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S **SPEAKER**

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INTERVIEW

TALLEN ALWAYS SHINES

COSTIN AVRAM, CEO, Crystal System

1 Crystal System is the blueprint of a successful company, not only in Romania, but also abroad. What is your recipe for success and how difficult was it to adapt to different markets?

Crystal is indeed active on the Romanian market as well as on the international market, in countries such as Germany, BeNeLux, France, UK, Italy. Recently we started to deliver IT professional services in ASPAC, following large and very large global customers, and in the US. All the time our differentiator and recipe for success was based on the best price/quality ratio compared to competitors. In a nutshell, it is about the talents that are working in our organization. Thanks to our business model that has its foundation in the strategic collaboration we have with Universities, we continuously manage to provide a pattern regarding the human resource in terms of intelligence, commitment, ownership of the task each individual is performing, proactivity, open-mindedness, adherence to Crystal's organizational culture and to our customers' organizational culture. On top of these abilities we build knowledge and skills.

2 How do you plan to develop the necessary skills in your workforce, keeping in mind that it is becoming more and more difficult to find skilled labour? Is re-skilling the workforce the solution?

Re-skilling is a fundamental solution and it has to be done in a massive and structured way. Today most companies are hunting the talents but we are all fishing in the same lake (if you allow this metaphor). So it is not enough anymore to access the existing talent but to work with the academic environment in Romania as well as with other Romanian institutions to increase the number of IT professionals. Crystal initiated many years ago the IT for NON-IT program inside ASE Bucharest and since 2018 inside UPB. In this moment, we launched a new program where we have more than 800 students subscribing to our program. These are students coming from scientific specializations but not necessarily from computer-science departments. They have the chance to spend 2-3 months with our trainers, inside the University, and enter the IT world. With this approach, Crystal actually initiated a new business line, dedicated to HR solutions. The investment we are making is a

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major one (in equipment, software licenses, trainers and all logistics details) but it is the only way to build sustainable programs and achieve concrete and long-term results.

3. In light of the signs of a slowing economy and the real possibility of an incoming economic crisis, what are, in your opinion, the perspectives for the software industry and for Crystal System?

Thanks to our sustainable business model and our go to market strategy, based on HR investments and high attention to the cost/quality ratio, we should not be affected of an economic crisis. Our offering is about reducing the costs of RUN IT while saving money for added value strategic projects. If an economic crisis will freeze the IT budgets for strategic projects, innovation, R&D, we will focus on the maintenance of the existing IT systems (current IT systems still need to be maintained). My personal opinion is that there is always an appetite for innovation and cost saving with the maintenance of current systems. There are a lot of money spent in between so when budgets are frozen, IT companies should focus on the two extremes: concrete innovation products vs. reducing the costs related to OPEX. An economic crisis should have as effect some HR cost reductions but normally this happens with a certain delay.

4. What are your goals for 2020 and what will be the main challenges for the next 3 to 5 years? Do you have any specific plans to address these challenges?

We have in this moment three centers of delivery in Romania, Moldova and Albania. We want to extend further in terms of geographical distribution in Eastern Europe but also in ASPAC. This is a follow-up on our existing global customers. They are very satisfied with the collaboration with Crystal and they are pulling us in others regions where they need our support. Therefore, it is a safe extension, based on concrete programs and concrete commitments. Of course, there are

challenges in doing this related to the coordination of the offices but also related to new competitors. But our business model is founded on an universal truth, talent always shines.

5. What are the most innovative products that you are offering and what are your plans for the following years (in terms of innovation)? Can you name one which you think will disrupt your field of operation?

There is innovation in all Crystal's daily activities related to our methodology, our approach on solving issues and optimizing, simplifying and governing process. In the same time we invest a lot in the development of platforms and solutions for intelligent process management that are combining the latest visualization technologies, process mining techniques as well as AI and ML algorithms. These are some of the technologies that are already disrupting the current way IT operates and in Crystal we try to get closer to these trends so that we embrace them as an evolution of our current capabilities and not as a revolution of the industry.

6. What is the most valuable lesson you, as head of a leading company in Romania, have learned throughout 2019? Based on this, what will be the best advice you can give to people working with you?

Actually, this year I have learned to listen more to what my colleagues have to say and to trust them more. I am used to listen a lot to our customers, to identify their pains and find out solutions. This year I have experienced several occasions where teams of specialists working on different projects had more clear ideas than the customer itself about problems, solutions to those problems and even improvement ideas. If you think, this is only normal, so I guess what I have learned, is people need to be empowered and motivated to identify new collaborations opportunities because they have enough knowledge and skills. We deal with services and in the end we deal with people so my advice will be: be curious and proactive.

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7 **What is the most important aspect businesses should pay attention to in 2020? What are you doing to address it?**

There is no company today in Romania, acting in the IT&C industry, and not only, that is not complaining about the lack of resources. In 2020 and in the years to come the problem will be even more severe and it has to be solved in a structured and institutional manner. Otherwise, Romania will lose opportunities.

At the same time, Romania should focus more on innovation because the talents Romania has are able to do innovation. The salary costs are extremely high at this moment and they will keep growing so we do not talk only about an opportunity but also about a necessity. Crystal is acting exactly in these two directions: building more talents for classical IT application development and AMS while investing in the innovation area.