

## Interviews with leading minds

### Pierre Casse holds two hopes for European leadership: Eastern Europe and the young

*The esteemed educator Pierre Casse talks with great energy about the European Leadership Conference that he is co-organizing at IEDC-Bled School of Management on 1-2 June. In this interview with [Mark Vanderbeeken](#), he also reflects on the dire situation of European leadership, on the fact that Europe's only hope today is coming from Eastern Europe and from its young people, and on the need for courage, creativity and innovation. Finally, he discusses his newest challenge: the academic deanship of the new [Berlin School of Creative Leadership](#).*

#### Why a conference on European leadership trends and success stories?

The conference is the work of four people and four institutions: Jonathan Gosling from the Centre for Leadership Studies at the University of Exeter in the UK, Derek Abell from esmt in Berlin, Germany, Danica Purg from the IEDC-Bled School of Management in Slovenia, and myself from the Solvay Business School in Brussels, Belgium. All four of us were deeply involved in defining and implementing the idea of launching a European forum to look at leadership needs and priorities in Europe. The first conference was three years ago, and it was conceived as a meeting that functioned as an open think tank. Under the leadership of Danica Purg, the forum was always held at IEDC-Bled. People came to Slovenia once a year and brainstormed on selected issues.

#### Each year had a different theme?

The first one was an agenda setting meeting trying to understand the issues

#### About Pierre Casse

Pierre Casse is the Academic Dean of the Berlin School of Creative Leadership. In addition to his role Academic Dean, Professor Casse holds the Suez Chair of Leadership at the Solvay Business School, and is Adjunct Professor for Leadership at the Kellogg School of Management and Professor and Associate Dean for International Affairs at the IAE (Institut d'Administration des Entreprises).

An esteemed management educator, Professor Casse's interest include intercultural dynamics, leadership, organizational development, and change within the context of the global market place.

Professor Casse has consulted for many international companies and organizations including: Alcatel, Disney Consumer Products, Ernst & Young, GKN Corporation, Hoffman-La Roche, ICL and Nokia.

After studying sociology at the University of Liège, Professor Casse completed his post-graduate studies in Public Administration and Business Administration at the University of Southern California, before receiving his doctorate from the University of Lille.

Publications by Professor Casse include "Training for the Cross-Cultural Mind", "Training for the Multi-cultural Manager", "Managing Inter-cultural Manager", and "Managing Intercultural Negotiation, The One Hour Negotiator". He is the co-author of "From the Meaning of Life to the Meaning of Business".

of leadership for European competitiveness. What kind of leadership do we need in Europe to be more competitive and effective in the global market? Two years ago, we explored the interface between the private and the public sector, analyzing the specific leadership challenges that the public and private leaders are facing today in Europe. Last year, we looked at the

relation between the private sector and the media, and this both from the media's as from the business perspective. This year we will focus on leadership success stories in Europe and I will tell you more about that in a bit.

**Are there plans for the coming years?**

Next year we will be launching a new leadership award in Europe, to promote the creation of training or learning material that help to make sure that our European leaders are better prepared to face future challenges. The conference will focus on that. In two years the theme will be "Leadership in Europe – Learning from History", exploring what some of the great European leaders did in the past and what can we learn from them.

**Can you tell us more about the award?**

With the award, which is co-sponsored by the four organizing institutions as well as the "Leadership Business Review", we want to attract researchers, students and trainers to submit materials, case studies, videos, etcetera, that can be used in leadership training, so that we can share them and promote best practice. We have eight or ten high-level submissions so far.

**This year's theme "Leadership trends and success stories" is very broad. Where do you want to go with it?**

There will be three components in the conference this year. First we want to look at some success stories, so we invited people from business — also people from start-ups who have launched very successful European companies — to talk about what they have done and how they have done it.

A second component of the conference will look at the challenges and the trends, and try to outline the profile of a successful leader. What do you need to have to be successful?

So we invited people like Mrs. Mary Pitsy, the Managing Director of Boyden,

an executive recruitment company, who will talk about what makes a European leader successful.

The last component of this year's conference will focus on research. Researchers will complement the more personal success stories with broader reporting on what has been successful in Europe.



**You did some research yourself, you told me.**

I did a very small flash survey with my students here in Brussels at the Solvay Business School. I asked them to each select a leader, a role model in the world today, and to write a short text on why they chose that particular leader and why he or she is a role model. Even though there were only thirty-three students participating, the results were quite interesting. Most of the leaders they selected come from the public and the social sector, rather than the private sector. Many from outside Europe, and only one of the thirty-three selected leaders was a woman.

### **What will the research part of the conference focus on?**

Jonathan Gosling of the University of Exeter will run that session. It will not be a session with people reporting on what is currently going on. Instead we want to outline the kind of research we should launch and sponsor in Europe to make sure that we are getting the data we need, in order to know more about trends and requirements.

### **What trends do you see in European leadership?**

Well, be aware that by answering this question, I am just giving you my own thoughts, not necessarily the main lines of the conference.

### **That is what we are interested in now.**

A first observation is that it is not going very well. I don't think we are awake in Europe. We need a wake-up call. We are asleep and not quite fully aware of what is going on and what is happening. Potential good leaders are struggling with very strong, heavy resistance from different European systems. Some of them are just leaving. More than 200,000 French people are in California right now, involved in start-ups. We are losing the good people, including many promising people from Eastern Europe. The main trend is that things are really bad and scary! What is going on now in Europe, is not what should happen if we want to face the challenges in the world today, for example, China, with its very forceful presence. And where are we? We are still talking, while what we should really be doing is be more innovative and creative, and reinvent ourselves in Europe. And we are not doing it.

### **But there is hope.**

Yes, there is hope, and it is not coming from Germany, France, or even the UK. The hope is coming from Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe has to play an extremely active role in promoting the wake-up call that I just talked about. When I speak with leaders from Western

Europe, as a consultant or as a trainer, meetings are very often dull and heavy. People have become complacent. When on the other hand you meet people from Croatia, Hungary or Poland, it's totally different. I was in Russia a few weeks ago, meeting with twenty young men and women, all executive leaders within a multinational. You should have seen the energy level of those people! They are hungry. They want to move.

### **You mention young people.**

This is the third trend. We have to trust a new generation. When I am teaching at various universities in Europe, I always see quite a few very good young men and women in my classrooms. However, the system around them, the environment is pushing them down. We are suffering from what I call the tyranny of the average in Europe. Good students are coming to me and asking me how they can leave, how they can get a job outside Europe.

### **Not a rosy picture.**

No, it isn't. That's why we need strong leadership, to really challenge our system and to innovate the way we do things. We cannot just do what we did in the past. We cannot go the French way. That country is dying and they are pulling us down. It is similar in Italy, whereas in Eastern Europe, there is stamina, energy and will. If countries in Western Europe were smart enough, we would have that too. The European Union is not going to help. Where is the leadership there?

### **So what can a young European aspiring leader do except leave for California?**

I am telling my students that they have to pick up the challenge. They have to fight. That's what leadership is all about. Leadership is not to give up. Leadership is to pick up challenges and to fight for a better world. Nobody ever said that leadership was easy. Yes, they can go somewhere else. But how about trying in Europe first? Young aspiring leaders have to stand up for their ideas and go for it. But this requires courage,

and this is an extremely important value that we need in Europe and that we have to promote. Where is the courage? Where are the risk takers? Where are the people who say "enough of this nonsense". I hope we will talk about that in the conference.

### **Are our European leaders up to it?**

If you look at the leaders in the public and private sector, it is amazing to see the lack of trust. Trust is not around anymore. Trust is built around four critical ingredients. Credibility – Where is the credibility for our leaders today? Reliability – Will they deliver? Look at the public sector. Do they deliver? Do politicians deliver? Transparency – Are they straightforward? There are many lies around, no? – And the capability to listen. Now if you have low credibility, low reliability, low transparency, but enormous ego drive, you get what we have in Europe. It is a major crisis. If the crisis would at least be acknowledged, we would be ok. But most people are even not seeing the problem. They are saying that we are ok. We are NOT ok.

### **So how can research help then? To better understand the problem?**

You should probably ask this question to my friend Jonathan Gosling. Personally I think that research is focusing too much on micro problems, on the nitty-gritty things, rather than on the big issues. Those who dare to look at the bigger picture don't get published. So the debate is not happening, which is also a major problem. Europe is not like North America where you can research something, and then get it out, and challenge and provoke people with some new ideas. I don't think this is part of the European culture. Have you attended an international research conference lately? It is boring and of very little impact for our daily lives.

**How is the conference that you are co-organizing in Bled going to be different? How can it have an impact? How can it make change happen?**

That is a very good question. We have to do more than just print a publication. I really hope that we can promote new thinking with the award and the success stories. We have quite a few success stories in Europe but they are not well known. A few months ago I was talking with the CEO of Puma. They are very successful, but nobody knows about that. We are shy to talk about success in Europe. We are not proud of those who are successful; instead we criticize them, we kill them. So it is important that we can use this conference to identify good European success stories, so that we can write them up in case studies, and use them in the training of chief executives, middle managers, high potential aspiring leaders, but especially also young people. In Brussels we have leadership programs for people who are 22, 23 years old. We can also have impact through research. Hopefully at the end of the conference, we will decide that we will need to explore A, B and C, so that we can seek EU funding for those research areas.

### **How did you select the people who are going to be at the conference?**

It is a very open forum. Those who have been there in the past, tend to come back, because they find it interesting, and they value the possibilities of networking, meeting, talking and exchanging ideas. This is important and IEDC is a fantastic place for that. Now these people all have their own networks and depending on the theme they invite some other people to join in too, and so do we, the organizers from the four institutions. It's quite an informal process. We meet, we talk, and increasingly, we seek to have an impact on what's happening in Europe.

**Perhaps the conference up till now has been somewhat under-communicated. This year the conference has a nicely produced brochure. But also after the conference, it is important to have the right tools to share and disseminate the knowledge, ideas, concepts and success stories that it generated. Otherwise it becomes a closed club.**

I agree. It is time now to move from a brainstorming event to an event with impact. You are right on target with this comment. We need to ask ourselves why we are doing this: for the sake of talking, for the sake of networking? It cannot be that anymore. We have to do it for the sake of impacting. As a chairman of the conference, I want to make sure that we get something out of the conference that is not just interesting, but that is also useful, something that leads to action.

**Otherwise the conference would lose momentum.**

Absolutely. You need to move to a next stage, or you will die as a conference. But don't forget that the people who have been organizing it now for the fourth time, are doing this on a voluntary basis — professionally, but on top of the many other things that they are doing. For instance, I launched a big program at the Solvay Business School and now I have become a dean in Berlin. It's a lot of work.

**Let's talk about the new school in Berlin that you are in charge of.**

It's a very new school, called the Berlin School of Creative Leadership. It was launched last September and this autumn we will start with an Executive MBA for the creative industries, aimed at the worlds of entertainment, media, marketing, and advertising. We are inviting chief creative officers and the people below to join the Executive MBA, which will be organized over a period of 18 months. There will be 6 modules of two weeks each. The first module will take place in Berlin and will be on leading yourself. The second module will be in Chicago, in collaboration with the Kellogg School of Management, where I also teach, to cover marketing and leading your partners and clients. From Chicago we will also visit New York. The third and fourth module will be back in Berlin, one about leading your people, the other about leading your enterprise, your organization. For the fifth module, on leading with innovation and creativity, we will travel to Tokyo, and

we will close back in Berlin with a module on leading your industry. In all modules, academic people will team up with people from industry (e.g. chief creative officers from the big advertising companies) to work and brainstorm with the students. It becomes a full partnership.

**Why was this school founded? What was the deeper motivation for it?**

That story itself is a good example of leadership. The former chief creative officer of Leo Burnett, Michael Conrad, took the initiative. He just retired and decided that he wasn't going to sit at home and do nothing. He had the idea that there was a strong need to create a special leadership program for creative people and for the creative industries, and he acted on his idea. Being German himself, he contacted various German universities and business schools, and the Steinbeis University, where the Berlin School is now located, was interested. They then came to me and asked me if I was interested in becoming their academic dean. I said yes. Since then we have already been in Chicago, New York, London, and Paris to promote the program to the big advertising companies.

**Have you been inspired by Richard Florida's book and thinking on the rise of the creative class?**

Absolutely, and also by Thomas Friedman's book "The World is Flat". Being creative and innovative is our only way to survive and to keep growing in Europe. The sponsor of our school by the way is the German Art Directors Club, a very big creative network. It is an exciting challenge. I have already identified people from all over the world who will come to teach, from the Kellogg School in Chicago, from Harvard, from IMD, from INSEAD, from esmt and from all over. I think it is going to be a smashing program.

**Good luck with it.**