MCR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Interview

# SHAPING THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP IN ROMANIA: INSIGHTS FROM P&P INTERSEARCH ON RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION

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**1. How was the year 2024 for your business? Comparing to your outlook for 2024, do you see anything surprising? Was the executive candidates' market as tight as what we witnessed in the overall economy?**

For us, the year 2024 was dynamic for our business, with both expected and unexpected developments. Initially, we anticipated a challenging market, especially given the global economic uncertainties, but the resilience and adaptability of executive candidates surprised us. While the broader economy experienced tightening, the executive candidate market remained competitive, but not as constrained as we expected. This was largely due to an increase in cross-industry moves and more openness among candidates to explore roles outside their traditional sectors. What stood out was the heightened demand for leaders with sustainability, digital transformation, and crisis management expertise, which exceeded our forecasts.

**2. How would you characterize a recruiter for executive candidates job this year and what do you expect to change in 2025?**

Recruiting executive candidates this year required a delicate balance of using data-driven tools while leaning into deep interpersonal skills. On one hand, AI-driven sourcing and screening increased efficiency; on the other, identifying leadership qualities, assessing cultural fit, and building trust remained fundamentally human tasks.

As we move into 2025, the use of AI and predictive analytics in the early stages of

recruitment will likely expand. Routine tasks such as resume screening and initial candidate sourcing will be increasingly automated, something we at P&P InterSearch have already embraced. However, human intuition, emotional intelligence, and the ability to assess complex leadership traits will remain irreplaceable, particularly as companies seek adaptable leaders to navigate an ever-changing business environment.

**3. What about the executive candidates? As the good economic times is a long-term historical trend, we might have ups and downs. Is there anything specific that executives and other top individuals should prove when the economy is facing a downturn?**

In economic downturns, executives must display resilience, strategic foresight, and adaptability. Empathy is regaining importance at the C-suite level, with leaders who understand their employees' needs being better positioned to retain top talent.

In Romania, where industries like automotive, FMCG and technology faced pressure in 2024, leaders who could navigate resource constraints while maintaining innovation and emotional intelligence were and will remain in high demand.

**4. Will the Artificial Intelligence take some of recruiters' jobs/ executives' jobs? Why would candidates prefer/or not to be scouted let's by an AI powered Linkedin or by an experienced headhunter (or vice-versa)/**

AI is revolutionizing recruitment, particularly in automating tasks such as candidate sourcing, resume screening, and data analysis. It's incredibly efficient at identifying potential candidates based on quantifiable factors. However, executive search goes beyond matching skills; it's about understanding a candidate's personality, leadership style, and cultural fit—areas where human judgment remains indispensable.

Experienced headhunters build personal relationships, offer tailored insights, and maintain discretion, particularly in high-stakes, confidential searches. While AI can provide valuable data, it can't replicate the trust, empathy, and strategic guidance that headhunters offer.

For executive-level positions, candidates still value this human touch. They appreciate the discretion, expertise, and personalized guidance that come from working with a seasoned recruiter. While AI will likely continue to play a complementary role, handling routine tasks, the complex, relationship-driven aspects of executive recruitment will remain the domain of human experts.

**5. Recently, you wrote, let's say, a strategic guide for candidates looking for a job in a downturn. You mentioned some qualities that executives should have, like financial acumen, strategic thinking, problem-solving under pressure, and so on. Going back to the AI or AI tools, which of those skills (or others) would most likely be replaced by AI/AI tools soon?**

Indeed, in the strategic guide I wrote for navigating economic downturns, I emphasized critical executive competencies such as financial acumen, strategic thinking, and problem-solving under pressure. As AI continues to transform the workplace, it is poised to replace some skills more quickly than others. Below, I outline my opinions where AI will likely play a significant role – and where it will fall short.

**Financial Acumen:** AI tools have become highly proficient at financial analysis and forecasting, processing vast amounts of data in ways that would take human analysts much longer. They can identify patterns, generate insights, and automate basic financial tasks. However, the strategic interpretation of these insights—within the context of a company's vision and long-term goals—remains uniquely human. Executives are still needed to connect financial data with a broader strategic narrative.

**Strategic Thinking:** While AI can provide data-driven insights and scenario modeling, true strategic thinking involves more than just analyzing numbers. It requires creativity, long-term vision, and an understanding of human relationships both within and beyond the organization. AI lacks the ability to fully grasp the complexity of human behavior and the market dynamics that shape long-term strategies. As a result, AI can support strategic

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> *Sheryl Sandberg (former COO Meta)*

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thinking but cannot replace it.

**Problem-Solving Under Pressure:** AI excels at modeling outcomes and identifying potential solutions, but real-time problem-solving in high-pressure situations often requires understanding the intricacies of organizational culture, personal dynamics, and emotional intelligence. AI can enhance the decision-making process by providing data, but it doesn't have the adaptive capacity humans bring when facing unforeseen challenges.

**Decision-Making:** AI can assist with predictive analysis and provide recommendations, but final decision-making–especially in complex or high-stakes situations–relies on human judgment. AI lacks the ability to consider ethical, moral, and emotional factors, all of which are essential for leaders making decisions that impact people, reputation, and long-term organizational health.

**Interpersonal Skills:** Leadership goes beyond data. Empathy, negotiation, motivation, and the ability to build trust are at the core of effective leadership, and these are qualities AI will never fully replicate. While AI can provide valuable information, it cannot inspire or lead with the intuition and warmth that define strong human interaction.

**6. Let's take a gymnasium student and a high-school student. What jobs of the future do you foresee for them and what are the chances - from your long-time experience in leadership development, HR consulting, management consulting, executive coaching and so on - that their future jobs do not exist yet? Can you give some us examples and can you point to those skills they should already start to build? On short, what will be the jobs of the future?**

For a gymnasium or high-school student today, the likelihood that their future job doesn't exist yet is quite high. We are in an era of rapid technological advancement, societal shifts, and environmental challenges, which means that many of the jobs they will hold in the future are still being shaped or haven't even been conceived.

The future job market will demand adaptability, continuous learning, and a mix of human-centered skills and technical competencies. Here are some examples of future jobs and their relevance for today's students:

For **gymnasium students**, roles in **virtual reality education design, synthetic biology**, and **climate adaptation** might be waiting for them. These jobs will require competencies in creativity, critical thinking, and a strong foundation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Their future jobs are likely to focus on problem-solving for large-scale challenges, whether that be creating educational programs in immersive environments, engineering new biological solutions to environmental crises, or managing urban climate resilience projects. These jobs don't fully exist today, but the building blocks are already visible.

For **high-school students**, we might foresee roles like **AI Ethics Auditor, Quantum Computing Specialist**, or P**ersonal Data Broker**. As AI and quantum technology advance, students with strong backgrounds in computer science, data science, ethics, and digital privacy laws will be highly valuable. While aspects of these fields exist now, the specific roles will evolve in ways we cannot yet fully predict.

In my long-time experience in leadership and HR consulting, I've observed that while technology accelerates certain job categories, the human touch—empathy, strategic thinking, and emotional intelligence—remains irreplaceable. While many technical roles will emerge, so will jobs that require human insight to manage complex systems, ensure ethical conduct, or lead in uncertain environments. These future jobs will likely blend technology with uniquely human traits, requiring a balance of both.

What's certain is that future leaders will need both technical proficiency and emotional intelligence to thrive in this evolving landscape.

**7. While preparing for this interview, I looked at the open positions available now, for your clients. Most of the open positions (for the moment) are in FMCG, or manufacturing. My questions are: which were the most vibrant sectors of the economy in terms of recruiting in 2024, and what do you expect for 2025?**

*The key to succes lies in agility and innovation. Businesses that invest in sustainability, technology integration, and resilient leadership teams will come out stronger.*

In 2024 in **P&P InterSearch**, Romania's projects the most vibrant sectors in terms of recruitment have been **FMCG** and manufacturing. These sectors have shown resilience despite economic fluctuations, driven by both consumer demand and the need for modernization. **Technology and healthcare** also saw strong demand for executives who can lead through innovation and digital integration.

Positions in these areas saw consistent demand, with an emphasis on roles that support digital transformation, supply chain optimization, and sustainability initiatives.

Based on current trends, 2025 is likely to see continued growth in these sectors, particularly with an increased focus on **sustainability**, **AI-driven innovations**, and **green manufacturing**. Manufacturing will likely continue focusing on advanced technologies, while FMCG will evolve further toward **consumer personalization** and **digital commerce leadership**.

**8. Finally, what is your main message to your clients/partners in terms of challenges and opportunities for the short and medium term?**

My key message to clients, candidates and partners is that in a world marked by uncertainty, the key to success lies in agility and innovation. While challenges like talent shortages and rising costs loom, they also present opportunities for growth. Businesses that invest in sustainability, technology integration, and resilient leadership teams will come out stronger.

As I reflect on the changes shaping our world, one thing is clear: the leaders who will define the future are those who blend innovation with purpose. In a time of rapid technological advancements, economic shifts, and global challenges, leadership is no longer about maintaining the status quo—it's about daring to reimagine what's possible."

In the coming years, the companies that thrive will be those led by visionary leaders who are not only agile but audacious. Leaders who see every disruption as an opportunity to redefine their industries, who harness AI not to replace the human touch, but to elevate it. And most importantly, those who understand that sustainability isn't just a trend—it's the foundation upon which the future of business will be built.

The future belongs to those who embrace change with resilience, lead with empathy, and innovate with a purpose that goes beyond profits.

In a world of uncertainty, one truth remains: the greatest leaders are those who look at the chaos around them and see not obstacles—but endless possibilities. These are the leaders we need now. These are the leaders we will create.

**9. These are all our questions. Is there anything else you want to add?**

Through my roles as **Global Board Member with Interim Management Worldwide and Global Practice Leader for Sustainability at InterSearch** I've seen firsthand the importance of cross-border collaboration and sustainable leadership. As companies face increasingly global challenges, having access to interim leaders who can manage transitions and drive sustainability initiatives will be key to long-term success.

Whether navigating critical transitions or aligning with sustainability goals, leaders of the future must blend operational strength with a commitment to long-term, sustainable growth.