For some time, like many firms, we were weighing how much to rely on external suppliers and how much expertise to build ourselves. I am glad we chose to create a dedicated in-house AI team.

That matters because AI is already changing how audit, tax, accounting, and advisory services are delivered. But in a profession built on trust, speed alone is not enough. What matters just as much is governance, data protection, judgment, and accountability.

One issue I consider carefully is talent development. If firms allow AI to take over too much of the junior learning curve, we may create a gap between today's senior professionals and the next generation expected to replace them. At BDO, that is why we see AI not as a substitute for developing people, but as a tool that must be introduced responsibly.

Building this capability internally gives BDO more control, stronger long-term know-how, and a safer way to innovate. It also helps our people spend less time on repetitive processes and more time on what clients value most: insight, responsibility, and sound professional judgement.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY IN YOUR REGION?

The biggest challenge for the creative industry in Eastern Slovakia is still its full recognition as a driver of innovation and economic development. While the sector has strong talent and growing infrastructure, it is often underestimated in policy-making and investment decisions. Another critical issue is retaining and attracting skilled professionals, who are frequently drawn to larger European hubs. At Creative Industry Košice, n. o., we address this through a systemic approach – strengthening the ecosystem, connecting stakeholders, and, importantly, building evidence. With the establishment of our research and development institute, CXI (Citizens Experience Institute), we are actively contributing to data-driven policymaking and demonstrating the measurable impact of the creative economy on urban and regional development.

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

In 2025, one of our most significant milestones was becoming an officially recognized research and development organisation. This step fundamentally strengthened our position, allowing us to move beyond project implementation into generating knowledge, research, and innovation with broader societal impact. Through CXI, we have deepened our focus on topics such as urban innovation, cultural and creative industries, and sustainable development. I am equally proud of our involvement in international projects like SAM-SUD, which focuses on sustainable urban development. This project allows us to bring innovative solutions to Košice while positioning the city within a strong European network. It reflects our ambition to not only follow trends but actively shape them.

## WHAT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT QUALITIES THAT YOUR ORGANISATION CAN OFFER?

Our uniqueness lies in the combination of three pillars: practice, strategy, and research. We are not only implementers of projects but also strategic partners and now a research institution through CXI. This allows us to understand challenges from multiple perspectives and propose comprehensive solutions. We have the ability to translate creative potential into concrete development strategies for cities and regions. At the same time, we are deeply embedded in the local environment of Košice, which enables us to design interventions that are both relevant and impactful. This combination makes us a distinctive organisation in the Central European context.

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

Innovation is embedded in everything we do. Through CXI, we actively develop research-driven approaches and experiment with new methodologies in urban and creative sector development. We support interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together experts from creative industries, technology, academia, and public administration. Internally, we cultivate a culture of openness, where new ideas are encouraged and tested. From a business perspective, we continuously explore new partnership models – especially cross-sector collaborations that allow us to scale our impact. Projects like SAM-SUD are a good example of how we combine innovation in technology, policy, and community engagement.

## WHAT ARE YOUR ORGANISATION'S KEY STRENGTHS THAT MAKE IT A VALUABLE LOCAL OR INTERNATIONAL PARTNER?

One of our key strengths is our ability to act as a bridge between sectors, local and international environments, and practice and research. Our transformation into a research and development organisation significantly enhanced our credibility and capacity to engage in high-level international collaborations. Through CXI, we bring analytical depth and evidence-based insights, while our long-standing experience ensures practical implementation. We are also strongly rooted in Košice, which allows us to test and pilot solutions directly in an urban context. This makes us not just a partner, but a living lab for innovation in city development.

## WHAT PART OF YOUR WORK MOTIVATES YOU TO LEAD THE ORGANISATION?

What motivates me most is the tangible impact of our work on the city and its people. Seeing how our initiatives contribute to making Košice a more innovative, inclusive, and forward-looking city is incredibly rewarding. Whether it is through supporting creative professionals, shaping public policies, or implementing projects like SAM-SUD, our work has visible outcomes. I am also deeply motivated by our team and the broader community we collaborate with – people who are passionate about creating meaningful change. Leading an organisation that is both locally grounded and internationally connected, and now also contributing to research and development through CXI, gives me a strong sense of purpose and responsibility.

Creative Industry Košice, n. o. today represents a unique model in the region – an organisation that integrates creativity, innovation, and research to actively shape the future of Košice.

# IVANA HANUŠOVSKÁ

DIRECTOR  
CREATIVE INDUSTRY KOŠICE,  
N. O.



Ivana Hanušovská is the Director of Creative Industry Košice, n. o. (CIKE), where she has worked since 2015. Over time, she has held key roles including Project Manager and CFO before becoming CEO, gaining a comprehensive understanding of both strategic management and project implementation. Her work focuses on developing the creative ecosystem, supporting talent, and connecting cultural and creative sectors with innovation, technology, and urban development. Under her leadership, CIKE has transformed into a research and development organisation delivering data-driven solutions in the fields of creative economy, urbanism, and sustainability. She promotes interdisciplinary collaboration and international partnerships. Her vision is to shape Košice as an innovative, inclusive city that fully harnesses the potential of creativity for sustainable urban development.

# DIANA HAUERLAND

CEO  
HAUERLAND SPOL. S R.O.



Diana Hauerland is CEO and owner of Hauerland spol. s.r.o., a family company operating 35 years in Slovakia and a leading provider of merchandising, branding, and promotional products in Central Europe. She took over the company during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on innovation, sustainability, and personalized B2B solutions. Diana is a recognized leader in corporate merchandising and marketing, actively engaging in discussions on branding trends and client relationship building. Her approach combines strategic thinking, creativity, and a people-focused philosophy, enabling Hauerland to deliver high-quality, original promotional solutions that strengthen brand visibility and client engagement across industries.

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

We believe the key priority today is shifting the focus from price to value. Slovakia has a strong industrial foundation and significant potential to grow—particularly in areas where higher added value is created, such as creativity, services, and proprietary products.

There is also clear room to simplify the business environment and accelerate decision-making processes. Companies operate dynamically today and expect the same from the state.

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

We see this as both a natural shift and a significant opportunity. Young people bring strong potential—they are innovative, creative, and naturally focused on working efficiently while maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Generation Z is steadily entering the workforce, and it is important to give them the space to fully develop their potential. At the same time, the experience and broader perspective of older generations bring tremendous value.

The best results come when these worlds connect—when energy and fresh ideas are combined with experience and wisdom. This creates an environment that is not only high-performing, but also sustainable in the long term.

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

The greatest difference would come from predictability. Companies are able to adapt to almost anything, as long as they know the rules of the game in advance.

When the rules are clear, stable, and decisions are made in a timely manner, businesses can focus on growth, innovation, and value creation. That is what truly drives the economy forward.

In practice, this means fewer unexpected changes, simpler processes, and faster decision-making—creating an environment that naturally supports business activity and long-term planning.

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

The year 2025 confirmed for Hauerland that quality, client experience, active listening, proprietary solutions, and a strong brand deliver tangible results. We

strengthened our market position while significantly advancing the perception of merchandise as an essential part of brand building.

Clients increasingly see us as a trusted expert and strategic partner in offline advertising, branding, and merchandise strategy.

Our events were a key highlight of the year—Hauerland Creative Marketing & Innovation Days 2025, Opening Season for Novelties Edition, and High Season Xmas Edition—where we connected inspiration, innovation, and practical solutions for our clients.

This shift toward strategic partnership has been our most significant achievement.

## **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?**

Our priority is to maintain a high level of personalization and quality even as the volume of projects continues to grow. Clients expect original merchandise that authentically reflects their brand—delivered within increasingly shorter timeframes.

That is why we are focused on accelerating processes, optimizing logistics, and implementing new digital technologies. A key part of this is integrating AI into the creation of personalized offers, allowing us to respond faster, more accurately, and at scale.

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

Innovation is a natural part of our everyday work. For each client, we create tailor-made solutions that reflect current trends, modern materials, and the latest standards in the merchandise industry. We actively seek out new products, collaborate with trusted brands, and bring into B2B solutions that were until recently more typical of retail.

Each year, we refresh approximately 10–20% of our product portfolio to keep our offering current and inspiring. We also showcase innovations through our Hauerland Innovation Days, connecting them with practical, client-specific solutions.

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

Digitalization is significantly simplifying the way clients work with merchandise. It enables faster visualizations, greater personalization, and a stronger connection between creativity and the final product. As a result, clients can more easily envision outcomes and make decisions more efficiently.

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

Slovakia's key challenge is the lack of long-term strategic planning beyond electoral cycles. Successful nations have clear strategies and a national identity that endures despite political changes, which helps avoid frequent geopolitical U-turns. Slovakia's EU membership in the 2000s brought significant economic boost, and the EU still holds the potential to attract investments, create jobs, and modernize infrastructure. However, to fully capitalize on these opportunities, Slovakia must prioritize long-term planning. The government's main focus should be on creating a sustainable and long-term strategy that aligns investment projects with national priorities. Slovakia's central location in Europe, along with its skilled, hardworking population, provides a unique advantage. If we focus on strategic sectors, invest in world-class education and healthcare, and create an environment that retains talent, we can enhance our global competitiveness. First, though, we need to answer the fundamental question of who we are and where we belong.

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

Slovakia's aging population is a growing challenge for the labor market, social systems, and healthcare. To keep older generations in the workforce, we must ensure their health. This requires a shift in how we view healthcare. Instead of claiming that modern hospitals and medicines are unaffordable, we must recognize that excluding a large portion of the population from the workforce due to chronic diseases—such as cardiovascular, autoimmune, and oncologic conditions—will cost us much more in the long run. The real challenge is to find the political courage to invest in healthcare. Health is an investment, not an expense. If we fail to address this, Slovakia will face greater difficulties in maintaining a competitive labor market and supporting its aging population.

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

In 2025, I am most proud of our success in establishing AmCham as a key stakeholder in discussions about the future of healthcare in Slovakia. This

year, we dedicated much of our efforts to contributing to the ongoing legislative reform of pharmaceutical reimbursement policies. Through a series of meetings, discussions, and collaborative efforts, AmCham, as a platform bringing together representatives from the pharmaceutical and med-tech industries, healthcare providers, wholesalers, insurance companies, and professional advisors, demonstrated its immense potential for creative problem-solving. Our contribution to the legislative process, particularly just before the Christmas holidays, was a significant achievement. We managed to produce high-quality comments to the draft reform in a very short time, and this input has sparked important discussions that could lead to improved healthcare access in Slovakia. It also has the potential to enhance rule of law in the country's pharmaceutical market.

On the professional front, I'm proud of Čechová & Partners celebrating its 35th anniversary. Having been with the firm for 20 years, I'm thrilled to see it maintain its position as one of Slovakia's top-ranked full-service business law firms, continually innovating while upholding the highest standards of integrity.

On a personal level, I am honored to have been reelected as Vice-Chair of AmCham's Healthcare Committee, and to have received the AmCham award. This recognition, alongside two other outstanding legal practitioners, is both a challenge and a commitment to continue delivering exceptional service to the AmCham community.

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

In the legal profession, remaining relevant without embracing technology, including AI, is impossible. However, a law firm is, at its core, a people business. Technology is only as good as its users, which is why we prioritize keeping our colleagues engaged, educated, and happy in their roles. Our firm stands out among independent domestic firms by offering associates, regardless of seniority, extensive opportunities for education and professional networking both in Slovakia and internationally. This is not merely a perk for senior partners; it is an integral part of our business model. We invest in talent, empowering our team to deliver world-class legal services in the domestic market while cultivating their own professional networks.

**MAREK HOLKA**

PARTNER  
ČECHOVÁ & PARTNERS S. R. O.



Marek Holka is a partner at Čechová & Partners, a leading independent Slovak law firm with more than 35 years of history. His practice focuses primarily on the pharmaceutical and life sciences sectors, distribution, and competition law. He is a recognized expert in pharmaceutical law and has been consistently ranked by international directories, including the Lexology Index for Life Sciences—Regulatory. He is also ranked by The Legal 500 as a Next Generation Partner in the Commercial, Corporate and M&A category. Since 2024, Marek has served as Vice-Chair of the Healthcare Committee of AmCham Slovakia. He is also an active member of AIJA—International Association of Young Lawyers, currently acting as the Vice President of the Healthcare and Life Sciences Commission. Marek is a frequent speaker and author on life sciences and antitrust topics.

# SAMUEL HOLLIS

COUNTRY PRESIDENT  
NOVARTIS SLOVAKIA



Samuel Hollis serves as Country President of Novartis, one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in Slovakia and Europe, where he leads efforts to reimagine medicine.

With experiences spanning the US, Switzerland and the UK, Samuel has held both global and local roles across marketing, sales, market access and medical functions within the pharmaceutical industry.

Now based in Central Europe for the last 2.5 years, he leads the Novartis team in pioneering purpose-led partnerships across Slovakia, working to create a sustainable healthcare system and bringing innovations to address some of the most pressing healthcare challenges facing society today.

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

In 2026, Novartis celebrates 30 years as a unified company - built on more than 250 years of scientific innovation - with one clear purpose: reimagining medicine to improve and extend people's lives. That purpose remains both our compass and our challenge.

Innovation in the life sciences sector is essential but hard. On average, it takes on average around 14 years and more than \$2 billion to bring a new medicine from molecule to patient and only a small fraction (14%) of early ideas ever reach market or patients. This reality demands that we innovate not just in medicines, but in how we discover, develop, and deliver them.

## TECHNOLOGY AS AN ENABLER, NOT THE OBJECTIVE

New technologies - particularly data science and AI - play a critical role in improving success rates, reducing cost and accelerating development. At Novartis, we actively encourage teams to use AI in their daily work, but responsibly. Speed alone is never the goal; data quality, transparency and trust are essential in a regulated, patient-centric industry.

By automating routine and procedural cognitive tasks, we free our people to focus on higher-value work: clinical insight, strategic decision-making and creative problem-solving. Clear ethical principles guide our use of AI, ensuring we act responsibly as part of our commitment to patients, society and the environment.

## CULTURE AND PEOPLE AS THE TRUE INNOVATION ENGINE

Technology enables innovation, but people make it real. In my experience, an innovative organization starts with the belief that change is inevitable and positive. Leaders must actively foster curiosity, resilience, and smart risk-taking from the top down.

At Novartis Slovakia, the innovation mindset I aim to embed is grounded in several core principles:

- Psychological safety and a "fail-forward" culture**  
 Innovation requires creating an environment where people feel safe to share ideas, challenge assumptions, experiment and learn from failure without fear of blame.
- An "Unbossed" way of working**  
 Leaders shift from controlling decisions to removing obstacles and creating space for teams to experiment. Teams are given autonomy over how work is delivered, alongside taking greater accountability for the ideas and learnings from implementation.
- Customer and patient-centricity**  
 Innovation must solve real problems. We listen closely to customers and patients, embed analytics into decision-making, and ensure experimentation always ties back to outcomes and value - not novelty.
- Curiosity and cross-functional collaboration**  
 Questions like "why?" and "what if?" are encouraged. By breaking down silos and bringing diverse functions together, we unlock broader perspectives and better solutions.
- Learning from beyond our industry**  
 Innovation rarely happens in isolation. We actively learn from academia, startups and other sectors and explore open approaches such as partnerships, hackathons and crowdsourcing to bring in fresh thinking.
- Recognition and celebration of learning**  
 We deliberately celebrate well-designed experiments and shared learnings, not only successful launches. The question shifts from "Did it work?" to "Did we learn something meaningful?"

## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

By combining responsible use of technology, strong data and analytics capabilities, cross-functional collaboration and a culture that values experimentation and learning, we strengthen our ability to innovate sustainably.

This integrated approach helps Novartis remain competitive in a fast-changing industry, while allowing our people to focus on what matters most - delivering meaningful breakthroughs for patients and contributing to healthier, more resilient healthcare systems.

# RICHARD KELLNER

COUNTRY MANAGER  
& EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
KOMERČNÍ BANKA, A.S.,  
POBOČKA ZAHRANIČNEJ BANKY



Richard Kellner has built an extensive career in the banking sector since graduating from the University of Amsterdam in 2000. He has held various senior positions in banking both abroad and in Slovakia. After spending nine years working in Amsterdam, he returned to Slovakia in 2008 and continued his career with ING Bank. In early 2013, Richard joined Komerční banka Slovakia as Director of Corporate Banking, where he focused on driving the bank's business activities. As of June 2025, he took on the role of Country Manager and Chief Executive Officer of Komerční banka in Slovakia. In addition to his executive role, Richard serves as President of the Dutch Chamber of Commerce in Slovakia and is a member of the Supervisory Board of Circular Slovakia.

## WHAT SHOULD SLOVAKIA PRIORITIZE TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE WITHIN THE EU AND GLOBALLY?

Slovakia needs to make a clear shift from a cost-based economy toward a value-driven one. That means accelerating digitalisation, supporting innovation, and deliberately strengthening higher value added sectors. Today, the challenge is not a lack of ambition, but execution. Slow decision-making, regulatory uncertainty, and fragmented responsibilities reduce our ability to move quickly. If Slovakia wants to remain competitive within the EU, we need faster decision cycles, predictable rules, and stronger cooperation between the public and private sectors. At the same time, Slovakia needs a strong rule of law, a transparent and predictable business environment, and clear and consistent geopolitical communication confirming our alignment with EU values. These are essential for maintaining investor confidence and long-term stability.

## HOW SHOULD SLOVAKIA RESPOND TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, TALENT SHORTAGES, AND WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION?

We are already experiencing the impact. Talent shortages are becoming one of the main constraints to sustainable growth. The response must be comprehensive. We need to make better use of domestic talent, including women returning to the workforce and older employees, while also adopting a more structured and open approach to attracting skilled professionals from abroad. At the same time, companies must take greater ownership of reskilling. Lifelong learning is no longer a benefit—it is a necessity for both individuals and businesses navigating rapid change.

## IF YOU COULD DEFINE ONE BOLD REFORM OR STRATEGIC SHIFT, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

A practical overhaul of the education system, with less emphasis on theory and a stronger focus on real-world skills. The labour market increasingly needs graduates who can think critically, work with data, and adapt quickly. Education must be better aligned with market needs and more flexible in responding to change. Without this shift, Slovakia's long-term competitiveness will remain at risk.

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

In 2025, we strengthened our role as a responsible and engaged corporate citizen while continuing to deliver solid business results. We focused on education, inclusion, and targeted community support, and actively involved our employees in these initiatives. What I value most is that responsibility and engagement are no longer seen as side projects, but as a natural part of how we operate every day.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?

The pace of change. We are accelerating digital transformation across processes, services, and culture, while maintaining trust, stability, and strong client relationships. Balancing innovation with reliability is one of the most demanding—and most important—challenges companies face today.

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

AI is moving the industry from a reactive approach to a more predictive one. It enables deeper client understanding, more efficient processes, and stronger risk management. At the same time, technology alone is not enough. The real differentiator is how it is implemented—responsibly, transparently, and with a strong emphasis on security and trust.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?

Clarity in uncertainty. Leaders are increasingly required to make decisions with incomplete information, provide clear direction, and communicate openly. At the same time, trust, consistency, and the ability to listen are essential for keeping teams engaged and resilient in a rapidly changing environment.

# MARTIN KLUCH

PARTNER  
HKV LAW FIRM S.R.O.



Before establishing law firm HKV, Martin worked as a senior associate for White & Case in Bratislava and Prague. He obtained extensive experience in the areas of real estate, M&A, corporate, employment, and foreign direct investment by participating in many large-scale privatizations, real estate and corporate acquisitions as well as commercial transactions. Martin's practice focuses primarily on buy- and sell-side mergers and acquisitions, private equity transactions, joint ventures, general corporate matters including corporate governance matters and employment law.

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

We need to stop pretending we can compete on cheap labour as that race is over. The priorities are obvious: a legal, tax and regulatory framework that does not change every six months, real investment in infrastructure (especially east-west), and an education system that actually talks to industry. And, honestly, political stability. Investors don't start by reading our laws; they read our headlines.

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

Realistically, we won't out-birth this problem. We need to keep our young people here which means housing, decent salaries, and a reason to stay. Also we need a serious, controlled immigration policy targeted at skills we lack. Pretending the demographic curve will fix itself is the most expensive policy we have.

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

Radically digitise and simplify how the state interacts with business. One tax, one form, one portal, and one coordinated inspection per topic per year instead of overlapping checks from several authorities at the same time. Slovak entrepreneurs spend an embarrassing amount of time on compliance theatre that produces nothing. Cut that in half, and you will see investment, hiring and tax revenue all move in the right direction.

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

Two stand out. The first is advising the buyer on the acquisition of MEDIREX GROUP (the Slovak leader in laboratory diagnostics) obtaining sole control from the former joint-venture partner, one of Europe's largest laboratory operators. Structurally, it was one of the most demanding mandates we have handled: a Slovak acquisition combined with a parallel cross-border component in the Czech Republic, the unwinding of a long-standing joint venture, two separate acquisition financing lines from different banks, and Slovak merger control clearance. Healthcare, cross-border, financed and regulated — every layer at once.

The second is the Slovak Bridge Reconstruction project, to be realised as a PPP. Roughly a third of our 1,800

state-owned bridges are in poor or critical condition, and without action up to 90% could deteriorate by 2035. We are part of the consortium acting as legal advisor to the Ministry of Transport on what will be one of the first PPP projects of its kind in Europe focused on the systematic renewal of a national bridge stock. What I am most proud of is not the size of the project; it is the fact that we are effectively drafting the template for a model that has not been realised in this form before. And once it works here, it can be replicated elsewhere.

## **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?**

Our biggest strategic challenge is the arrival of AI and how to use it properly in the legal industry, without losing quality, confidentiality and personal responsibility. Navigating that shift without compromising quality, confidentiality, or the next generation of lawyers is the defining challenge for HKV and for the profession. Also we have to rethink how junior lawyers learn, because AI is absorbing the first-pass work that used to be their training ground.

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

AI is fundamentally changing legal services. Research, document review and first drafts that used to take days now take minutes, which means the billable hour is losing its meaning as a measure of value. Pricing will shift towards outcomes, fixed fees and risk-sharing. Routine work will commoditise; the real value will sit in judgment, strategy and accountability which are things a client cannot outsource to an AI model. Smaller, sharper teams will outperform large ones built on leverage. We are responding by integrating AI where it brings genuine efficiency, but always with human control, strict confidentiality, and the final legal responsibility on our side. The lawyers will divide into those who adapt and those who do not.

## **WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT**

Clarity and trust. In a noisy, uncertain environment, people need to know what we're doing, why, and what's expected of them. Charisma fades, strategies change, technology shifts but a leader who can take a complicated situation, make it clear, take a position, and move forward is worth a lot. Also a good leader should not pretend to know everything, but should be able to take responsibility and give direction. For clients and for colleagues alike, trust is still the most important currency.



# EVA KONEČNÁ

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
RONALD MCDONALD  
HOUSE SLOVAKIA



Eva Konečná leads Ronald McDonald House Slovakia as Executive Director, overseeing the organization's strategic direction, financial management, key projects, and partnerships. She brings experience from the public, private, and non-profit sectors, including roles at Volvo and the League Against Cancer. She is passionate about building meaningful brands and collaborations with real social impact. Her motivation in this role is rooted in a strong belief that a family's presence is essential for a sick child. As a mother of three, supporting families during difficult moments is not only her mission, but something truly personal to her.

## **RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE OPERATES GLOBALLY, BUT EACH COUNTRY HAS ITS SPECIFICS. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE MISSION OF RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE SLOVAKIA AND ITS GREATEST BENEFIT FOR FAMILIES OF HOSPITALIZED CHILDREN?**

At Ronald McDonald House Slovakia, just like anywhere in the world, we implement and support programs that directly improve the health and well-being of hospitalized children and their families. At its core, Ronald McDonald House Slovakia creates a space where families can stay together, even during a child's hospitalization.

The presence of a parent is not a luxury, but a vital part of a child's recovery. It has a profound impact on their emotional well-being and their ability to cope with treatment. Feeling safe and having loved ones close gives children the strength they need to keep fighting. In many ways, we also support the healthcare system itself. A parent's presence often means a calmer child, better cooperation during treatment, and ultimately a more positive overall experience with care.

## **ONE OF THE KEY PROJECTS IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE BANSKÁ BYSTRICA. WHAT WILL THIS PROJECT BRING AND HOW WILL IT CHANGE THE SITUATION FOR FAMILIES IN PRACTICE?**

Ronald McDonald House Banská Bystrica is bringing something that has been missing in Slovakia until now, a place where entire families can stay together throughout a child's treatment, no matter how long it takes.

In practice, this means a significant change. Families will no longer have to face daily commuting, search for accommodation, or carry the financial burden that comes with it. Instead, they will have a safe, welcoming space close to the hospital.

The House will offer more than just a place to stay, it will provide understanding, support, and a sense of community among people going through similar experiences. It will transform everyday life for families, replacing uncertainty and exhaustion with a space where they can focus on what truly matters: their child's health.

## **WHAT LONG-TERM IMPACT CAN RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE BANSKÁ BYSTRICA HAVE ON THE SLOVAK HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SYSTEM?**

In the long term, Ronald McDonald House Banská Bystrica can significantly shape how we approach care for pediatric patients in Slovakia. It highlights that treatment is not only about medical care, but about recognizing the family as an essential part of the healing process.

This model shows that high-quality healthcare should be complemented by support systems that nurture the emotional well-being of both the child and their loved ones. When families are actively involved, it can lead to better outcomes, lower stress levels, and a more manageable experience for everyone.

Ronald McDonald House Banská Bystrica introduces a model that connects healthcare with social support, setting a new standard for a more compassionate and modern approach to treating children. It also demonstrates the power of collaboration between the non-profit sector, public institutions, and private partners, an approach that can inspire broader systemic change.

## **ORGANIZATIONS LIKE RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE SLOVAKIA RELY ON COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS AND DONORS. WHAT ROLE DO THEY PLAY AND WHERE DO YOU SEE THE GREATEST POTENTIAL FOR ENGAGING NEW PARTNERS?**

Partners and donors are absolutely essential to everything we do. Without their support, projects like these simply wouldn't exist or be able to grow sustainably. Ronald McDonald House Slovakia is built on collaboration, where each partner contributes their expertise, resources, or know-how.

We deeply value every donor and partner, because their trust and willingness to help allow us to truly change the lives of families in difficult situations.

Partnership for us is not only about financial support. Services, professional expertise, and practical solutions are just as important. The greatest potential lies in long-term partnerships, those that go beyond one-time support and allow us to build meaningful, lasting solutions together.

**For a sick child, nothing is more important than having a parent close and thanks to our donors and partners, we can make sure that closeness is never lost.**



LUGERA

# GERARD KOOLEN

GROUP MANAGING PARTNER  
LUGERA & MAKLER



Dutch-born entrepreneur Gerard Koolen has spent over 30 years building businesses across Central and Eastern Europe. Before recruitment, he founded and exited a design company with clients like IKEA and later managed large-scale distribution operations across the region. In 1996, he co-founded Lugera in Slovakia with Rasťo and Luboš, starting in a 4x4 meter office with one computer and one phone line. Today, Lugera operates in more than 10 countries, with 15,000 people at work daily and group revenues of €243 million. Known for combining entrepreneurship with innovation, he has driven the development of next-generation recruitment platforms like New TalentBase and STAA. His belief remains simple: technology enables—but people make the difference.

WWW.LUGERA.SK

## SLOVAKIA'S RECRUITMENT LEGACY

In May 2026 Lugera turned 30. The company started in 1996 in a 4x4 meter office with one computer and one landline. Once the computer was connected, Luboš (the "LU" from Lugera) started surfing the internet for candidates—truly revolutionary at the time. Our first assignment came from KPMG: finding Dutch nationals for roles in Bratislava. Within an hour, Luboš identified our very first candidate, who was later successfully placed. Not a bad start. The early days meant working with just four people, one computer and one phone line. Calls had to be queued, and if a candidate or client didn't answer, you simply went to the back of the line.

## ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SLOVAK MULTINATIONALS

Today Lugera operates in more than 10 countries across Eastern Europe and Morocco, employing around 500 internal staff and supporting approximately 15,000 temporary workers. Permanent staffing remains our core service, but over time we expanded into Temporary Staffing, Payroll Administration, Recruitment Outsourcing and recruitment technology.

## FROM 45K IN 1996 TO 243 MILLION

Lugera is one of the genuine Slovak success stories. Founded in Slovakia, it is the recruitment company that started small and gradually expanded into international markets. What began as a local company in a small market has grown step by step over the years—from €45,000 in revenue in 1996 to €243 million in group revenue in 2024. This growth places Lugera among the top three independent recruitment agencies in Eastern Europe.

## LUGERA SLOVAKIA #1

Within three years of starting, Lugera became the largest permanent staffing agency in Slovakia in number of placements. Over the years, we occasionally gave up that position—to some very good competitors. And that is exactly where you want to be: constantly challenged by strong competition, because it keeps you sharp, focused, and always pushing forward.

## WHAT CHANGED IN THOSE 30 YEARS?

Nothing and everything. I remember the early days of the first job portal in Slovakia, around 1997. At the time, many believed job portals would be the end of recruitment agencies. The opposite happened: more agencies were created than ever before. When LinkedIn, Google and social media entered the market, predictions were the same. Again, the opposite happened. More platforms emerged, more agencies were

founded, and the market expanded rather than contracted. The lesson is simple: every technological wave reshapes the industry—but it does not replace it.

## WILL AI EAT RECRUITMENT AGENCIES?

Today AI is the new "end of the industry" story. Many agency owners wonder if their business will survive. The reality is straightforward: those who embrace AI as an opportunity will prosper; those who rely on it blindly will not. AI is a powerful tool, but it is not a business model. Without a strong foundation of recruitment expertise, process discipline, and real understanding of people, AI alone will not deliver results.

## LUGERA'S RECRUITMENT EXPERTISE

Our experience shows that deep recruitment expertise consistently outperforms standalone AI tools. Over 30 years, Lugera has built an extensive know-how base and refined every step of the recruitment process—from taking a job brief to guiding a successful hire, and everything in between. That foundation, combined with smart use of technology, continues to drive our results.

## HOW IS LUGERA DEALING WITH AI?

Within the group, we have developed two recruitment applications. The first is New TalentBase—the younger brother of TalentBase, originally built in 1998 in Lugera Slovakia. It is the next-generation, the full-stack applicant tracking system with practical automations and AI features. The second application is STAA, a unique platform powered by multiple AI agents designed to support different parts of the recruitment process in ways traditional tools cannot easily match.

## READY FOR THE NEXT 30 YEARS

Lugera looks ahead with excitement and confidence as we continue to serve clients and candidates in this new AI-driven era. We believe we can make an even greater positive impact in the years to come. Because what truly defines us is not just technology, but our loyalty to clients and candidates, our help-driven mindset, and our commitment to long-term relationships. Technology will continue to evolve—but people will always value genuine human connection. And that connection, when done right, will always make the difference.

### CONTACT

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## The Ally Advantage: Why Male Leadership is the Key to Unlocking Corporate Potential

Gender equality is now a critical business imperative rather than just a “women’s issue”. Truly innovative and high-performing organizations depend on the active participation of male allies, whose effectiveness is one of the most vital factors in women’s career success.

As an expert organization with deep know-how in this field, Aj Ty v IT works with companies to bridge the gender gap in tech and leadership. Drawing on global best practices and research, we have compiled the five most essential questions managers ask when looking to implement male allyship programs within their organizations.

### WHAT DOES IT ACTUALLY MEAN TO BE A “MALE ALLY” IN A PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT?

A male ally is defined as a member of an advantaged group who is committed to building supportive relationships with women, minimizing sexism in their own behavior, and understanding the social privilege conferred by their gender. Allyship is not a passive state or a self-proclaimed title; it is an ongoing process of advocacy and action. Effective allies recognize that women’s rights are human rights and take responsibility for questioning power dynamics within their workplace.

### IS THERE A CLEAR “BUSINESS CASE” FOR MALE ALLYSHIP, OR IS IT JUST ABOUT CULTURE?

The impact on the bottom line is substantial. Organizations with greater leadership diversity are 70% more likely to capture new markets and are significantly more innovative and higher performing. Specifically, companies in the top 25% for gender diversity on executive teams are 21% more likely to experience above-average profitability. Furthermore, a culture of allyship is a talent retention tool; employees in inclusive environments are 50% less likely to leave and 75% less likely to take sick days.

### WHAT IS THE CRITICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MENTORING AND SPONSORING?

Many managers believe they are supporting women when they are only providing one form of help. Mentorship involves direct support: giving advice, feedback, and coaching to help a mentee develop their skills. Sponsorship, however, is externally facing advocacy. A sponsor acts as a “brand manager” or “publicist,” using their own social capital and influence to sway an audience in

favor of their protégé. Sponsors nominate women for high-visibility projects, publicly defend them during evaluations, and stake their own reputation on the protégé’s future success. While mentorship is helpful, sponsorship is the “halo effect” that actually shatters glass ceilings.

### WHAT PRACTICAL ACTIONS CAN A MANAGER TAKE TODAY TO START BEING AN ALLY?

Allyship is often built through small, daily interactions that promote cultural change. Managers can start with these immediate steps:

- **Listen with curiosity:** Book monthly meetings with women on your team specifically to discuss the challenges they face and how you can support them.
- **Amplify voices:** If a woman’s idea is overlooked in a meeting, repeat it and ensure she receives the credit.
- **Interrupt bias:** Call out inappropriate behavior in the moment, such as when a male colleague interrupts a female peer.
- **Audit the workload:** Ensure that “non-promotable” tasks (like taking notes or organizing events) are distributed evenly and not automatically assigned to women.
- **Be a “Bias Interrupter”:** Look at recruitment and promotion processes to identify where hidden biases might be hindering female talent.

### WHAT DO MEN GAIN PERSONALLY FROM BECOMING ACTIVE ALLIES?

Gender equality is a win-win, not a zero-sum game. By challenging rigid patriarchal norms, men improve their own mental health, wellbeing, and life expectancy. Ultimately, being an ally cultivates essential inclusive leadership skills, including emotional intelligence and active listening, which lead to higher job satisfaction and greater career opportunities.

#### Moving Toward Authentic Action

The transition from “silent allyship” to authentic action requires courage and a willingness to lean into discomfort. Performative gestures—like posting on social media without taking internal action—can actually demoralize staff and hurt your brand.

Aj Ty v IT is here to provide the expert guidance, tools, and training modules your organization needs to turn these insights into a sustainable strategy. By investing in male allyship, you are not just supporting women; you are building a more resilient, profitable, and human-centric future for your entire company.

# PETRA KOTULIAKOVÁ

CEO  
AJ TY V IT



Petra is the founder and CEO of Aj Ty v IT, an NGO supporting women in IT since 2012. She chairs the DiversIT Charter Working Group at the European Council of Professional Informatics Societies and is a board member of the American Chamber of Commerce Slovakia. Recognized as Female Role Model of the Year 2018 by CESA and a Women in TECH Inclusion Award 2020 laureate, she inspires girls and women to pursue careers in tech. In 2023, she was named among the TOP100 Women in Europe Social Enterprises. Her organization has trained over 60,000 women, increasing female participation in IT from 3% to 17%. Petra holds a PhD from the University of Economics in Bratislava and studied at Université Pierre Mendès France and Institut des Études Politiques Paris, advocating for women’s education and inclusion in technology.

WWW.AJTYVIT.SK

## MARTIN KULTAN

CEO AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
DÔVERA ZDRAVOTNÁ POISŤOVŇA, A.S.



Martin Kultan is CEO and Chairman of the Board of Directors of private healthcare insurance company DÔVERA zdravotná poisťovňa, a.s. Most of his professional career is connected to DÔVERA, for a short period of time he worked for the state-owned Všeobecná zdravotná poisťovňa health insurer and another short period of time he spent in the state healthcare regulator Úrad pre dohľad nad zdravotnou starostlivosťou.

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

In healthcare—and, in fact, in other sectors as well—it is necessary for the government to be as flexible as possible and to trust the market by supporting a market environment. This means less regulation and centralization. Starting with taxes and social and health contributions and ending with the labor market.

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

For quite some time, we have maintained that if we are expecting trains full of doctors and nurses, we will be disappointed. We admit that in other sectors where the knowledge and expertise required of employees is lower, workers from abroad can help us remain competitive for a while. As long as there are large employers operating on the market. In healthcare, however, we need to support new technologies, including telemedicine and artificial intelligence. At Dôvera, we have had good experiences with this; we use artificial intelligence in services for both our insured clients and healthcare providers.

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

I'll say something unexpected: for a certain period, politicians should do nothing and leave it to the healthcare sector itself. In other words to rely on providers, patients, and insurance companies. I am sure they will manage on their own.

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

We have received various awards, but what pleases me most is that we have commemorated our 30th anniversary with dignity and we have successfully launched a rebranding of the company.

### **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?**

I see two challenges. Give even greater room to new technologies, including artificial intelligence; retain highly motivated employees who create high value for clients.

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

We combine both approaches: we train our own artificial intelligence and seek new paths for further innovation. We collaborate with healthcare providers while we do not pretend to know everything. We are happy to take inspiration both at home and abroad.

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

The greatest concern for patients is the access to treatment. There are three main barriers: time (long waiting periods and waiting lists), geography (in some regions it is difficult to reach a specialist), and finances (chaotic fees). Digital tools are precisely what can overcome these barriers. For example, our dermatology tool combines artificial intelligence with dermatologists. In just a few years of operation, it has replaced twelve dermatology outpatients' departments. What more, our clients can access it free of charge.

### **WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?**

The ability to delegate and trust your team. Only teamwork can overcome all current challenges.

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# IVANA LORENCOVIČOVÁ

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MANAGING PARTNER  
DELOITTE



Ivana Lorencovičová is the Managing Partner of Deloitte Czech & Slovak Republic. She is also a member of the Deloitte Central Europe Executive Committee and a WorldImpact Leader for Deloitte Central Europe promoting initiatives focused on creating a more sustainable and more equitable corporate environment. Ivana has over 20 years of experience in M&A transaction advisory. She is a Fellow Member of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (FCCA) in the UK.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?

Today's world is extremely dynamic and brings several large and strategic challenges in parallel – significant geopolitical tensions, economic instability, supply chain disruptions, high inflation, changing customer preferences. These influence all companies in Slovakia and abroad, regardless of sector or size.

When you look at additional factors, digital transformation is definitely one of our key priorities—adoption of new technologies like AI while addressing ethical and operational risks, cybersecurity breaches, digital vulnerabilities, and data protection.

With constantly evolving regulations across different topics, lately primarily around AI, data, cybersecurity and ESG, we need to adjust to ensure compliance and to transform our business and embed sustainable practices into how we operate.

Since our clients are navigating similar challenges, to remain relevant as their advisors, we need to constantly innovate our services, invest in new solutions, competencies, training, and education for our people, and implement fast-paced changes to adjust to clients' changing needs. We aim to bring the most relevant expertise to respond to clients' needs and support them in their challenges.

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

Fostering innovation within Deloitte is actually intrinsic to our culture and strategy. We invest in technology, empower our people, and continually evolve and adjust our business to remain forward-thinking, relevant, and impactful.

We cultivate an entrepreneurial culture by encouraging people to collaborate, bring ideas, lead projects, and experiment with new approaches that support creativity and drive innovation.

We develop new state-of-the-art tools, technologies, and AI-driven solutions to improve the services we deliver to our clients. We also implement new technologies internally, such as automation and cloud solutions, to optimize processes and improve decision-making.

We also invest a lot in leadership and upskilling programs to equip professionals to adapt, innovate, and stay ahead.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?

In today's complex and dynamic environment, adaptability and resilience are probably the most essential. The ability to navigate uncertainty, embrace change, and adjust strategies and thinking in response to changing circumstances is critical to ensure companies remain agile, resilient, and competitive.

Adaptable leaders create a culture of trust, collaboration, and experimentation, empowering teams to take risks, explore new solutions, and innovate. They have the ability to proactively anticipate opportunities as well as the ability to learn from mistakes and challenges.

And last but not least, I believe that adaptable and modern leaders need to be attuned to the needs of their teams and clients and lead their organizations with empathy. Emotional intelligence and the ability to listen and consider things from different perspectives enhance adaptability and enable leaders to inspire trust and navigate uncertainty.



**JANA  
LVOVÁ**

GENERAL MANAGER  
MASTERCARD SLOVAKIA  
& CZECH REPUBLIC



Jana Lvová has served as General Manager of Mastercard for Slovakia and the Czech Republic since 2023.

She leads the company's strategy and business development across both markets, focusing on the growth of digital payments and the broader digital economy. She brings extensive international experience in payments, fintech, and banking.

During her career in the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic, she has successfully led sales, strategic partnerships, client development, and major European initiatives aimed at strengthening brand value and customer experience. Jana holds an MBA from the Rochester Institute of Technology and a Master's degree from Charles University in Prague.

WWW.MASTERCARD.COM

**MASTERCARD IS STILL ASSOCIATED PRIMARILY WITH PAYMENT CARDS. WHAT IS THE COMPANY'S ROLE IN SLOVAKIA TODAY?**

Payments remain an important part of what we do, but Mastercard today is fundamentally a technology company. Our role is to build digital infrastructure that connects banks, businesses, governments, and consumers in a secure and efficient way.

In Slovakia, this means working closely with banks, fintech companies, institutions, and the public sector to support the development of the digital economy. Of course, enabling digital payments is part of that mission, but our work goes much further. We are also involved in initiatives that help entrepreneurs grow their businesses, improve financial accessibility, and strengthen cybersecurity.

We believe that when digital infrastructure works well, it benefits everyone – consumers, businesses, and the economy as a whole.

**IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT, WHAT SHOULD SLOVAKIA FOCUS ON TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE WITHIN EUROPE AND BEYOND?**

Competitiveness today is closely linked to digital transformation. Countries that manage to digitalize their economies effectively are better positioned to innovate, grow businesses, and attract investment.

Slovakia already has strong technological capabilities and talented people. The key challenge is ensuring that digital transformation reaches the entire economy – including small businesses and regional communities.

**MASTERCARD HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY ACTIVE IN SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURS AND SMALL BUSINESSES. WHY IS THIS AREA SO IMPORTANT FOR YOU?**

In many towns and regions, local entrepreneurs provide services that keep communities alive and functioning. Given that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 99% of all businesses in the EU, it is no surprise that they are the backbone of our economy.

At Mastercard we therefore focus on initiatives that help entrepreneurs access knowledge, tools, and networks that can support their growth. In Slovakia, activities such as Veľký týždeň malých firiem or tools like Kde začať podnikat and aim to give people practical guidance on how to start or develop a business and how to take advantage of digital opportunities.

There are many consumers already prefer to pay digitally, but some smaller businesses still do not have the

infrastructure to accept these payments. Even though by expanding acceptance retailers report a 20% increase in sales. So, these initiatives of ours make sense because they help to expand digital payment acceptance across the country.

**AS ECONOMIES BECOME MORE DIGITAL, CYBERSECURITY IS BECOMING A CRITICAL ISSUE. HOW DO YOU SEE THIS CHALLENGE EVOLVING?**

Cyber threats these days do not respect national borders. Criminal networks operate globally, share tools and knowledge, and move quickly across jurisdictions. This means that defending against them also requires global cooperation and technological capabilities.

This is where companies like Mastercard can play an important role. As a global technology company operating across markets, we have access to insights, data, and expertise from many parts of the world. This allows us to identify emerging threats early and help partners – including banks, businesses, and public institutions – strengthen their defenses.

However, technology alone is not enough. Education and awareness are equally important. Small businesses, in particular, need access to knowledge that helps them understand potential cyber risks and protect themselves.

**WHAT MAJOR TRENDS DO YOU EXPECT TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF PAYMENTS AND COMMERCE?**

The physical payment card will gradually become less visible as more people use mobile devices, wearables, or digital services to make payments. In many cases, the act of payment will happen automatically in the background – for example in mobility services or online platforms.

At the same time, artificial intelligence is starting to play a much larger role in how people shop and pay. We are entering a world where digital assistants can help consumers search for products, compare offers, and even complete purchases on their behalf within parameters set by the user. This so-called AI-driven or agentic commerce could fundamentally reshape how people interact with digital marketplaces.

In such an environment, secure digital identity and trusted payment infrastructure will become even more important. People will expect convenience and automation, but they will also want full transparency and control over their spending.

The most successful technologies will be those that simplify people's lives while maintaining the highest standards of security and trust. And that is exactly the direction in which we see the future of payments and commerce evolving.



Amrop

# RASTISLAV MACKANIČ

PARTNER, CORE MEMBER OF GLOBAL INDUSTRIAL PRACTICE GROUP  
AMROP SLOVAKIA



Rastislav is a Partner at Amrop in Slovakia, with over 20 years of experience in Leadership Advisory. In terms of specialization, his domain is primarily industrial manufacturing projects, emphasizing the Automotive Industry, Energy, and Sustainable Solutions. Based on his deep experience in this sector, he is a member of Amrop's global Industrial Practice. He collaborates with numerous major Slovak and international companies, supporting them in addressing the needs of new leaders with expertise in emerging technologies, including eco-friendly drives and materials within environmental sustainability, automated driving, safety, and digitization. He graduated from the City University of Seattle in Bratislava with a degree in Business Management and Administration.

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

Slovakia's ability to remain competitive within the EU and on the global stage will depend less on short-term policy reactions and more on its capacity to execute a coherent, forward-looking strategy centered on people, talents, innovation, and institutional resilience. Our country needs a comprehensive talent strategy that goes beyond education reform. It should also invest in the development of a stable environment, favorable conditions, and mechanisms to keep people motivated to stay and work in the country, actively attract international talent, and incentivize the return of Slovak professionals from abroad. Equally important is the need to strengthen institutional effectiveness and governance. In a competitive global environment, stability, predictability, and transparency are key factors influencing investment decisions. Slovakia must significantly improve the stability of the business environment, the efficiency of its public administration, reduce regulatory complexity, and reinforce the rule of law.

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

Our ongoing success in recent years shows our ability to serve as a reliable, stable, and trustworthy partner capable of delivering effective leadership solutions – not only in identifying suitable candidates for C-level and senior management positions, but also in establishing effective and agile organizational models. Our long-standing knowledge of the business environment has helped us, even in 2025, to connect its various segments, deliver unconventional solutions, effectively and confidently engage leaders from other business sectors, and open up career opportunities for them in new fields of activity. Last but not least, there are new trends in the field of leadership, where we provide innovative AI-based tools that support the decision-making of C-level leaders and shorten transformation processes from months to days, or even hours.

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

Artificial intelligence and digital transformation are reshaping Executive Search and Leadership Advisory by enhancing – not replacing – human

expertise. The industry is moving toward “augmented intelligence”, where AI improves efficiency by automating data-heavy tasks such as talent mapping and initial screening, bringing broader and more diverse candidate pools. However, the core value of Executive Search remains human. Assessing leadership potential, cultural fit, and navigating complex stakeholder environments requires judgment, intuition, and experience that technology cannot replicate. As digital transformation reshapes business models, clients more often seek leaders with digital fluency, adaptability, and the ability to lead through disruption. In response, firms like Amrop are selectively integrating AI into workflows, expanding their advisory role, and building consultants' digital capabilities. At the same time, ethical considerations – such as bias and data privacy – require careful human oversight. Ultimately, competitive advantage lies in combining AI-driven insights with human judgment, shifting the focus from filling roles to shaping future-ready leadership.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?

From an Amrop perspective, the most important leadership quality today is adaptive resilience – the ability to adjust quickly while staying effective over time. Business leaders no longer deal with occasional crises; they operate in constant change. Markets shift, expectations evolve, and pressure from stakeholders is ongoing. In this environment, it's not enough to simply “push through”. The best leaders are those who can adapt as they go, without losing focus or credibility. Adaptive resilience comes down to three practical behaviors. First, staying open-minded – being willing to rethink plans and make decisions even when information is incomplete. Second, staying composed – keeping a clear head and supporting others, even under pressure. Third, acting with flexibility – moving quickly, but adjusting course when needed. Just as important, strong leaders take care of their own performance. They manage their energy, build trusted networks around them, and create time to reflect rather than just react. They also encourage honest feedback and adaptability within their teams. In simple terms, while vision and decisiveness still matter, adaptive resilience is what makes them work in today's world. It enables leaders to handle constant change, stay effective, and lead their organizations with clarity and consistency.

WWW.AMROP.SK

# MARTIN MALO

MANAGING DIRECTOR  
CZ & SK  
GRAFTON SLOVAKIA



Martin Malo has been active in the HR market since 2009 and has held a range of project and management roles across the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Since 2019, he has led Gi Group Holding's operations in the Czech Republic, including Grafton Recruitment, and since 2022 he has also overseen Gi/Grafton in Slovakia. His expertise includes business leadership, labour market analysis, employer relations, and communication with public institutions, with a strong focus on labour market trends and developments in times of uncertainty.

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

Slovakia should focus on foreign investments projects, employer's support and EU initiatives. The main goal is to achieve a GDP growth. Moreover Slovakia should prioritize among others, education and healthcare systems.

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

Mainly via re-skilling and up-skilling. These are the main priorities to be in-line with the implementation of technologies. On top, due to the negative demographic curve, it is vital to support economic migration from non EU countries.

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

As I am representing the HR / Labor market, I would advise to dramatically eliminate the "grey" zone of the labor market, which is, unfortunately, widely present in Slovakia. This would secure higher incomes to the country budget and cultivate the labor market itself.

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

As we are facing very turbulent business environment recently, I am mainly proud of our ability to navigate through it. This wouldn't be possible without our engaged colleagues, they are the important part of our existence.

## **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?**

Definitely to compete with the grey zone of the labour market. As well the economic prediction in Slovakia doesn't seem to be promising therefore fighting for new business is a challenging discipline.

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

Well, innovation is always linked to investments. I am proud to say that, no matter what is happening outside, we keep investing in to technologies, mainly in to our internal IT systems which allows us to be even more productive and effective.

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

You are right, it is. Our response is very simple: we understand speed is becoming more and more relevant in the Recruitment business. That's why it is important to invest in to those AI technologies which allows you to speed up the hiring processes, to be able to deliver as fast as possible the feedback to the candidates and the candidates to the customers.

## **WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?**

Resilience.

**THE RIGHT JOB.  
TOGETHER, WE'LL GET IT.**

Learn more about our services.

Scan the QR code to explore our recruitment and HR solutions.



## FORGING SLOVAKIA'S DIGITAL FUTURE: CITI'S 30+ YEARS OF INNOVATION AND DEDICATED PARTNERSHIP

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

To strengthen its long-term competitiveness, Slovakia should prioritize a strategic shift towards higher value-added industries, particularly in IT and advanced technology. This requires fostering a dynamic and competitive business environment capable of attracting significant foreign direct investment and skilled talent, including from abroad, which is crucial given adverse long-term demographic trends. Furthermore, supporting entrepreneurship, cultivating robust startup ecosystems, and encouraging active angel investor communities will drive innovation and economic diversification. Finally, consolidating public finances is necessary to ensure a stable macroeconomic environment, but this must be achieved without undermining business competitiveness. A stable and predictable regulatory framework is paramount for attracting and retaining investments and ultimately creating new jobs.

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

In 2025, Citi Slovakia proudly celebrated 30 years of continuous presence in the country. This significant milestone underscores our unwavering commitment to the local market and our ability to consistently deliver exceptional value. I am particularly proud of how we leverage Citi's unrivalled global network, operating in 90+ markets and serving clients in over 180 countries, to bring world-class expertise and innovative, practical solutions directly to Slovakia. This approach has enabled us to support our clients effectively through various economic cycles and geopolitical shifts, demonstrating remarkable resilience, flexibility, and deep market knowledge. Our ongoing investment in next-generation platforms and digital solutions, driven by our comprehensive strategic modernization efforts, further solidifies our commitment to providing cutting-edge services and sharpening our competitive edge here in Slovakia.

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

AI and digital transformation are fundamentally reshaping the financial industry, propelling us towards a truly digital future where GenAI is an essential part of being a winning bank. At Citi, we are responding proactively by strategically integrating GenAI tools across our operations. This empowers our colleagues to make faster, data-driven decisions, automate repetitive tasks, and significantly boost productivity and efficiency. We've introduced proprietary tools like Citi Stylus for extracting intelligence from documents, Citi Assist for navigating policies, and Citi Squad for automating non-coding tasks for developers, complementing the use of GenAI tools like GitHub Copilot by over 30,000 Citi developers.

Our approach is governed by ethical considerations and a robust risk framework, with over 50 GenAI use cases currently under development. We firmly believe that AI serves as a powerful enhancement to human judgment, not a replacement. Beyond AI, our broader digital transformation strategy involves transitioning from legacy systems to fully digital platforms, such as CitiDirect®. This ensures faster, more seamless, and more secure transactions for our clients, significantly enhancing their ability to manage payments and financial operations. This steadfast focus on next-generation platforms and enabling the digital economy highlights our unwavering commitment to innovation and future-readiness in Slovakia.

# JAN MELICHAR

CITI COUNTRY OFFICER &  
BANKING HEAD SLOVAKIA



Jan Melichar is Citi's Country Officer and Banking Head for Slovakia, acting as Citi's principal representative to drive business growth, regulatory relationships, and governance. With over 20 years at Citi, he previously led Global Network Banking for the Czech Republic and Slovakia, specializing in global subsidiaries, automotive, and foreign direct investment. A strong advocate for talent and inclusive leadership, Jan chaired Citi Women employee chapters and now serves as Chairman of Junior Achievement Slovakia's Board. His active engagement in AmCham and other business associations underscores Citi's commitment to supporting Slovakian businesses and the economy. Jan earned an MSc from the University of Economics in Prague, and an MBA from IESE Business School in Barcelona, Spain.



# DANIELA MIŠUROVÁ

MANAGING DIRECTOR  
DHL EXPRESS SLOVAKIA



She leads the company's operations, strategic growth and customer-centric services. She has been with DHL Express since 2000, building her career through roles in sales, key account management, commercial leadership and marketing before being appointed Managing Director in 2010, a position she has held for over a decade. Under her leadership, DHL Express Slovakia has focused on innovation, reliability and network development to meet evolving customer needs, strengthen service quality and expand the company's footprint. Daniela champions a culture of teamwork, flexibility and excellence and is actively involved in industry discussions on logistics trends, sustainability and digital transformation. She holds a degree in economics and is recognized for her commitment to operational excellence and people development.

WWW.DHL.SK

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

In 2025 we were able to strengthen our global network while continuing to deliver fast, reliable, and sustainable international shipping for our customers. This reflects our ongoing commitment to operational excellence, innovation, and connecting people and businesses across borders—no matter the challenges. From the point of view of DHL Express Slovakia, we are proud of expansion of our retail network, bringing us closer to our customers and making our services more accessible across the country. In parallel, earning 3rd place in the Naj Zamestnávateľ survey from Profesia in the logistics category is a strong recognition of our people-focused culture and confirms that our employees remain at the heart of our success.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?

At the moment, the biggest strategic challenge we are navigating is balancing long term transformation with the day to day operational resilience our business requires. The pace of change in our industry—whether it's digitalization, fluctuating market demands, or evolving customer expectations—means we need to innovate quickly, but in a way that doesn't compromise the reliability our brand is built on.

We're therefore focused on strengthening our internal processes, boosting cross team collaboration, and ensuring our people have the right tools and clarity to adapt to new priorities. It's a delicate balance: driving progress while keeping our core operations stable, efficient, and customer centric.

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

We foster innovation by creating an environment where people feel both empowered and equipped to try new things. Technology plays an important role, but for us innovation always starts with people — with curiosity, collaboration, and the willingness to challenge established ways of working.

We actively encourage teams to share ideas across functions, experiment with smarter digital tools, and look for small improvements that can scale. At the same time, we focus on building a culture where feedback is valued, learning is continuous, and innovation is not seen as a separate initiative, but as part of how we operate every day.

It's this combination of technology, mindset, and open communication that helps us stay adaptable and move the business forward in a meaningful way.

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

AI and digital transformation are profoundly changing the way we at DHL manage logistics, assess capacity, and respond to customer needs. Automation, predictive data, and intelligent tools help us accelerate processes, increase accuracy, and enhance the customer experience.

We are responding by connecting technology with people: investing in modern systems, simplifying internal processes, and strengthening the digital skills of our colleagues. We see AI as a form of support — it frees us from routine tasks so we can focus more on meaningful communication, innovation, and the customer.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?

In today's complex environment, I consider the most important leadership quality to be the ability to build trust and psychological safety. When people feel heard, informed, and free to speak openly about ideas or concerns, it creates space for better collaboration, innovation, and faster adaptation to change.

A leader today is no longer the one who provides all the answers — but the one who creates an environment where others can find those answers.

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

To stay competitive within the EU and globally, in my opinion, Slovakia should prioritize these key areas:

1. No. 1, accelerating innovation and digital transformation — not only in business, but also in public services — to create an environment where companies can scale and invest with confidence.
2. No. 2, developing and retaining talent. Strengthening education, supporting future focused skills, and building stronger links between schools and industry will be essential for long term growth.
3. And No. 3, maintaining a stable and predictable business environment. In today's geopolitical and economic uncertainty, trust and clarity are strategic advantages. Combining innovation, strong talent, and reliability is what will keep Slovakia competitive in the years ahead.

# ROBERT MITTERPACH

CFO  
CORWIN SK A.S.



Robert is the CFO and a member of the Board of Directors at Corwin. Since its inception, the company has established itself as one of the leading players on the Bratislava development market. Its projects rank among the top in urbanism and sustainability, with a primary focus on the development and revitalization of brownfield sites. Over more than eight years at Corwin, Robert has been involved in acquisitions, development, and shaping the company's domestic strategy, while also leading its successful expansion abroad. Corwin has become one of the most prominent developers in Ljubljana and has launched its first project in Prague. This has also been made possible by its position as a respected partner for financial institutions and investors, supported by several successful bond issuances.

CORWIN.SK

## IS IT STILL WORTHWHILE FOR DEVELOPERS TO BUILD OFFICE SPACES AT A TIME WHEN AI IS REPLACING LARGE CALL CENTERS WITH CHATBOTS AND COSTS PRESSURE IS FORCING COMPANIES TO MAXIMIZE THE EFFICIENCY OF THEIR SPACE USAGE?

Today, I want an office that brings additional benefits to my company. Not just modern, technologically advanced, or flexible spaces—that's already a given. For example, it should also help reduce costs because the building is efficient, has its own energy sources, and doesn't waste drinking water unnecessarily. At the same time, it should be, in simple terms, "healthy." A good example is Einpark, a project that not only saves costs but, above all, creates an excellent indoor environment. That is also why several Einpark offices have succeeded in the Office of the Year competition, whether as the overall winner or as the winner in the Healthy Office category. Such spaces are not only high-quality, pleasant, and modern workplaces, but they also help build community and improve team collaboration. Tenant satisfaction in surveys has therefore exceeded 90 percent, and several companies use their headquarters in Einpark as a tool to attract talent from the market.

Moreover, a building like Einpark significantly supports the fulfillment of ESG criteria, which are an important success metric for larger companies. So, the answer to your question is: yes, it is worthwhile. However, developers must consider many factors and calculate very carefully. Today, competition in this segment is strong, and no project has guaranteed success in advance. Based on our experience, we therefore look beyond certifications and focus primarily on spaces where people feel good. This approach also helps us expand into new markets.

## WHY DID YOU START FOCUSING MORE ON INTERNATIONAL MARKETS?

We want to grow, and there is demand for this type of product abroad. Today, we see that it was the right decision. The proof is Vilharia—the largest and most sustainable office project in Slovenia, with more than 36,000 square meters of leasable area. We completed it in less than five years from land acquisition, which would not have been possible under Slovak conditions. It is now almost fully leased. Fit-outs are underway for tenants, mainly large multinational companies such as SAP and Generali. We are also seeing strong interest from investors, who started approaching us even before the project was completed.

This is further evidence that we have delivered something exceptional, without real competition on the market.

## HAS BRATISLAVA FALLEN OFF YOUR RADAR FOR NOW?

No, quite the opposite. Next year, we would like to launch the first phase of the revitalization of Palma brownfield. It is our flagship project, which will be a unique example of transforming a long-abandoned, deteriorating factory into a modern local urban center. We aim to build a new district with a mix of different functions, exactly as envisioned by the team around the world-renowned urbanist Jan Gehl. In addition to residential units, this mix will also include office spaces. Palma will feature a modern office building with several unconventional solutions, for example, a rooftop sports court. It will be set within a district close to the Carpathian Mountains, with rich amenities including restaurants, public spaces, cafés, and shops.

The office segment is and will remain part of our projects as a component of a balanced mix that defines modern districts combining living, working, and leisure.

## WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF SUCH A MIX OF FUNCTIONS?

It brings life to an area throughout the entire day. If you look at purely administrative complexes, these are zones where you won't meet anyone after 6 p.m. Gehl talks about a city for people—one that attracts you to spend time there at any hour of the day. Connected districts where you find lively squares, but also quiet semi-private residential blocks, offices, shops, galleries, sports facilities, playgrounds, and areas for rest and relaxation in the shade of trees. Such locations are also safer because you are never alone there. They are oriented towards pedestrians and cyclists, while not forgetting about cars. In Palma, surface traffic will be routed around the perimeter of the area and directed into underground parking.

That is why it makes sense to build office spaces even outside the city center. You avoid the slowest morning traffic jams. The offices are more accessible for people commuting from suburban areas, and this setup connects work with leisure opportunities. In Palma, this is enabled mainly by advanced cycling infrastructure, the proximity of the Carpathian Mountains, and excellent connections to tram lines and two railway stations. We therefore believe this will be a unique project in Bratislava. It will redefine what you can expect from an office building.

# TOMÁŠ NÉMETHY

MANAGING PARTNER  
& COUNTRY HEAD  
CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD  
SLOVAKIA



Since 2023, Tomáš has been Country Head of Cushman & Wakefield Slovakia, overseeing business operations and leading the firm's continued growth in the local market.

He joined the company in 2019 to establish its Slovak presence and build the Valuation & Advisory department from the ground up. With nearly 15 years of experience in real estate, he has held roles across financing, investment, and valuation. Before joining Cushman & Wakefield, Tomáš worked on major real estate projects, commercial transactions, and delivered tailored valuations and feasibility studies. He enjoys building teams and fostering a collaborative and people-driven culture.

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

In recent years, Cushman & Wakefield Slovakia has undergone a period of dynamic expansion, nearly tripling its size since 2022. This progress has been driven not only by targeted recruitment, but above all by a strong focus on company culture.

The year 2025 represented a notable shift in momentum. We expanded our property management portfolio by seven new assets, including five shopping centers, and now provide full leasing services across seven retail assets. Retail has therefore become the defining growth story of the year. Beyond retail, we continue to unlock potential across project management and office leasing, with several of our teams now recognized among the most respected players in the Slovak market. This reputation is the result of consistent hard work and a constant drive to rethink how we create value for our clients.

## HOW DO YOU FOSTER INNOVATION WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Innovation at Cushman & Wakefield Slovakia is driven primarily through people and culture. High engagement and satisfaction levels show that empowering teams, encouraging ownership, and fostering collaboration are central to how new ideas emerge. At the same time, technology and data play a critical role in reshaping service delivery and decision making. Innovation is not treated as a separate initiative, but as part of everyday operations and an ongoing effort to rethink how value is created for our clients and how we embed AI and productivity tools in everything that we do.

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

Digital transformation, including AI

implementation, is no longer viewed as a future ambition but as a current operational reality. Across real estate advisory services, technology is already reshaping data analysis, reporting accuracy and decision making speed. At Cushman & Wakefield Slovakia, we place AI and technology at the center of our competitiveness agenda, using them to work faster and smarter. The focus remains on ensuring that technology supports human expertise, not replaces it. Strengthening trust and long-term advisory relationships remain our priority.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?

I believe in clarity, radical transparency combined with empathy which is essential part of our recent growth. Effective leadership requires the ability to set a clear direction while remaining flexible and people focused. Building trust internally and externally, creating space for collaboration and leading by example and consistency rather than hierarchy are critical. At its core, leadership is about enabling others to perform at their best and maintaining credibility through actions, not titles.

## WHAT MAKES SLOVAKIA ATTRACTIVE TO INVESTORS?

Slovakia has a skilled workforce for industrial production and the advantage of being fully integrated into international supply chains and western institutions, including the eurozone. Due to its size, it has proven in the past its ability to reinvent itself quickly and attract international investment.

As advisors, our role is to help investors navigate local specificities, identify the right assets and timing, and turn market data into clear, confident decisions. The opportunities are there, but they are often highly country specific and require strong local insight to unlock their full potential.



## NURSES – SERVANTS OR THE NEW ELITE? OR HOW TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN MORE NURSES

“Don’t go into nursing, you’ll end up wiping people’s backsides.” This sentence, still heard by many young people at home, perfectly captures the stereotypes healthcare professions continue to face. The problem is that these views are passed down from generation to generation and significantly influence decisions already made by 14- or 15-year-olds when choosing their secondary school.

Yet, interest in the nursing profession was not always low. During the time of Generation X, secondary medical schools were selective institutions. Over time, however, due to broader social trends, the rise of economic and social science fields, and legislative changes that separated the roles of nurses and practical nurses, they lost part of their appeal. For a period, this led to a decline in both the number and quality of applicants. Today, interest is rising again, but the question remains whether it will be enough given the historical shortage of nurses and the declining demographic curve.

The reality of a practical nurse’s or nurse’s work is fundamentally different from these stereotypes. It is one of the most diverse professions: it includes caring for newborns, adults, and terminally ill patients, working in operating rooms, as well as handling administrative and documentation tasks. It offers both shift-based work and flexible part-time arrangements. For young people who are naturally motivated to help others, it is a profession with a clear sense of purpose and broad career opportunities. What is crucial, however, is to start fostering interest in this career already at the level of primary school students, who are potential applicants to secondary medical schools. Their graduates make up the largest share of future nurses.

One of the decisive factors in career choice is how a profession shapes and presents its own identity. Social identity theory suggests that people naturally identify with groups that enhance their positive self-image. In other words, if a profession is perceived as valuable and respected, people want to join it and stay in it. Even less “attractive” industries manage this—just look at successful social media campaigns that have turned technical professions in the municipal waste company OLO into symbols of pride and societal value.

Healthcare, however, has not yet fully tapped into this potential. An important role is also played by how healthcare professionals themselves, professional chambers, and unions talk about the profession. Communication that focuses primarily on problems without balancing them with positives tends to discourage rather than attract. Professional identity is also weakened by fragmentation among

different groups of healthcare workers—for example, practical nurses are no longer part of the nurses’ chamber but have been moved into a chamber of medical-technical staff.

Paradoxically, the labour market tells a different story. Starting salaries for nurses in larger cities are comparable to, and often higher than, those of university graduates in the humanities. With further education and specialization, a nurse’s salary—without overtime—can rise to the level of a manager in economic fields. Skeptical? Take a look at job portals. Employers are actively competing for healthcare professionals, offering retention bonuses, housing, and above-standard benefits. In many other fields our children graduate from, such competition simply does not exist.

Demographic trends are unforgiving. Within the next five years, approximately a quarter of healthcare workers will reach retirement age. Even if not all leave immediately, the pressure on the system will increase. New generations are smaller, and competition for talent will intensify further. Anyone who has not yet understood the importance of quality management and HR in healthcare will soon face serious challenges.

Organizations will need to address where to find people and how to attract them in a highly competitive environment. This requires strong HR—clearly defined employer value propositions and systematic employer branding. These are areas that still remain outside the focus of many healthcare HR teams.

Equally important is caring for existing employees, reducing turnover, and building an environment where people want to stay. Managers play a crucial role here. Research consistently shows that their behaviour has the greatest impact on team satisfaction and motivation. The assumption that the best expert automatically becomes the best leader is outdated. The sooner healthcare recognizes this, the better. People management is a discipline in its own right and needs to be developed. Top management must demand these competencies, and HR must ensure their systematic development.

So, what should be done to attract and retain practical nurses and nurses in our healthcare system? Each of us must act within our own scope of influence. As healthcare leaders, we should build pride in healthcare professions and in our organizations—through internal communication, storytelling, and employer branding. At the same time, we must improve the quality of our management teams to ensure motivated and high-performing teams working for the benefit of our patients. At Penta Hospitals, we strive to do this every day.

# JANA PALENČÁROVÁ

GROUP CHIEF HR OFFICER  
PENTA HOSPITALS  
INTERNATIONAL



Jana Palenčárová is an HR director with over 20 years of experience across pharmaceuticals, banking, and healthcare. She is the former Chief Human Resources Officer of Bory Hospital, who played a key role in shaping the HR strategy of this next-generation medical facility.

# ROMAN PONC

PARTNER  
LEITNERLEITNER  
SLOVAKIA



Roman Ponc is a Partner at LeitnerLeitner Slovakia, where he leads the firm's accounting and payroll services in Bratislava. He focuses on guiding clients through the intersection of local compliance, financial reporting, and process transformation. He has extensive experience in addressing local statutory and compliance requirements while bridging them with broader international standards and group expectations. Roman works with a diverse portfolio of Slovak and international companies and is also responsible for driving digitalization initiatives, process automation, and the practical use of AI within the Slovak practice. He joined LeitnerLeitner early in his career and has since grown into a leadership role. Today, he leads a team of more than 20 professionals and actively contributes to the firm's long-term development in Slovakia.

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

In my view, Slovakia's competitiveness will increasingly depend on its ability to offer a stable and predictable environment for business, while continuing to strengthen the quality of its people, institutions, and day-to-day execution. In a geopolitical and economic climate shaped by volatility, companies are looking for places where they can plan with confidence, make long-term decisions, and rely on a business environment that supports investment, adaptability, and growth.

At the same time, competitiveness today is no longer defined only by cost or location. It is increasingly shaped by the ability to develop talent, embrace innovation in a practical way, and create conditions in which businesses can operate efficiently and move into more value-added activities. In that sense, digital progress matters not as a slogan, but as something that should visibly improve how the economy functions in practice.

If Slovakia can continue to build on these foundations, it can remain a credible, resilient, and competitive place to do business within the EU and beyond.

## **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?**

One of the key strategic challenges for our firm in Slovakia is how to continue evolving our services and internal ways of working as technology reshapes both client expectations and service delivery, while preserving the quality, trust, and expert judgment that clients expect.

This is particularly visible in areas such as accounting and payroll, where clients increasingly expect not only reliable compliance and execution, but also greater efficiency, better data, smoother processes, and more practical support in day-to-day operations. The challenge,

therefore, is not simply to introduce new tools, but to translate technology into meaningful improvements that work in practice and create real value for clients.

At the same time, transformation in advisory services is never only about technology. It also requires the right mindset, strong teams, and the ability to adapt while maintaining consistency, quality, and a high standard of service. For us, the strategic challenge is to keep moving forward in a way that is innovative, practical, and sustainable over the long term.

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

AI and digital transformation are changing our industry in a very fundamental way. They are not only reshaping how work is done, but also what clients expect from service providers. This is particularly visible in accounting and payroll, where the shift is redefining both service delivery and the value these functions create for clients.

I see this as a major opportunity. Tasks that have traditionally been time-consuming and repetitive can increasingly be streamlined, while technology also creates space for higher-quality outputs and more meaningful client support. Used well, it can strengthen consistency, improve the flow of information, and allow experts to focus more on judgment, interpretation, and practical advice.

At the same time, I believe it is important to keep the right perspective. Technology should remain a tool, not the purpose. In our field, trust, quality, accountability, and the human element still matter enormously. That is why our response is focused on practical use rather than hype. We are looking at how digital tools, automation, and AI can genuinely improve service quality, internal efficiency, and the client experience in ways that are useful, responsible, and sustainable over the long term.

## LENOVO BRATISLAVA CELEBRATES 20 YEARS IN SLOVAKIA

This year, Lenovo Bratislava celebrates an extraordinary milestone: 20 years since the site first opened its doors. Moments like this invite reflection, and as I look back over the past two decades, I feel immense pride, and genuine gratitude to represent a site that has grown not only in scale and capability, but also in heart.

When Lenovo Bratislava began, we were a small team of around 30 people, focused on transactional processing and foundational operational work. Those early years laid important groundwork, but what truly defines our journey is how far beyond those beginnings we have grown. Today, Lenovo Bratislava is home to more than 1,200 employees and has evolved into a high-value operations center with a significant strategic footprint across EMEA and Worldwide. We now support complex, value-adding activities and proudly host several EMEA and WW leadership roles here in Bratislava - clear recognition of the trust placed in this site and the talent that exists within it.

Growth in numbers and responsibility is impressive, but what makes me most proud is the culture behind that success. I feel incredibly lucky to represent a site where people genuinely care—not only about the work we do, but about each other and the wider community around us. Lenovo Bratislava is a place where collaboration is real, support is visible, and people show up for one another every day. That sense of connection has been built deliberately over time and remains one of our greatest strengths.

Our impact extends well beyond the walls of our offices. Colleagues across Bratislava actively engage with and support the local community, giving their time, energy, and ideas to make a positive difference. This strong sense of social responsibility reflects who we are at our core: a community of people who understand that success is most meaningful when it is shared.

Innovation has always been central to Lenovo's identity, and our Bratislava teams exemplify that mindset. We continuously challenge ourselves to think smarter, work more efficiently, and find better ways to deliver value. Yet if innovation fuels our progress, I firmly believe our true superpower lies in our people - and specifically in our diversity and inclusion.

Lenovo Bratislava is proudly multicultural, with employees representing more than 50 nationalities. This remarkable diversity brings together a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and ways of thinking, strengthening our ability to solve complex problems and support a truly global business. Just as importantly, we do not stop at diversity alone. We place equal emphasis on inclusion - creating an environment where every individual feels respected, heard, and able to contribute fully. Inclusion is what transforms diversity from a statistic into a genuine competitive advantage.

Our commitment to inclusion is also reflected in our leadership. Almost 50% of our management team is female, demonstrating our focus on balanced representation and equal opportunity. This is not about meeting targets; it is about building leadership teams that reflect the diversity of our workforce and bring richer perspectives to decision-making.

This year, Lenovo's recognition as an Employer of Choice was a particularly meaningful achievement. It validates the culture we have built together - one rooted in trust, respect, development, and belonging. That recognition belongs to every employee in Bratislava who contributes to making this a workplace where people want to stay, grow, and succeed.

As we celebrate 20 years, it is also important to look ahead. Lenovo's motto, "Smarter AI for All," speaks to our ambition to make technology more accessible, responsible, and impactful. From Bratislava, we are proud to play our part in delivering on that promise - supporting smarter operations, enabling innovation at scale, and contributing to solutions that matter.

None of this would be possible without the people of Lenovo Bratislava - past and present. Your commitment, care for one another, openness to change, and belief in what we are building have shaped this site into what it is today. As we mark this anniversary, I am deeply proud of what we have achieved together and confident in what lies ahead.

Here's to 20 years of growth, transformation, and community - and to the many chapters still to come for Lenovo Bratislava.

# DAVID REILLY

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR /  
BRATISLAVA SSC SITE LEADER  
LENOVO SLOVAKIA S.R.O.



David Reilly, from Glasgow, Scotland has 27 years' experience in the IT industry. David joined IBM in Scotland in 1999, becoming a Lenovo employee in 2005 following Lenovo's acquisition of IBM's PC Division. David has wide Global Experience, having lived and worked in Europe (Scotland and Slovakia), Australia and the US, holding leadership positions in Finance, Supply Chain & Operations. As part of the original leadership team when Lenovo first opened its SSC in Bratislava in 2006, David has seen Lenovo Bratislava grow to become being an integral part of Lenovo's success, with over 1,100 employees across functions like HR, Finance, Operations, Supply Chain and Services.

# FEDJA ROJNIK

DIRECTOR OF READY-MIX  
CONCRETE & PRECAST  
DANUCEM SLOVENSKO, A.S.



Fedja Rojnik is Director of Ready-Mix Concrete & Precast at Danucem, overseeing operations across our key markets of Slovakia, Hungary, and Austria. Fedja holds a degree in Business Administration & Social Studies from the United Kingdom and an Executive MBA from IEDC - Bled School of Management in Slovenia. He joined the company in 2006 and has since held several leadership roles spanning human resources, organizational development, and regional integration projects. His leadership approach combines operational discipline with a strong focus on people development, performance, and long-term value creation.

## HOW DO YOU SEE THE CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS MARKET IN SLOVAKIA EVOLVING OVER THE NEXT 3 TO 5 YEARS?

We expect the Slovak construction market to continue to grow over the next three to five years, driven primarily by two key segments: residential construction & infrastructure. Residential development will be concentrated mainly in Bratislava, Košice, and other regional capitals. Cities are continuing to expand, and the shortage of available and suitable housing will continue to be a major driver of demand. The second growth driver will be critical infrastructure. There is a solid pipeline of projects and funding focused on major transport corridors, including road and rail development.

## WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS DANUCEM'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE?

We are well positioned to support all major types of construction projects in Slovakia from small individual housing to the most complex infrastructure objects. From cement and aggregates through concrete, paving solutions, and soil stabilization products, combined with own logistics we can support all residential, non-residential, and infrastructure construction activity.

This is further complemented by our nationwide footprint – we operate the country's largest network of ready-mix concrete plants, covering both major urban centers and smaller regional and rural markets. With cement plants located in both the eastern and western parts of the country, we are close to key consumption hubs and can respond efficiently to customer demand.

Our competitiveness is further strengthened by our stability as part of a multinational group, our experience across a wide range of projects, and a strong focus on quality and reliability.

## WHAT ROLE DO LOW CARBON MATERIALS PLAY IN SHAPING FUTURE CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS?

If we, as an industry, are able to produce materials that have a lower environmental impact, it benefits everybody. At Danucem, we believe that our role as a regional leader goes beyond simply responding to current demand. If we can deliver materials with the same performance and quality but with a lower CO<sub>2</sub> footprint, then this is the right direction and it is our responsibility to continue building understanding

and confidence – among professionals and the wider public – that low carbon materials deliver real, long term value.

## HOW HAS DEMAND FOR LOW CARBON CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS EVOLVED AMONG DEVELOPERS AND INVESTORS IN RECENT YEARS?

Demand for low carbon construction materials has been increasing in recent years, particularly among larger developers and institutional investors. Sustainability has moved from being a niche topic to an established part of professional discussions, project concepts, and investment criteria, but I would say there is still some way to go before it becomes an industry standard or requirement.

## HOW SHOULD SAFETY BE EMBEDDED INTO OVERALL BUSINESS STRATEGY AND OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES?

Safety is a constant focus and an ongoing process that requires a clear vision, sustained investment, and long term consistency. It is about mindset, behavior, and requires continuous effort at every level of the organization. The goal is for people to understand risks deeply and take personal ownership of safety – even when management is not there to supervise.

## WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?

In our business, leadership is built on trust, relationships, and experience. One of the most important qualities is credibility – keeping your word and delivering on commitments, but also proactive and transparent communication is essential. Trust is strengthened not by perfection, but by consistency and openness. Long term success comes from creating an organization where people can perform, grow, and take responsibility.

At the same time, effective leadership requires a strong change mindset especially in mature industries. Leaders must continuously challenge the status quo and look for ways to improve – whether through innovation, simplification, or better use of technology. The key is to identify what truly matters, and deliver visible, tangible progress. That is how leaders can drive sustainable change and help to build organizations & teams better prepared for the future.

## Leading Through Change: Why Human Potential Is Slovakia's Strongest Advantage

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

What I am most proud of in 2025 is how we strengthened our role as a **trusted partner in navigating workforce transformation**, both for our clients and for the broader Slovak labor market. We moved beyond transactional talent solutions and significantly deepened our advisory approach—helping organizations build more resilient workforce strategies. At the same time, we invested heavily in developing our own people, expanding AI literacy, leadership capability, and a culture anchored in our ManpowerGroup values: **Care, Trust, Innovation, and Sustainability**.

Perhaps most importantly, we demonstrated that strong business performance and human centered leadership are not opposing goals. By placing people at the center of transformation, we helped clients achieve better outcomes while creating meaningful, future ready work. That balance - performance with purpose - is something I am deeply proud of.

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, AGING POPULATIONS, AND GROWING TALENT SHORTAGES ARE RESHAPING LABOR MARKETS ACROSS EUROPE. FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, HOW SHOULD SLOVAKIA RESPOND TO THESE CHALLENGES?

Slovakia is standing at a critical inflection point. The demographic reality is no longer theoretical—we are experiencing it in real time. Our workforce is aging faster than it is being replenished, while demand for new skills, particularly digital, technical, and deeply human capabilities, continues to accelerate. This is not a temporary fluctuation; it is a long-term structural shift.

The first step is to fundamentally rethink how we define and manage talent. We can no longer treat talent solely as something to “hire.” Talent must be built, developed, retained, and continuously renewed. Our global ManpowerGroup data shows that nearly **nine out of ten Slovak employers struggle to find skilled talent**, placing Slovakia among the most talent constrained labor markets worldwide. Traditional recruitment alone is simply no longer sufficient.

Second, lifelong learning must become a national priority. As more than half of today's job skills are expected to change by the end of this decade, upskilling and reskilling are not optional—they are essential. This requires much closer collaboration between employers, the

education system, and policymakers, with a stronger emphasis on practical skills, work based learning, adaptability, and AI literacy rather than rigid degree requirements.

### INNOVATION OFTEN SOUNDS ABSTRACT, BUT SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES LIVE IT EVERY DAY. HOW DO YOU FOSTER INNOVATION WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION—THROUGH PEOPLE, TECHNOLOGY, OR BUSINESS MODELS?

At ManpowerGroup, innovation starts with mindset, not technology. We intentionally cultivate a culture where curiosity, experimentation, and continuous learning are encouraged. Responsible risk taking and learning from failure are seen as drivers of progress, not obstacles.

From a people perspective, we invest deeply in building adaptability, critical thinking, collaboration, and leadership capability. While AI related skills are among the hardest to find globally, our research consistently shows that the most durable competitive advantages remain human: communication, judgment, professionalism, and learning agility. Innovation happens at the intersection of technical capability and human insight—what we call the **Human Edge**.

From a business model standpoint, innovation means embracing flexibility. Today's workforce is increasingly hybrid, composed of permanent employees, contingent workers, freelancers, and digital tools working together toward shared outcomes.

### WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?

Our biggest strategic challenge is helping organizations move from short term talent fixes to long term workforce sustainability at a time of unprecedented change.

Many companies feel intense pressure to - adopt AI quickly, control costs, and respond to ongoing uncertainty. The risk is focusing on technology or efficiency in isolation. Our role is to help leaders see the full picture: how work, skills, culture, and technology must evolve together.

Navigating this complexity requires clarity, trust, and a strong human compass. At ManpowerGroup, our strategic priority is to ensure that digital transformation strengthens - not erodes - the Human Edge. When technology supports people, when skills are continuously renewed, and when leaders invest in confidence and capability, the future of work becomes not a threat - but a shared opportunity.



ManpowerGroup®

# ZUZANA RUMIZ

GENERAL MANAGER  
MANPOWERGROUP  
SLOVENSKO



Zuzana Rumiz is a dynamic business leader with ten years of experience at ManpowerGroup Slovakia, where she advanced from Operations Manager to General Manager within one year, reflecting her strong strategic acumen and people focused leadership. In her role, she leads business growth, workforce transformation, and the promotion of responsible employment practices. Beyond her executive responsibilities, Zuzana is a respected voice in Slovakia's HR and labor market policy landscape. She serves as the re-elected President of APAS and as Vice President of AZZZ, contributing to national dialogue on employment legislation and labor market sustainability. She holds a degree from Comenius University in Bratislava and completed executive education at SDA Bocconi in Milan.

WWW.MANPOWERGROUP.SK

## IVAN SAGÁL

MANAGING PARTNER  
BIRD & BIRD  
CZECH REPUBLIC  
AND SLOVAKIA



Ivan Sagál is the Managing Partner of Bird & Bird offices in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, heading the Czech and Slovak Corporate and Banking & Finance Groups. He represents domestic and international clients across sectors including financial services, real estate, renewable energy, IT, telecoms, automotive, life sciences and aviation. Ivan's expertise covers M&A, reorganisations, project and acquisition finance, capital markets, FinTech, regulatory matters and complex cross-border restructuring and employment projects. Ivan contributes regularly to legal publications and business media, and is a member of the Czech and Slovak Bar Associations.

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

As global supply chains are being interrupted and defence spending is increasingly influencing industrial decisions in the EU, Slovakia has a genuine opportunity, particularly in the automotive industry transition, energy security, and advanced manufacturing. Attracting extensive foreign investment requires predictable regulation, an independent and efficient court system, and a government that signals long-term stability to international partners.

At Bird & Bird, we see this daily, as clients make location decisions based on legal certainty as much as tax incentives. Slovakia should leverage its EU membership more assertively, align with pro-business Central European neighbours, and present itself as a reliable, well-governed hub for technology and innovation investment.

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

A comprehensive digitalisation of public administration and the justice system. This is the single reform that would have the most immediate and far-reaching impact.

Lengthy court proceedings, paper-based bureaucracy, and fragmented public registries remain among the most frequently cited frustrations by both domestic and international businesses. Digitising these systems would reduce costs, increase transparency, cut corruption risks, and dramatically shorten timelines for resolving disputes and completing regulatory processes. Countries like Estonia have demonstrated that this transformation is achievable within a generation.

Slovakia has the talent and the EU funding available – what is needed is political will and coherent execution. From a legal services perspective, faster and more predictable institutions directly translate into a more attractive investment environment.

### **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?**

Staying ahead of the pace of change in technology, in client expectations, and in the competitive landscape of legal services. Clients increasingly expect their law firm to be a strategic partner, not just a service provider. They want faster

turnaround, greater cost predictability, and advice that connects legal risk to business outcomes.

At the same time, AI and legal technology are fundamentally changing how legal work is structured and delivered. Our challenge and opportunity is to harness these tools to enhance the quality and efficiency of what we do, while ensuring that the human judgement, relationship depth, and sector expertise that define Bird & Bird remain at the core of our offer.

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

Innovation at Bird & Bird is not a separate initiative – it is embedded in how we work. Globally, the firm has invested significantly in legal technology and AI-assisted tools that support research, document review, and due diligence. Locally, we encourage our lawyers to challenge conventional approaches and to stay close to the industries they serve, understanding business models and not just legal frameworks. We also benefit enormously from our international network, where best practices and new methodologies are shared across offices.

People are ultimately the engine of innovation. We hire curious, commercially minded lawyers and give them exposure to complex, cross-border work early in their careers. That combination of global reach and local depth is what keeps us innovative and relevant.

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

AI is transforming legal services faster than most anticipated even two or three years ago. Document-intensive work such as due diligence, contract review, and legal research is being fundamentally reshaped.

At Bird & Bird, we are responding not by resisting this shift, but by embracing it strategically. We use AI-assisted tools to increase efficiency, reduce turnaround times, and allow our lawyers to focus on higher-value analysis and client counselling. Importantly, we are also advising clients on the legal implications of AI adoption – regulatory compliance, data governance, liability frameworks – which is rapidly becoming one of the most in-demand areas of our practice.

The firms that will lead in this new environment are those that combine technological fluency with deep expertise and sound legal judgement. That is precisely where Bird & Bird is positioning itself.

## HOW DO YOU FOSTER INNOVATION AT YOUR ORGANIZATION VIA TECHNOLOGY, PEOPLE AND BUSINESS MODELS?

Data from our latest annual CEO Survey show 76% of Slovak CEOs view innovation as a core element of their strategy, significantly higher than the global figure of 50%. At PwC Slovakia, we focus our innovation efforts on combining people, technology and new ways of working into a single, business led approach. We actively embed AI, data and digital tools into our core internal processes and services. We invest in continuous staff upskilling, so we as professionals can confidently combine emerging technologies with deep industry expertise and professional judgement. We focus on integrated, tech enabled solutions rather than traditional services, more on the provision of new services, such as data governance and data management, cyber risk management, transforming organizational workflows with agentic AI, e-invoicing technology solutions, and tailor-made full-stack and low-code application development.

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

AI isn't going to make consulting disappear – it will remove the easy parts of consulting. The profession won't vanish; but “slide-making consulting” will. Anything that is repeatable—summarising, drafting, benchmarking, first pass analysis, even building standard deliverables—will be done by AI at a fraction of today's costs and time. The winners in consulting will be the firms that stop selling “hours and outputs” and start selling speed to decision, measurable outcomes, and trust.

So the disruption is real: clients now expect faster insights, data driven decision making, and tangible business outcomes—not just recommendations. That doesn't reduce the need for advisors; it raises the bar. When AI can generate 80% of the content, what matters is the last mile: judgement, accountability, domain expertise, and the ability to turn ambiguity into action—especially in regulated areas. And that's exactly where PwC is leaning

- 1. We embed AI into delivery, rather than it being a “nice-to-have add on.”** Our strategy is: integrate data, technology and AI into core offerings and show clients how we're transforming ourselves.
- 2. We scale adoption and skills, not pilot theatre.** PwC is investing in enterprise AI enablement (e.g. Network AI Academy), so teams can deliver consistently, rather than sporadically.
- 3. We lead with trust and governance, because AI without trust won't scale.** We operate under network level principles on reliability, validation and oversight, which is critical when clients move from experimentation to operational use.

The majority of Slovak leaders, (60% according to the latest CEO Survey), say investments in AI have not yet delivered the expected impact in terms of higher revenues. A smaller percentage of CEOs report a tangible return in the form of lower costs and higher revenues, and only 16% have seen a combined effect from both. These figures clearly show that AI alone is not a guarantee of value. Leaders see AI as a defining force of future competitiveness, but not as a quick fix. Its real value lies in a long term transformation.

We have numerous examples from the Slovak market where we helped our clients: with rollout and integration of Microsoft 365 Copilot into their workflows, training and change management and making savings on the client side; designing an AI governance maturity assessment for a client, covering governance across the AI lifecycle and training their internal teams, and selling licenses for our globally exclusive AI tool Harvey, an AI platform built on LLM, which helps automate and improve work across legal and advisory use cases. So no – consulting won't disappear. But consulting that can't demonstrate its value beyond what AI can generate will disappear.

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

The establishment of a truly stable, predictable, and investment oriented tax and regulatory framework—anchored in a binding multi year tax policy commitment by the state. Slovakia does not suffer from a lack of ideas or talent; it suffers from uncertainty. Frequent ad hoc legislative changes, retroactive measures, and short implementation timelines undermine long term planning, discourage investment, and disproportionately burden compliant businesses. A credible commitment to tax stability—supported by systematic impact assessments, meaningful consultation with the business community, and clear transition rules—would significantly strengthen investor confidence.

Such a framework should explicitly reward innovation, reinvestment, and productivity growth, rather than over taxing labour, and being overly focused on compliance. It would reposition Slovakia from a “reactive” jurisdiction to a predictable and competitive one, capable of attracting high value investments and supporting domestic champions.

In short, predictability is the most powerful pro growth reform Slovakia can deliver—without increasing fiscal costs, but with a profound impact on trust, competitiveness, and long term economic resilience, fully aligned with the direction and priorities we articulated in the recently published AmCham Tax Manifesto.



# CHRISTIANA SERUGOVÁ

CEE TLP CLIENTS  
& MARKETS LEADER  
PwC



Christiana has over 25 years of experience in Slovak and international tax. She joined PwC after 4 years at another consulting firm and specializes in M&A Tax, International Tax Structuring, and Transfer Pricing. After seven years leading PwC's Slovak tax and legal practice, she now oversees both PwC Slovak and CEE Clients & Markets. She was actively involved in numerous privatisations during the transition of the Slovak economy and advises a diverse range of multinational and Slovak companies on inbound and outbound investment structuring. Christiana has been a Slovak State Registered Tax Advisor since 1998 and currently serves as the Vice President of Finance at AmCham and chairs the Tax Committee, which takes an active role in shaping Slovak tax legislation.

[WWW.PWC.COM/SK](http://WWW.PWC.COM/SK)

# TOMÁŠ SLECHAN

CEO  
BENU

PHOENIX ZDRAVOTNÍCKE ZÁSOBOVANIE, A. S.



Tomas has dedicated his professional life to the healthcare industry he established the first pharmacy chains in Czechia and Slovakia. Since 2019, he has served as CEO of the PHOENIX Group in Slovakia, where he oversees the operations of the major wholesale distributor PHOENIX Zdravotnícke zásobovanie, a. s., the BENU pharmacy chain, and EL Pharma. He is driven by a strong conviction that Slovak patients deserve access to the same innovations available across Europe, and he brings the same determination to leadership that he does to building businesses. Known for his relentless energy and strategic focus, Tomas is committed to bridging the gap between local healthcare standards and international excellence.

## TRANSFORMATION OF PHARMACY: FROM DISPENSING MEDICINES TO ACTIVE HEALTH MANAGEMENT

In the dynamic environment of modern healthcare, the role of the pharmacist is being fundamentally redefined. Pharmacies are now the most accessible healthcare facilities, and pharmacists' competencies are expanding in areas such as vaccination, screening, and advanced pharmaceutical care counseling. Pharmacists have both the capability and the expertise to motivate patients toward a more responsible approach to their own health – ranging from a healthy lifestyle to a realistic perception of health issues.

### PREVENTION AS A RESPONSE TO CRITICAL STATISTICS

In Slovakia, cardiovascular diseases have long been the leading cause of death. Many of these tragedies can be prevented through the early detection of risk factors. This is where BENU pharmacies play an indispensable role. Our pharmacists possess the expertise and technology to monitor critical values, such as blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and blood glucose. By bringing these examinations directly into pharmacies, we are removing barriers to preventive care and direct patients toward further treatment when necessary.

### STRATEGIC INNOVATIONS: PREVENTION CENTER AND BENU CLINIC

At BENU, we push the boundaries of our industry. At the unique Prevention Center in Trnava, which is an integral part of a pharmacy patients have access to a comprehensive range of examinations. With BENU Clinic in Topoľčany, we confirm our role as a strong advocate for expanding pharmacists' competencies.

### THE FUTURE OF PHARMACY: INTEGRATION, DIGITALIZATION, AND CLINICAL BENEFIT

Pharmacy is a dynamically evolving field with the potential to become an even more significant part of the healthcare system. A key element is digitalization. If pharmacists had access to unified patient health records, treatment safety would increase significantly – particularly regarding drug interactions and a comprehensive overview of the patient's health status. We believe that pharmacies will play a key role in future as an accessible, professional, and trustworthy pillar of healthcare.



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# MARTIN ŠRAMKO

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CEO  
IMMOCAP



Martin has been ImmoCap's CEO since 2014, after previously serving as the company's Financial and Investment Director. He holds degrees from the University of Economics in Bratislava and the University of Reading, specializing in Real Estate Investment & Finance. His career began at Deloitte, where he gained expertise in due diligence, financial analysis, and real estate transactions. Under his leadership, the company has transformed into a comprehensive developer creating space not only for work, but also for living and spending free time. Under Martin's leadership, the ImmoCap co.re approach emphasizes responsible development, reducing carbon footprint and aligning with ESG principles. The company plans to deliver 100,000 sqm of office space and 2,000 homes in the next decade, representing €1 billion in investment. ImmoCap's ambition is to elevate the city's urban fabric by thoughtful, future-ready design.

## WHAT ACHIEVEMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR ARE YOU PARTICULARLY PROUD OF AT IMMOCAP?

I am particularly proud of our team's ability to consistently deliver high-quality projects despite a challenging market environment. We managed to make significant steps forward in the development of our flagship projects – Istropolis, Éclair and ZSE headquarters. All are already under construction, in leasing / sale or pre-sale phase. Our office buildings all have major tenants, and the residential sales exceed our plans. The sale of The Mill, our highly decorated office building, is also one of our valuable business achievements. We see the strong demand for our developments as validation of our strategic and well-considered decisions. At the same time, we are proud to be elevating the standard of real estate development in Bratislava, especially in terms of sustainability and public space quality.

## WHAT CONTINUOUSLY MOTIVATES YOU IN YOUR WORK AND DRIVES YOU FORWARD?

My strongest motivation is the team at ImmoCap, which shares the same values and ambitions. Every project is the result of collaboration across multiple disciplines, and the result of this synergy is what continuously drives us forward. We are also motivated by the opportunity to actively shape the future of Bratislava and deliver projects with a lasting positive impact. The trust of our partners and clients represents a strong commitment to making thoughtful and high-quality decisions. We are constantly driven by the ambition to innovate and raise development standards. Ultimately, what motivates us most is the vision of creating a better place to live.

## HOW DOES IMMOCAP APPROACH INNOVATION AND ITS PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION?

Innovation is a natural part of our approach at ImmoCap, which we define through our own co.re concept. It goes beyond technology and represents a comprehensive way of thinking about development, with a strong focus on sustainability and efficiency. From the first sketch, all projects are designed with sustainability and energy efficiency in mind, to bring significant savings on costs for all users and a gentler effect on the environment. While solutions for each building may differ, the result is always state-of-the-art energy management concept. And that is what our clients look for, technologically advanced buildings in prime locations that meet ESG criteria.

## WHAT STRATEGIC STEPS ARE YOU PLANNING FOR THE NEAR FUTURE?

We will focus on further developing key locations in Bratislava where we see strong potential for high-quality urban living – Mlynské nivy area, Trnavské Mýto, the new downtown of Bratislava. Our ambition is to continue delivering projects that integrate living, working, and leisure into one cohesive environment. We plan to deliver 100,000 sqm of office space and 2,000 homes in the next decade, representing €1 billion in investment. A strong emphasis will remain on ESG principles and reducing the carbon footprint of our buildings. At the same time, we aim to deepen our collaboration with the city and local communities to ensure meaningful added value. A strong team and well-considered strategic decisions will remain the foundation of our approach – to uncover the city's potential and elevate the city's urban fabric through thoughtful, future-ready design.





# PETER ŠTARCHOŇ

DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF  
MANAGEMENT, COMENIUS  
UNIVERSITY BRATISLAVA



He is a leading figure in marketing management in Slovakia and serves as Chairman of the Scientific Council of the Faculty of Management, Comenius University Bratislava.

His academic work promotes interactive teaching and connects marketing theory with contemporary business practice and emerging trends. His research focuses on social media, new information and communication technologies in marketing communication, as well as branding and consumer behavior in international marketing. He is the founder and Chairman of the Editorial Board of the international scientific journal *Marketing Science and Inspirations* and serves on the editorial boards of several other scholarly journals. He also contributes to international scientific conferences and regularly presents his work in Slovakia and abroad.

WWW.FM.UNIBA.SK

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

Slovakia must prioritize the internationalization of its higher education system to produce a workforce capable of operating in a globalized market. This involves offering professional degree programs in multiple world languages specifically English, German, and French to align with the needs of multinational corporations and European institutions. Furthermore, the country should leverage the strategic position of Bratislava as a hub for international business and decision-making to bridge the gap between academic theory and global market practice.

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

The primary response should be a dual strategy of retaining local talent and attracting international students. To combat the "brain drain," Slovakia must provide high-quality, internationally recognized education at home that mirrors the standards of Western Europe. Simultaneously, educational institutions should implement "reskilling" and "upskilling" through lifelong learning initiatives and micro-credentials to address the evolving needs of the workforce.

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

The most significant shift would be the systematic integration of the multilingual model into professional education. Moving beyond basic English proficiency to professional-level fluency in other major European languages (German and French) provides a distinct competitive advantage for the labor market. This shift ensures that graduates do not require extensive on-the-job training and can immediately enter high-value roles in multinational shared service centers and global corporations.

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

The most notable achievement is the elevation of the Faculty of Management to 4 Palmes of Excellence in the Eduniversal 2025 rankings. This classifies the institution as a "Top Business School with Significant International Influence". This milestone is significant because it is based on peer evaluation from deans worldwide, confirming that Slovak management education can compete with elite institutions in Scandinavia and Western Europe.

## **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY NAVIGATING?**

Our primary strategic challenge is to strengthen our position as an international hub for management education by maintaining a culture of radical openness and excellence. We fulfill our social responsibility by providing world-class education and high-impact research that attracts international talent to our region. To succeed, we focus on maintaining excellence across four key pillars: delivering professional programs in multiple world languages that meet elite global standards, sustaining our status as a top-tier scientific workplace with significant international influence, expanding global partnerships to integrate students into international business environments, and actively cultivating a diverse academic ecosystem that addresses the evolving needs of the modern labor market.

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

Innovation is fostered through an ecosystem of mobility and global partnerships with institutions in the USA, Japan, and across Europe. By facilitating the movement of over 200 Erasmus students annually and encouraging faculty exchanges, the organization ensures a constant influx of global perspectives. Additionally, the curriculum is continuously updated to reflect digital marketing, process management, and ethics in the age of AI.

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

Digital transformation is shifting the focus of management education toward "AI literacy" as a core leadership competency. Rather than viewing AI as a technical "trick," it is being integrated into analysis and decision-making processes. The response includes training staff to utilize these tools and teaching students to manage the risks of AI, such as hallucinations and ethical biases, just as they would manage human teams.

## **WHAT LEADERSHIP QUALITY DO YOU BELIEVE IS MOST ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?**

The most essential quality is the ability to manage "global capital" a combination of linguistic, cultural, and professional adaptability. Modern leaders must be capable of operating in multicultural teams and virtual projects while maintaining a data-driven approach to decision-making. Ultimately, a leader must be able to translate theoretical knowledge into practical impact within a rapidly changing global context.

# IVANA HERETIK VAČOKOVÁ

CEO  
TALENT SOLUTIONS  
SLOVAKIA



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.

WWW.TALENT-SOLUTIONS.SK

### **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.

SWAN

ROMAN  
VAVRÍK

CEO  
SWAN



Roman Vavřík studied Strategic Management at Comenius University in Bratislava and Business at Webster University in Vienna. He began his career in 2007 as a Strategy Consultant at Slovak Telekom, later leading the Corporate Strategy team and advising top management on major projects, including acquisitions. In 2012, he became Head of B2B Marketing, overseeing corporate customer activities. Two years later, he was appointed Marketing and Sales Director at Digi Slovakia, where he shaped and executed commercial strategy for residential TV and internet services. At SWAN, he first served as Board Advisor before being named Chief Executive Officer in February 2019. Under his leadership, SWAN continues to grow as a leading Slovak-owned telecommunications provider.

WWW.SWAN.SK

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

Today, Slovakia should primarily invest in three areas: digital infrastructure, energy stability, and the quality of human capital. If we want to remain competitive within the EU and globally, it is not enough to be cheaper. We must be faster, more reliable, and technologically prepared. In practice, this means supporting networks, data centers, cloud solutions, cybersecurity, and creating an environment where companies can innovate without unnecessary delays. The economy of the future will be built on data, connectivity, and the ability to turn technology into concrete, value-added services.

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

Demographic change is a hard reality, not a topic for conference presentations. Slovakia must respond through a combination of higher productivity, reskilling, and smarter integration of people across generations. Where the number of people is not increasing, efficiency must. This means more automation, AI tools, more flexible work models, and an environment where both graduates and experienced senior professionals have a place. It is also crucial that companies can attract and retain talent more effectively, because in a competitive environment, it is no longer just about salary, but also about purpose, culture, and growth opportunities.

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

If I had to name one bold reform, it would be a radical improvement in the speed of the state. Slovakia does not need more strategies sitting in drawers, but faster permitting processes, a more predictable regulatory environment, and less administrative friction. In business, it is often not just the quality of the idea that matters, but how quickly you can bring it to market. Countries that can make decisions quickly and consistently will win. The others will watch investments and talent move elsewhere. This principle applies equally to telecommunications, IT, and the overall business environment.

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

That we confirmed our ability to be not only a price challenger, but also an innovator. 4ka has long been reshaping the market's price levels while also introducing new types of services, from shared unlimited plans to digital solutions built on AI. At the same time, SWAN continues to develop strong B2B capabilities in data centers, cloud, and security. What matters is that we are not building these as marketing labels, but as real services that simplify life for people and businesses.

### **WHAT IS THE BIGGEST STRATEGIC CHALLENGE YOUR COMPANY IS CURRENTLY FACING?**

The biggest strategic challenge we are addressing today is growth without losing flexibility. We operate in a market where we compete with strong multinational players with greater capital, while also needing to make the right decisions in infrastructure, security, and new digital services. A major topic is how to further scale our network independence and how to expand our portfolio toward higher value-added areas such as cybersecurity and telemedicine.

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

Innovation in our company does not happen by writing it into a presentation once a year. It is created through the combination of technology, people, and business discipline. We are used to looking for models that make economic sense while also improving the customer experience. In the consumer segment, this means simpler and smarter digital interactions; in the business segment, it is about cloud, managed networks, and security solutions. For us, innovation is not an end in itself; it must simplify a service, accelerate a process, or reduce costs.

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

AI and digital transformation are already fundamentally changing the telecommunications sector. In customer service, they speed up request handling; in internal operations, they make working with documents, data, and development more efficient. We approach this pragmatically: we do not implement AI because it is a buzzword, but where it has measurable impact. Examples include the new generation of the My 4ka app with the AI assistant Hugo, as well as the use of AI in document management and development, where it significantly increases efficiency.

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

Artificial intelligence and digital transformation are fundamentally reshaping the IT and telecommunications industry. We are seeing a shift from traditional service delivery toward highly automated, AI-driven models that increase speed, scalability, and efficiency. At the same time, global delivery structures continue to evolve, with routine activities increasingly moving to lower-cost locations such as India, while demand for more complex, high-value capabilities grows. We should not forget that the way data is perceived and handled is rapidly changing and influencing our day-to-day work. Its integrity, security, and sovereignty significantly affect our industry.

At Deutsche Telekom IT Solutions Slovakia, we view these changes as both a risk and a significant opportunity. Our response is centered on embedding AI-based automation into everyday work and empowering our employees to use it as a productivity and innovation tool. We actively invest in AI training and development programs, and an increasing share of our workforce is already leveraging AI daily to improve outcomes and create value for our customers.

In parallel, we are reshaping our skill base. While automation reduces the need for certain repetitive roles, it simultaneously creates new opportunities in areas such as AI engineering, cloud, cybersecurity, and digital consulting. Our focus is therefore on continuous upskilling and reskilling, enabling our people to transition into these higher-value roles.

It is necessary to emphasize that AI provides a toolset, but the aim is not simply to implement AI for its own sake. The objective is to increase efficiency, shorten time-to-market, strengthen service resilience, and rebuild our legacy processes and ways of working into the new operating model of tomorrow.

What is critical in this environment is adaptability. The pace of technological change means that the lifecycle of skills is shortening significantly, and organizations must continuously evolve. By fostering a culture of learning, flexibility, and openness to change, we ensure we are not only keeping pace with transformation but actively shaping it.

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

We strongly believe that innovation does not arise in isolation—it results from collaboration across teams, countries, and ecosystems. That is why we foster innovation through international cooperation, cross-sector partnerships, and a strong engineering culture.

A great example is the Industrial AI Cloud initiative launched by Deutsche Telekom in Munich in February 2026. This next-generation AI platform, developed in close collaboration with partners such as NVIDIA, represents a strategic step toward Europe's technological sovereignty. What makes this project particularly meaningful for us is that it was significantly driven by our teams in Košice, working hand in hand with international colleagues.

Our Slovak experts played a key role in designing and building the platform end-to-end—from architecture and infrastructure to automation, security, and operational readiness. Within a very short timeframe, they helped transform thousands of GPUs into a fully operational AI environment capable of supporting real-world industrial and public-sector use cases. This successful project demonstrates how innovation emerges when diverse expertise comes together with a shared goal.

Beyond large-scale projects, we also cultivate innovation by enabling experimentation. The Industrial AI Cloud is designed as an open ecosystem where companies, start-ups, research institutions, and public organizations can develop and scale AI solutions without investing in costly infrastructure. This strategic European infrastructure lowers barriers to entry, accelerates time-to-market, and encourages the adoption of new business models.

Equally important is our involvement in local organizations and communities, as well as our intensive collaboration with universities, particularly the Technical University of Košice and UPJŠ, which enables us to stay at the forefront of emerging technologies while nurturing future talent. By connecting academia, industry, and internal teams, we create a continuous flow of ideas and practical innovation.

In essence, our approach to innovation is built on three pillars: a skilled and educated workforce; leveraging cutting-edge technology; and fostering strong partnerships. When these elements come together, innovation becomes not just an outcome, but a natural part of how we operate every day.



DEUTSCHE TELEKOM IT SOLUTIONS

# L'UBOR ŽATKO

MANAGING DIRECTOR  
DEUTSCHE TELEKOM IT  
SOLUTIONS SLOVAKIA



Since 2009, Lubor has worked at Deutsche Telekom Group, specifically at Slovak Telekom, a.s., where he and his team designed and implemented numerous strategic and transformational projects. In 2016, he was appointed Director of Network Development and Construction at Slovak Telekom and T-Mobile Czech Republic, overseeing changes and advancements in mobile and fixed networks. Since 2019, he has served as Chief Technology and IT Officer at Magyar Telekom, the largest mobile operator in Hungary. As a member of the company's senior management, he was responsible for strategy, efficiency, and implementation of new products and innovations, as well as for leading the organization in the areas of IT systems and infrastructure, mobile and fixed networks. He has extensive experience in major companies in the telecommunications and banking sectors like Barclays bank UK, Vodafone CZ or First Data.

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## COMMUNITY

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## VISIBILITY

AmCham provides increased visibility in the business community and inspires our leaders to drive strategic initiatives.



## IMPACT

Powerful and direct legislative impact in Slovakia, supporting the continuous improvement of business environment. Key policy pillars:



## INFORMATION

Members can enjoy increased media exposure through quotes, articles, interviews in major media outlets.



## INNOVATIONS

AmCham brings new topics to the table with true visionary thinking.

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