

The added value of Executive Search is the consultancy we give, and the ideas we provide to our clients throughout the search process

Tirana, Albania - [Pranvera Papamihali](#), the Country Manager for Albania at Pedersen & Partners speaks to Club FM radio station and Club TV.

Please describe the context in which your firm operates.

Pedersen & Partners was the first international Executive Search firm to enter Albania in 2006, and this market was a challenging one. The firm started to educate the market on the importance of quality talent, and why Executive Search services are the best way to go for hiring management staff. As the Albanian job market is going through a talent war and competition is heating up for both candidates and companies, it is of crucial importance for firms to invest in finding the best employees. Everyone is striving to get the best people for their business.

Pedersen & Partners
EXECUTIVE SEARCH



Why are Human Resources so important for company operations?

Companies may have the best product, well developed marketing strategies and state of the art technology, however if their human resources fail, it becomes difficult to grow and prosper.

Why are Executive Search companies important here?

The primary goal of Executive Search companies is to mediate between job seekers and employers (companies). I am not against companies using their internal resources to find a certain profile, but experience shows that not all of them are successful, especially at higher managerial levels. When companies use Executive Search, they have much wider access to prospective candidates than they would by relying on their internal resources (HR).

What ensures that these firms and agencies are successful in meeting employment needs?

This is our main activity – it's what we do for a living, our core activity, our main business. That's why success is almost guaranteed with us. We have been on the market for a long time, and we have a very strong knowledge of the market, of each industry and of the talent pools available. We are able to provide companies with a wide range of options – options which they might never find on their own.

Some employers, especially local companies, might hesitate to use recruitment agencies or external parties to hire the best talent, especially when it comes to the fees that the employer must pay for the service. However, my experience shows that when we provide our product – the shortlist – to the client at the end of the process, they are delighted to realise that they have not only saved time, but also money.

For junior and entry level positions, companies can always rely on internal resources, ads and recruitment websites, but for management staff with crucial responsibilities, failure can be fatal. The development and the future of the company are at stake. The added value of Executive Search is the consultancy we give, and the ideas we provide to our clients throughout the search process. When you rely on Executive Search firms on hiring management staff, the chance of failure is close to zero.

Why doesn't the state administration use Executive Search services/firms?

In Albania, the state administration makes its hiring decisions based on politics rather than merit. If they ever wish to hire based on meritocracy, we will be happy to provide specialised Executive Search services. We try to deliver a high-quality talent pool, as our final objective is to have a long-term relationship based on trust and professionalism with both the candidates and the clients. We want our companies to be happy with the product they receive, and we also want candidates to find career opportunities matching their profile, expectations and ambitions.

What do Executive Search firms deliver at the end of the day? Is it just one candidate?

No, it's a shortlist of three to five candidates, which on one hand saves the companies time and energy, and on the other hand provides them with several options from which they can choose the best fit for their firm's culture. This means that the candidates are treated fairly and objectively, and the firms have a range of possibilities.

Our expertise in the market has shown that when our clients receive the shortlist, and the consultancy and guidance we provide with it, they often choose to change their initial search strategy, resulting in improved business performance. We also offer our clients a range of talent options from other industries, profiles, financial packages regarding various industries, profiles – essentially, we provide bespoke specialized business information solutions covering a multitude of aspects. I am very glad to notice that the market is changing, thanks to our hard work and contribution. Candidates applying for a certain position are not solely attracted by a better financial package, but also by the corporate culture and opportunities for career development. There is a growing tendency in Albania for candidates to think of their long-term professional futures.

Let's switch to the candidates' side and talk about how you serve talented professionals as individuals.

Companies that use Executive Search firms have access to a larger candidate pool. In the same way, professionals from various fields/sectors find that applying through Executive Search firms can open some doors that they could not have opened themselves. Executive Search firms are becoming more and more indispensable for professionals to access certain management positions.

Does the company accept candidates who apply directly?

Not normally. Even if a candidate applies directly, the contractor will channel them through us. Firstly, we help improve the career prospects of many individual candidates. Secondly, through what we do, we become their career advisors. For instance, we give constructive feedback as to what skills to leverage and what skills to improve/develop. In this way we focus on their professional development and growth in order to successfully meet future challenges.

What is your business model? Do you work based on requests from companies?

Yes, we need a search mandate signed by the company.

Can individuals/professionals who work and study in Albania or abroad send their CV to your firm, and be part of your talent pool of candidates?

Of course! We are open to all applications, and everybody is welcome to apply. This way we enrich our database, which is one of our assets. At the same time, our primary search method is direct search within the market, which means that we also go to individuals who are not actively looking for a new job. Although our primary focus is on getting new business and filling in the existing vacancies,

we also take time to meet some of the applicants. This way, we can improve and enlarge our market knowledge and maintain good relationships with the candidates.

Why do people in your industry call yourselves "head hunters"? Does that imply that you approach professionals who are not actively looking for a job?

A company can afford to fail in finding a new-entry position or junior profile, or what we call an "entry-level" position. However, they do not have the luxury of failure when looking for a manager, especially considering the responsibilities that the new manager will hold. While agencies may not be necessary for recruiting junior individuals, they are crucial for finding and selecting management staff. The first reason is confidentiality: a manager is unlikely to respond to an approach from a specific company's HR manager, but will not hesitate to respond when we reach out to them. They feel comfortable sitting with us and discussing the role – this is very important to the companies that we represent. Last but not least, top and middle managers are usually not looking to change companies.

We let our candidates know that although they may be satisfied with their current positions, this doesn't mean that they should close their eyes to other job opportunities, and they may want to listen to what we have to offer. At the end of the day, no one can stay in the same position forever; every company needs fresh blood once in a while to stay healthy. What's more, the talent cycle provides good opportunities for lower level employees to advance. Without these transitions, a company cannot develop and grow. That's why we are called "head hunters" – we take a very confidential and discreet approach, and talk to professionals who are not actively looking for a career change, or even candidates who may be afraid to leave their comfort zone.

So individuals that go with you feel safer, because they have been chosen by an agency that is specialized in finding the best talent/match for their companies' needs.

We exist to find the best talent. We don't risk anyone's career, but we help them grow in their professional path. There is always a certain risk in changing jobs: failing to adapt to a new environment or to meet new challenges, but without taking risks a professional cannot advance. Therefore, it is crucial to find a balance between stability and new opportunities. If we do not risk, we do not advance. It is only through change that we can develop personally and professionally. If you change jobs, you are in a strategic position to get to know new people, to contribute to developing another company, to gain values and new skills, and to change your industry. Risk-taking is healthy because it lets you enhance your professional profile. You might have been successful in Banking, but this doesn't guarantee you will be as successful in Retail or Telecom! In this way, you become an asset because you have shown flexibility and the ability to adapt yourself to new industries, new companies and new positions, showing excellent performance through multiple career changes. Of course, I am not talking about downgrading your position, although you can certainly move from a higher-level position in a smaller company to a lower position in a larger company.

Of course, when changing jobs, salary should be a major consideration.

Naturally, financial compensation is an important factor in changing jobs; however we make sure to combine it with other motivations such as career growth. There are cases when candidates are willing to move for financial reasons only, but we do not consider these candidates to be stable or highly-motivated professionals. Therefore we study their CVs carefully, and during the interview we go into great detail about their motivations. In this way, we always try to make sure that the financial package doesn't become the main reason to change jobs. Our experience shows that a 20-30% salary increase is usually considered a reasonable inducement to justify a career move.

What qualities and characteristics are most valued when assessing a candidate?

I would say that communications skills and team-working ability are the most important skills that a professional should have. What we most treasure in a candidate is the ability to convey a message. The same message can have vastly different effects depending on how it is conveyed. This has to do with the tone you use, and the way you articulate. And when we say "communication skills", we mean the ability to interact well with supervisors, subordinates, and peers. We also set great store by flexibility in a candidate – in other words, the ability to quickly adapt to a new working environment with new people, new rules and new procedures.

But surely adaptability is more of a natural talent: either you have it or you don't.

We are pragmatic; we work because we must make a living. We are ourselves a kind of "product" in the job market; so you must always try to be as good as possible, because you are your own brand. We are "products" and in order for a product to be long-term and successful, it must be well-adapted and well suited for market requirements.

CNN's Fareed Zakaria claims that people who have been studying social sciences (humanities) are more likely to succeed than professionals who are focused more on "harder" subjects like engineering and IT because they are more flexible, with strong cognitive abilities and communication skills. So an HR specialist may be hired with almost the same salary as an Engineering/IT Manager, due to the former's greater soft skills in areas like communication and team building. What industries do candidates tend to prefer, and what job markets are strong in Albania?

Economic development in Albania is very much linked to the presence of international corporations on the local market. They serve as strong regulators here, because they bring certain traditions, corporate values and structures, and know-how that was lacking in local companies. Specifically, Banking is the most developed and best structured sector in Albania, because nowadays most of the banks are linked to international corporations. The Telecom sector is a close second; it has established a lot of momentum in Albania and blazed a trail for the development of other sectors. Then we have the Retail & Pharmaceutical sectors; in the Pharmaceutical sector especially, we have international companies that bring western management traditions, corporate culture and work ethics, such as KRK, GSK and Bayer. Our candidates prefer to work with international companies rather than the local ones, which are mostly family businesses. However, this depends very much on job availability, as not everyone has the opportunity to work for an international client. Recently there has been a decrease in foreign investment in Albania, meaning that there are fewer new positions opening with these kinds of companies. I very much hope this situation will change, as our primary objective at Pedersen is to find top level executives to be involved in launching and managing the investors' businesses.



[Pranvera Papamihali](#) is the Country Manager for Albania at [Pedersen & Partners](#). Prior to joining the firm in 2007, she worked as Head of Corporate Affairs at Albanian Mobile Communications and as a Specialist at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania. Ms. Papamihali has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Hungarian Language and Literature from the University of Sciences Eötvös Loránd Tudomány Egyetem in Budapest, Hungary. In addition to her native Albanian, she speaks fluent English, Italian and Hungarian.