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Headline: There is a lack of experts in the Czech Republic

If you sit in a ŠKODA or a FORD car, you will feel comfortable maybe also thanks to seat covers from Strakonice. JOSEF BLECHA heads the company Fezko, which delivers textiles from many car producers.

In Strakonice there are sewn seat covers, door panels or head rests for cars from Volkswagen to Daimler Chrysler. While some car factories go bankrupt, Fezko still grows and recruits new employees; only last year there were 130 of them. "The biggest risk of our growth is lack of qualified labor force," says the Managing Director of the company Josef Blecha.

Czech textile companies aren't too successful, they complain of the Asian competition. Fezko again increases turnover and recruits new employees.

How do you do it?

Manufacturing for the car industry is demanding, quality of Chinese products cannot face competition. The client is interested in how quickly we manage to react to its requirements in development of the product. It concerns designs, colors and technical parameters. When Mercedes or Škoda make choice between four or five manufacturers, it's speed and quality of service, which plays role. It is almost unthinkable to react quickly along distance between Europe and China. In addition I am sure that a word "complaint" is missing in Chinese dictionaries.

*** You have also been known as an artist, an author of portraits and cartoons. Do you have influence on design of your products?**

We often talk about current trends with our main designer and chief of development about what our customer might like. However I don't intervene directly in processes in individual car factories. This is what designers usually do by themselves. But I would say we understand each other. These are creative people and therefore we are in a closer contact than if I were only an economist.

*** Fezko revenues move around one billion. Do you sleep well?**

This year they will exceed, for the first time, 1.5 billion crowns. However I don't feel bigger responsibility than six years ago, when turnover was about a half of today's amount. My sleep is still the same. Short. Together with a steep growth of turnover and recruitment of new employees there goes, hand in hand, necessity to adjust production. The task to face its growth as well as record-breaking scale of products naturally sometimes brings even sleepless nights.

*** Your employees have above-average salaries in their branch. Do you raise their salary always when company profit grows, as Škoda Auto trade unions wanted some time ago, or do you remunerate your employees only in compliance with their productivity?**

The way of remuneration depends on whether a specific worker adds any value to the product, or if he or she is "only" an office force. Remuneration should be directly connected with productivity. I suppose that it has not such a connection with the current profit of the company. If you are in the company management, you have to look several years ahead and to estimate reliably what is waiting

for you. The employee cannot know. He or she might see twelve month ahead or back and tells himself or herself - they earned so much so I have to get it from them. However if everyone started to think in this way, they would get the company very quickly in uncompetitive position. It is necessary to manage profit considering the future. When the profit is generated, it doesn't necessarily mean that the similar profit will be for next ten years.

*** Fezko cooperates with a secondary school and vocational schools. Would you like to have educated custom-made labor force?**

We have no other possibility. Vocational centers practically fell apart in the Czech Republic, there is nothing to make choice from, and therefore we are forced to create our own school. We teach there not only new scholars, but also current employees in order to enlarge their skills and education. We cooperate also with the Technical University of Liberec. Lack of technically developed labor force represents the biggest risk for us. I still face to a paradox that each year several textile companies go into compulsory liquidation, and we, despite the fact we pay the highest amount in the textile industry, cannot get a sufficient number of experts. People don't move from one region to another. No one feels necessity to look for a job somewhere else or at least to be interested in it. He or she doesn't say "They fired me, I have a university degree and I'd like to apply for a job in your company." I haven't had such a case here for six years.

*** How would you explain it? Is it a problem of a system?**

I suppose that it's probably not only Czech, but central European problem. Shortly: we are conservative or homebodies, if you want. We stay where our friends and parents are. Definitely it is not as in the USA or Canada, where I spent fourteen years.

*** In the U.S.A. and in Canada you have also worked in a managerial position. How would you compare your subordinates abroad and in the Czech Republic?**

Much common may be found. However there is bigger respect to work and sense for responsibility and discipline. Czechs are masters of improvisation; however they are very bad in following of regulations and discipline. Therefore we are very flexible, however very bad in discipline.

*** You have been manager for more than a quarter of the century, since your 29 years of age? What you do in a different way than in the beginning?**

I am not as stormy as I used to be. I can be more reasonable in reactions and to be less emotion-driven with growing age and experience.

Born on: 19 March 1952 in Rokycany

Education: Foreign trade at the University of Economics in Prague

Way up: He worked in the foreign trade company Motokov, from 1987 he was a manager of the

American Jawa, in which Motokov had a capital participation - he worked first in Canada, then in the U.S.A. Since 2001 he has been the General Manager of the Strakonice company Fezko, which produces textile for the car factories from all over the world.

Photo description: The Boss of Fezko Josef Blecha requires loyalty from co-workers. "Who has CV full of different employees, he or she can give it up in advance," he says.