

## **“IT IS VERY TYPICAL HUNGARIAN: THAT YOU ARE TRYING TO SIT ON THE FENCE...” - INTERVIEW WITH DR. MÁRTA HOFFMANN, CEO OF THE TNS-HOFFMANN MARKET RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

Interviewer: Thank you, Marta, for accepting our request and preparing for this interview with you as a company executive. You are the chief executive officer of TNS-Hoffmann. Could you please talk about the story of Hoffmann Research and TNS-Hoffmann; its establishment, the beginnings and how it developed to its current form?



Hoffmann: Yes, TNS-Hoffmann in its current form exists only since the beginning of 2011. Before that two separate companies: Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) Hungary and Research International Hoffmann operated. Both were on the market since 9-10-12 years. My part of the company, which is represented in the Hoffmann name, was established in 1997 under the name Research International Hoffmann and we operated under that name until the merger for the new company established as TNS-Hoffmann. Before that, I used to work as a partner in Medián opinion research from actually the change of the political system in 1989 and also before that, because I'm not that young, I worked as a communications researcher since 1979, when I finished the University. So I was going just backwards in the story, but I think, this also tells a bit of my background. In terms of my personal background other than of my degree as an economist, I also studied aesthetics at the ELTE Art Faculty, which I finished in the middle of the 80's. And I also did my doctorate degree actually combining the two interests in analyzing advertising of international kind trying to find patterns, which actually became my main interest afterwards. So I continued my career after the change of the political system in market research and since then I've been personally working as a qualitative researcher, and this also gives a kind of taste of the company because of my personal involvement. Research International Hoffmann and TNS-Hoffmann also have a bit of flair of qualitative research and is more associated with qualitative research as well.

Interviewer: I think you covered a bit from our second question, but if you can add anything a little bit to that and tell me about your career as a manager. How it started and how you became one, what it means.

Hoffmann: Yeah, exactly what I was saying before it was more about my professional career, or my professional background, my career as a manager was actually, well, like a lot of people in Hungary, I think, who are managers during these days. We were kind of forced in a way to become managers because under normal conditions, if we already had a good, well-developed market and market economy earlier, I don't think people like me would have ever become a CEO. It has never ever been my ambition to be a CEO, to tell the truth, it's not even an ambition after... I don't know... 25 years of having been a CEO, so for me being a CEO is more a title. Actually and as we'll talk about it: the way we distribute different tasks, I'm more, still more of a professional sort of leader in the company than the actual day-to-day operational management. Our current management actually consists of four people. So we are quite unique in that sense. Also part of the difficulty of course, in that sense we have four CEOs, so I am the CEO of the company but we still have four people who are legally CEOs. I'm more if you know the name on the top, because my name is included in the company name, but otherwise there are four people who distribute the managerial tasks between them.

The way we are organized...I will start with the easiest. One of the general managers is in charge of all the financials, the administration, and the operations; and the three other people are in charge of the professional tasks related to the actual research. So one person is in charge of a quantitative team and the whole of the quantitative operations, another one is in charge of the qualitative operations and I'm in charge - although I'm qualified too - but I'm in charge of the client service, so I'm head of the client service team actually, other than being the CEO, so that's how we are organized in general.

Interviewer: ...and this is the system since the beginning so...

Hoffmann: Yes, that's the way we've been established, and...it was the way we had been operating before TNS and Hoffmann had been merged, so we kind of inherited this system but because this was the system, we developed ourselves... that's the best operation for us. The reason for that is that the company and I haven't talked about the ownership yet... it is not 100% owned by TNS, this is a joint venture and this is a 60% majority owned by the Hungarian partner, so it is a minority share, that the multinational has and because of that the owners who are also operating in the company want to have a very good overview of what's going on in the company, and that's why we shared the different tasks and responsibilities as well, so that's how we've been able to work together for seventeen years. Now, because you know, three people, who are owners... it has a certain dynamics, and

although the shares are not the same between the three people, the way we take decisions, the way we operate the company has always been as if we were equal partners. So we are equal partners in business, that sounds not equal in shares but that's something over the years that we could somehow push in the background and that's not an issue in taking decisions.

Interviewer: ...and as you said from the beginning basically you operate internationally and what is the story of your international activities?

Hoffmann: Okay, the story of our international involvement or the international relationship goes back to 1994, when I gave a presentation at an ESOMAR<sup>1</sup> conference which was held here in Budapest. A person from Research International was present at the conference and listened to my presentation, and after the presentation he came up to me and asked me, if I we were interested in some type of a cooperation with Research International. At that time I was still at Median and because of that Median at that time in 1995 became part of Research International as an affiliate company. After that when we left and established our own company in 1997, Research International came with us as we were actually the only ones doing market research. The rest of Medián was doing political and social research primarily, so we, kind of, took over the market research side and this has continued until Research International and TNS were merged under the WPP ownership. So this has been like that, well, for exactly 20 years. So for the last 20 years we have been working for WPP companies, Research International and now TNS.

Interviewer: I don't understand, what does WPP mean?

Hoffmann: WPP is, well, that's the world's largest market services trust<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The European Society for Opinion and Market Research (ESOMAR) is a world association for market, social and opinion researchers. Founded in 1948, ESOMAR began as a regional association within Europe. Currently, with more than 4,900 members in over 130 countries, ESOMAR's global membership brings together professionals in market and opinion research, marketing, advertising, business, public affairs and media from across the world.

<sup>2</sup> WPP is a British multinational advertising and public relations company with its main management office in London, United Kingdom, and its executive office in Dublin, Ireland. It is the world's largest advertising company by revenues, and employs around 162,000 people in 3,000 offices across 110 countries. It owns a number of advertising, public relations and market research networks, including Grey, Burson-Marsteller, Hill & Knowlton, JWT, Ogilvy Group, TNS, Young & Rubicam and Cohn & Wolfe.

Interviewer: So, thank you for the details. What are the management issues and problems you have had to face during your tenure?

Hoffmann: Well, as I said the most important and biggest problem was to become a leader in itself. Because I'm personally not very much an assertive type, so I really had to change myself. You can't change your personality, but of course you can somehow develop your personality so I really had to develop into being able to direct other people and directly, you know, give them frameworks and create rules and create a way of working and develop strategy and things like that. So I used to be a communication researcher and I was very happy. My favourite project ever in my life was analyzing wedding photographs, so, yes, its fantastic and well after 20-30 years again I can again do projects like that, so it's amazing I had to build a big company in order to do that, to allow myself to do things like that. None of our managers are really the international type of managers, none of us has an MBA which I really think this company by now requires: somebody to lead with a very well created background and studied, and knowing all the management skills. We don't have management skills, all our skills have been developed as we go, but if you look around in the market research industry, in Hungary none of the companies so far have had a CEO, who would have had an MBA. Everyone is coming from the research career, everyone used to be a researcher and just developed him or herself into a manager... I think the times are going to change and this is more or less the time when the next generation taking over these companies is not going to be like us anymore. It's partly due to the history of these post-socialist countries, partly due to the uniqueness of the industry, because the clients want to talk to the people who know, who really know the ins and outs of the research, the nitty-gritty of how to do a group discussion or how to design a good questionnaire. Also in Hungary the size of the companies is relatively quite small, so to be able to manage a company with 30 to 60 or even a 100 people you don't really necessarily need all these skills or you had not, but now it's... I think it is very different and so now it's having done this over 20 years and you know relatively successfully. Because we are still here after 20 years... of course the profit rates are very different than in the 90's but this is not our fault only, but now the market has changed so tremendously, that you really need to use things that we just simply don't know. So that's my attitude to my own role.

Interviewer: Could you give me examples how did you overcome these difficulties...so far?

Hoffmann: Well, of course, yeah, well, first of all it was 10 years ago that we already realized it very clearly, that this is the situation and we need to do

something about it, and that was the moment, when we brought in a professional CFO who is now the fourth partner among the CEOs and although he doesn't have an MBA either... but he used to work for a bank, he has been a bank manager for a long time, he also has been manager of the Hungarian airport and of such huge operations. So for him something like 50-60-70 people is nothing, so he is much more professional in handling all those management issues except for the HR issues but the financial issues and all those things are not a problem for him. That's why we can have this luxury of, you know, really dealing with the professional part of the business much more and really the professional part of the business at the moment. As I'm saying it's changing, so now I feel this is more or less the point where we should either learn something which I'm not necessarily going to be able to do at close to 60. Or we're going to need to find people who are up-to-date.

Interviewer: About the management problems... Could you evaluate the management problems that arose from the international activity of your company and what are the solutions to those problems. Please, also specify how to manage international teamwork and how to handle intercultural conflicts. For structuring your answer please give details according to the following areas ... So if you think we can go one by one or just list them ...

Hoffmann: Yeah.

Interviewer: the accepted hierarchical pyramid; degree of organizational democracy; the lonely heroes versus team spirit culture; masculinity versus femininity; attitude towards risk and uncertainty; accuracy versus creative skills; relationship with time; low versus high context cultures and the national versus international multinational companies.

Hoffmann: Well, that's really a lot, so we should go one by one, so first of all, let's talk about international aspect with Research International for those 15 years, while we claimed an association with Research International. It was not so much an issue. The way we operated with them was that we paid a flat administration fee for being part of the network and we were able to use all their research products. We didn't get a lot of support though, because if you don't pay much and it wasn't much that we paid, much less than actually any of the other international companies paid to their headquarters, so it was very good to have the name, it was very good to have access to quite a few very good products, that Research International developed. But it wasn't a close relationship, in fact because they did not have any ownership. They didn't even have the right to tell us what to do or what not to do. They did not control our financials, they did not control our people, they did not control our

clients so they didn't really have a direct impact on the business. It was an opportunity for us ... We tried to make the best of the opportunity, so we visited all the conferences, that were possible to visit and used the whole of the network, because there was quite a nice network. There was something like 3000 researchers in the network of Research International globally, so we tried to make good use of that, but that was a very loose relationship. Since now we are part of the TNS network and they have 40% share... it's a total change. So TNS... it became part of WPP and that's very important, because WPP, as I said, is the largest marketing services network. It owns Ogilvy & Mather, it owns GREY, it owns the biggest names in the media, advertising, public relations etc. world, so it's just an unbelievable size of an operation and because of that their procedures are all designed for this absolutely massive huge multinational. And then here we sit with our 68 people in Hungary with a turnover that doesn't even appear anywhere, ...doesn't matter to anybody, it's so small and with only a 40% share, so everything is designed, you know, for huge, huge operations, that we are partly to follow. And here of course the stress is on "partly", because if we were to follow all the different procedures, that a wholly owned company has to, I would not be the CEO of this company, I would certainly not be, because that is just unbelievable... the control and administration what being part of such a multinational requires. So I would never ever do that; but because we are just 40%, it's there but it's much less and it's not always mandatory to follow everything, so our relationship... it is very typical Hungarian, I would say, in general: that you are trying to sit on the fence, you are trying to make the best of being part of it, but trying to reduce all the hassle, that goes with being part of the multinational. So for example, we still don't have timesheets, because timesheet is just one of the worst things in the world, I would say, although we sometimes, yes, you cannot control this and that, and that I'm saying ok. But overall productivity would go immediately down by 10 percent, if we had timesheets. So everything that we gain, we are going to lose on the other side. So we are in the position, that of course, we record everything in terms of financials, everything is 100 percent transparent: that is the first thing, that we must be 100 percent transparent on everything. So we are absolutely 100% following all the rules in terms of legal frameworks etc. But when it comes to following the managerial sort of ideas etc. ...and the strategy, that's a bit softer, so in terms of financial control it's a 100%, in terms of professional control, it's not necessarily 100 percent. But because, you know, this is kind of the central versus periphery question. So what can a centre do? The centre can give you ideas, how to do it, they can give you tools, how to do it, but whether you use them and use them the right way, it's up to the end market, it's up to the periphery. We are trying to make use of what TNS has to offer, but... again, we are very small and because it is a very downgrading market at the moment. Just in parentheses: the

volume of Hungarian market research market from 2008 has gone to half of it by 2013, so it's an immensely shrinking market and it's a very-very difficult market. So the tools and all the different frameworks that TNS has to offer are very supportive for developing markets or stable markets, but they don't really help a lot for a market like us. We are still trying to do our best, but we know that a lot of things that help us go forward are not the multinational tools. Most important problem with the multinational tools is, that they are immensely expensive and Hungarian companies are just unable to pay that, and it really has to be the top multinationals in Hungary, who are forced by their own multinational networks to use these tools. Where we can sell them, so we sell them for the telecoms, we sell them for Telenor, we sell them for Nestlé, to Heineken which are all multinational companies and their headquarters prescribe them to use those tools. But this of course is very important and that's the reason, why we decided to join the TNS network, because otherwise we wouldn't have had the opportunities to stay on our own, after Research International and TNS International had been merged... I didn't talk about it at the beginning... it's quite an important point.

Interview: Thank you.....

Hoffmann: Ok, please, can you just remind me of the other aspects I need to talk about.

Interviewer: The international activity of your company and the solutions to those programs. If you could give more examples, in what you have freedom and what you don't.

Hoffmann: Well, in terms of financial and legal, we have absolutely no freedom. So as I said we are following all the rules very closely and no exceptions. In our professional work it's more, more creative... we can use creative solutions, in taxation no creative solutions.

Interviewer: On the international teamwork and intercultural conflicts could you discuss?

Hoffmann: Well, international cooperation is, I think, that's really one of the strengths of the international companies: there is, for example, a tool which is called YAMMER, which is an international email network and it has just within TNS something like 50 different subgroups, which all talk about a certain aspect of the profession. This is actually just an email group tool, but if you sign up into that email group, which talks about service quality measurements - so service quality

measurements is a typical market research problem - then there is a service quality measurement subgroup within YAMMER, within TNS, and if you have a question 'Have you ever worked on... I don't know... nail polishing service or nail spa service quality measurement?' then you will immediately get an answer from 5 different people in the world, if they ever have. So this is really fantastic, this really helps: you know, you really feel that you are part of a network and of course, it's not just specific research issues that you can discuss, there are management issues, there are management subgroups. So, for example, the CEO of TNS!, the CEO of TNS has his own discussion group, where you can really post questions to the CEO of TNS, who is the head of... I don't know... 15 thousand people and he would answer! So this really gives access to all layers and all parts of the net, this is really great....There was another part of the question.

Interviewer: Yes, it connects, I think, to the hierarchical pyramid.

Hoffmann: Yes.

Interviewer: What is the accepted hierarchical structure...?

Hoffmann: Well, TNS is organized in a hierarchical way, because we are part of the Central European operation, and above the Central European there is a European operation and above that there is a global operation, so it's hierarchical, but the style of the company is not hierarchical. So, although yes, in decision making you need to climb the ladder, because we are small, and because we are working locally a lot and internationally, as well. And we can talk about most of our contacts outside of the local operation being either horizontal to the rest of the countries within the Central European network which is Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, all the Baltic countries we can even reach out to Russia if we need. So horizontal co-operations are really nice and strong, especially because there still are many people from Ex-Research International, and we know each other for 25 years; but there is also a hierarchical one and the head of the Central European operation is a Czech guy. He's very nice, so, if we have anything, we can discuss... also we have for example in a month, in exactly a month from today, we are having a Central European conference within TNS and it will be in Budapest, and it's in Budapest because I offered it, 'Why don't we have the next one in Budapest?' and they said, 'Yes, why not?'. So this gives us an opportunity to have more people in the conference and of course we are also happy to give them hospitality, so these are quite smooth and very supportive co-operations.

Interviewer: I think intercultural conflicts will be the next question.



Hoffmann: Well, what do you mean by intercultural conflicts? Because if we talk about intercultural in terms of Central Europeans behaving differently than British versus the American, then we don't. We really have this because we belong to the Central European network and we have the same culture.... when we talk to the German, the German will quite understand Central Europe, they are also kind of part of Central Europe. The British... I personally don't have a problem, because I've been working in London so much over the last couple of years, that I really know what the style and culture of working with British is. But because I've been working more or less all over the world from Brazil to China to India to Canada, that's one of my personal research topics... understanding different cultures, that's not an issue. So if that's the cultural aspect, then this is not a problem. If it's more the structure, then that could be a problem.

Interviewer: If you could give examples, I think, the question related to both aspects so maybe that you could give examples on what problems your colleagues met?

Hoffmann: Yeah, well, typically you find the Middle East and some of the eastern companies would not be willing to be very much on time, so timeliness is an issue. Also being precise, also, especially in the Middle East - I've been working in the Middle East for the last two years a lot - so, in the Middle East you never say no to anything...even as a business person, even if you were a part of TNS, even if you are a qualitative researcher yourself... the Egyptian research manager would never tell me, I am not able to do it on time. He will always say, "We will try our best", which to me, before I knew, meant that they are going to do it. Now I know, it means "I'm unable to do it", so there's these things, yes, create some issues, like you really have to learn, that in a different culture keeping time has a totally different meaning.

Interviewer: So now you know that it means 'I'm unable to do it'.

Hoffmann: Yes.

Interviewer: "I'm trying to do my best" how do you handle this? Because, while you know it means "I'm unable to do it" still, it has to be done. How do you manage it?

Hoffmann: Exactly...first of all, by the way I plan the project. So I know the timeline for these countries need to be much longer. So, for example, we are now

doing an 8-country study which involves countries from Ukraine to South Africa. Because we have worked in all of them, we know how to prioritize the countries, so we put the more timely ones to the beginning and the less timely ones to the end, but we start working with them at the same time so we start with Ukraine or Russia even better, then we start with some of those which we already know like, for example, South Africa is quite okay. So we do it in the middle and we put Nigeria at the very end, because for them it takes 3-4 times as long to do the same job. So it's kind of prioritizing and putting it in order. The other way is actually talking about the communication, so email *only* is never enough, because in email they will write you anything, which has nothing to do with actually what's happening. Another way is... you have to talk to them on the phone and make sure you make them say words, that they would never say in their own contexts. So you need to make them say, I am going to deliver it by Saturday. And, even if they say they are going to deliver it by Saturday - which already a step further than they would ever go on their own - if its Saturday...well, Saturday is wrong day for Middle East so never mind...so, on Wednesday you need to ask for a confirmation, "Has it already been done?", "How far have you got?" etc. If you don't get an answer within a half day, then you immediately call them again. Don't write an email, call them again and make them tell you. So, this really involves a lot of effort: you have to talk with them much more often, you have to press them much more also. What's very interesting in what I've found in the Middle East - when I haven't had much understanding of the culture yet- they are very hierarchical, so if somebody does not deliver on time they will immediately talk to their boss and the boss is going to play nearly the same, but he is going to make that person actually do the job; so you get much further quicker, if you use the hierarchy, because for us, with a very flat pyramid and everybody being a 100 percent responsible, it's not a question. If I talk to somebody in my company who is really at the lowest level of the hierarchy, he is going to be 100 percent responsible just as much as somebody on the top of the hierarchy, there's no difference between the people across the pyramid. But, for example, in the Middle East or in Eastern countries the higher you go the more reliable they are to a certain extent, but when it comes to big business, that's another issue.

Interviewer: Does it refer to, for example, asking for advice as well? Do they ask for advice or do they admit that they need more help or more information to do a certain job?

Hoffmann: Yes, they do, they ask a lot of questions. What I found that asking questions is a way to procrastinate, that they are trying to push the job delivery away, by asking too many questions about it. So once they start this, then we give

them a full response. Of course, then ask them “Ok, that’s fine, now we have given you all the answers. How are you actually doing it?” So it has to be very much hands on sort of approach. ...But there are other countries which are on the total other end, like for example Russia, what I was mentioning... Unbelievable! Before you ask them, they have already done it; you haven’t even thought of something and they have already done it! So my experience with the Russians was just amazing, so they did a fantastic job in being responsive and creative and wanting to solve it and delivering everything the shortest possible time. Much better, than Hungary... to tell the truth.

Interviewer: Have you got other examples with other countries, maybe?

Hoffmann: Countries, well, yes, a lot. Yeah, Brazil has been quite difficult, but not as difficult as the Middle East countries. Oh, China has been very interesting. In China it’s been a long time that I’ve been working in China, something like 10 years ago and haven’t been there since, but at that time everyone was a beginner, because market research in China 20 years ago was hardly existent... very small, it was really just beginning and the people there were all very young and all wanted to learn, so they were like sponges. So you couldn’t tell them enough h: if you spent two days telling them, they were sitting there for 48 hours and not moving; they were so keen to get all the knowledge, which is available already and they were immensely helpful. I remember when I called them by phone... of course China is terrible, because they don’t speak English. You don’t understand their English, even if they do and you can’t say a word and you can’t read anything. I wanted to take just a few Mandarin lessons to be able to say ‘thank you’ or things like that when being there. And they gave me lessons over the phone, there was somebody in the office, one of the researchers who said, ”I would love to do it for you” and they spent I think 10 times one hour giving me Chinese lessons over the phone. They were really so keen they wanted to help, but their helpfulness is just unbelievable! And well, I’ve been working with them, just not been to China since then and it has even improved, so it’s fantastic!

Interviewer: I suppose then their keenness on getting the knowledge gave very quick results as well.

Hoffmann: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: Very easy, too.

Hoffmann: It was very easy to cooperate and then they wrote very good studies, but of course it wasn't the level that here we do after 20-30 years of being in the industry, but to their level it was really perfect.

Interviewer: I think next on the list is the 'lonely heroes versus the team spirit culture'. How can you describe your company?

Hoffmann: They're very much teams, team workers. Of course, you always have some lonely wolves but it's very rare. So it's only for very very specific methodological parts or questions, where you have one single expert. So you have one fantastic expert for cluster analysis, who is the best in Central Europe. We have an absolutely amazing data analyst, who is doing all the very specific input data analysis, so these are quite rare... the lonely heroes, but overall we always work in team spirit in teams and although we always have one person, who is in charge, he or she would always work together with 2 or 3 other people. So we aren't trying to have a bit of a hierarchy but it's also because of the need of development. So, those people who are on lower level are also lower on the knowledge level, ...are working together in teams with more senior people. They would learn a lot, so in market research, I think, it's quite typical that people would create these knowledge sort of things, knowledge based things.

Interviewer: The next was the masculinity femininity aspect.

Hoffmann: Multinational culture, per se, is masculine but there are various styles and types of it. Among the client companies I could– but will not – name some who have a strong macho culture, with all females killing their feet in stilettos all day and wearing mini-skirts and tight jeans for the joy of the male bosses. But TNS is very far from that, it is a very liberal and democratic company in terms of gender roles, so we have not experienced any male-female cultural issues there at all.

Interviewer: What can you say about the attitude within your company towards risks or uncertainty?

Hoffmann: Yea, that's a... When I was reading the guide, that was something I said, "Oh my God, what shall I say?" Well, because research is about uncertainty, we are absolutely living uncertainty every moment. So and especially because of the type of research... during the Research International times 80 percent of our business was *ad hoc* meaning you don't know on the first of January what sort of jobs you are going to do the next 365 days. 80 percent we didn't know which

means we normally do about 3-400 projects a year which meant that we need to win in terms of 300 projects a year, more or less *one* a day, it means about 5 times as many proposals. So we write about 1500 proposals a year and we are about 60 - something 65 people. So it's an immense pressure and this is all about risk and uncertainty: we will win or we will not win and you still have to have stable operations. So the whole company's built on this statement, too much built on that, because since we are part of TNS we got a lot of tracking studies. So now I would say about 55 percent of our jobs is still *ad hoc*, but about 45% is something that we know at the beginning of the year, that it's going to come and sometimes of course it doesn't. But it's not like, you know... shaking the operation.

Interviewer: You said something like...that has changed a lot since the beginning, since the joint venture started... these figures are...

Hoffmann: Projects or tracking? No, not really, because ... because TNS used to have 80 percent tracking business and we used to have 80 percent *ad hoc* business. When we joined, it - kind of - levelled out, so that's why now- we were larger than TNS at that time- , that's why we are at 55- 45% but over the last 3 years it hasn't changed much.

Interviewer: The accuracy and the creative skill that was the next bit. Mentioned earlier as well...

Hoffmann: Yeah, but I don't quite understand, why these two would be opposite because precision doesn't kill creativity and the other way round: if you are creative, you still need to be very accurate. So we are trying to be both. Of course, you need different skills in different types of jobs more than the other. Qualitative in general is a bit more creative, although quantitative should be more creative as well and qualitative as well. Especially on our customer's mind or client's mind qualitative is not so much associated with precision and accuracy, although that is the one that really needs precision and accuracy. Not to be, you know, just talking out of the air, because there you don't really count... it's more opinions in people's mind that you explore. Exactly because of that, you need to have very accurate and very precise procedures to come to credible results. So yes, but otherwise precision is the heart of the market research companies. So if your data are not accurate and you cannot prove exactly where these data are coming from, that these are valid data, that controls data, then you can close down really quickly. In terms of creativity vs. accuracy being a multinational I think for a market research company creativity and accuracy both has to be present on all levels. If a global company loses either of these skills they will fail.

Interviewer: I think you already mentioned the relationship with time. If you can tell me more about it, my question would be how long it took to handle colleagues in other countries that had problems or different expectations with time management.

Hoffmann: How long did it take?

Interviewer: To realize or ...

Hoffmann:

Time for a global company goes much slower than for a local branch. So what you find that the multinational will be very strict in asking for various data and would not give you a loose deadline. But when it comes to their own deadlines it will take them much longer than you would expect. Of course the multiple layers of hierarchy make decision making processes much more complex and that takes time.



Interviewer: The next question would be the low context versus the high context cultures. Your experience?

Hoffmann: High complexity culture exists in TNS when it comes to strategy and finance. The way these are managed are on a very high level and we are often facing very high complexity materials coming from the headquarters which then need to be translated and communicated in a much less complex culture to our staff. But TNS, specially recently, has started to do this translation process by itself and they developed- paradoxically – a very high complexity – high context procedure on how to translate the high complexity strategy to a low context one. The abstract type of concepts are very alien from our down-to-earth, tangible, can say populist style thinking and communication. So the slogans and 3cs and 4Ks and matrix charts are not so easy to accommodate in to our day to day operations. But this is the language of management today, so we just need to live with that. I personally took the decision to not to simply neglect it but try to make something of a more useful and inspirational communication to our staff. It definitely takes a lot of effort to go through these cultural translation processes and balance between being too abstract vs. being too vulgar. We are just learning these and I am sure younger ones, specially with proper multinational background will do it better in the future.

Interviewer: The last question on this list was the national versus the organizational culture.

Hoffmann: Yeah, well, yes, the national culture it's more an HR issue than anything else, because the national culture in Hungary is a complaint culture, as we very well know. It really represents itself and people very often start things listing the problems around something rather than the solutions. This is very different from, for example, British but totally opposite to an American as well, where they would immediately start giving lots of ideas on how to solve a situation, because they look at everything as a situation rather than a problem or source of problems. National culture is very much like that... if that was the aspect of the question, if not then let's change it.

Interviewer: Yes, who work here in this office area, are they all Hungarians, or do you have the international...?

Hoffmann: NO, we don't have ex-pats, everyone is Hungarian. Some are coming in from Transylvania, for example, and they do have a different work culture, it's very interesting, but we don't have international staff here.

Interviewer: And did you find it easier or hard to convert some people into, let's say, the international work culture.

Hoffmann: We didn't have to, because the interesting thing is, TNS used to be a 100 percent TNS owned company, so those who came from TNS part had already been very much accustomed to the multinational thinking. It was more for our Research International lag to get accustomed a bit more to, you know, multinational rules and having to follow certain, not necessarily and not always very nice or logical sort of rules.

Interviewer: Thank you and finally let me ask you what would be the lessons that can come from your experience as a manager and a CEO, and what recommendations would you give for managers who work in similar work environments?

Hoffmann: Oh...I don't know...Well, maybe there is one: the multinational companies have their own psyche, they have their own soul, they have their own way of operation, but you don't talk to an organization, you always talk to people. If you think of them as people, you can always find a way. It took us 18 months to sign the agreement with WPP and we - at the end of the day - signed a 120 pages long contract by British law. If I think of that, I would say, I would never do it again, but if I think of the whole process of the negotiation: British lawyers, British financial people etc. They were still humans and we could find a way to go through all the multinational bla-bla and difficulties, so what we signed at the end of the day was a mutual agreement. We agreed on something, it was very complicated, it was very tough, it wasn't the best that either of us could have thought of, but it was still an agreement and it was only because it was people involved, we took each other as people during the process... So I can't be smarter than that...

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your time.

Hoffmann: You're very welcome...ok.