TIW43 - Kacper Pupin

Yurii Lazaruk: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Independent Workforce, the podcast where we explore the now and the future of work through the lens of temporary employment, such as freelancers, contractors, fractional experts, you name it. Here, we speak with CEOs, recruiters, founders, and industry leaders about how they work with independent talent, the wins, the challenges, and the lessons learned.

My name is Yurii. I'm growing the freelance market at freelancermap, an international platform that's been connecting top independent professionals with companies for over 20 years. And my guest is Kacper Pupin, co-founder of Relegate, the number one Polish platform that challenges traditional hiring by connecting businesses with verified, experienced independent managers and consultants, and also helps grow the interim and fractional management market in Poland.

So welcome, Kacper.

Kacper Pupin: Hi, Yuriy. Thanks for having me and, uh, having watched a, a few of your podcasts before, I'm, I'm very, I'm very honored to, to be one of your guests. Thank you.

Yurii Lazaruk: Super happy to talk to you. And the funniest part that the first guest of this podcast, [00:01:00] John Younger, he is exactly who connected us.

So kudos to John for making it happen. And I also know that you were even also at the-- our first Freelance Unload Conference in 2024, and I bet that you met John there because John also- Yes, of

Kacper Pupin: course ...

Yurii Lazaruk: was back then and-

Kacper Pupin: John, John, John is like the, the, the mastermind of of the, of the freelance, uh, of the freelance leve- revolution in the US and also now in Europe, and I believe, uh, John has connected many of us.

So, uh, it was, it was great meeting him in Berlin as well.

Yurii Lazaruk: John knows everyone and, uh, yeah, the circle closed. So let's dive into the topic. So you've been on this market for some time, so but why did you decide to focus on fractional professionals? So give me a little bit of your background and what role exactly do you play in this independent market right now?

Kacper Pupin: Mm-hmm. So, uh, well, Yuriy, when it comes to my background, I must say that, uh, basically the, the whole career path so far, uh, was somehow connected with, uh, with the consulting [00:02:00] market. So, uh, even during my, my studies, I remember, uh, when I, when I started just, uh, in the first semester, uh, having studied in, in Germany at that time, I was very much attracted to the, to the consulting industry.

We started, uh, working on a, on a few, uh, uh, consulting projects. You know, we, we had this fantastic network of, of various businesses that were, uh, requesting, uh, the, the university to, to provide them with some, you know, eager students to, to, to jump into some, uh, some nice business challenges. And for me, it was a, it was a great start that time to, to, to see the, the, the industry from, uh, from inside.

And that time also, I, I had the chance to, uh, to, to start, uh, working at, uh, that time Staufen AG, that was, was, was a German, uh, consulting company, uh, with the exposure to international markets. Um, [00:03:00] and it really, it was a great school of life, I would say, great school of, uh, consulting, of business overall, of, you know, what kind of struggles and business challenges, uh, the companies face, uh, on a daily basis.

Uh, and, you know, over a few years, um, seeing various projects, various, various companies, uh- Uh, with that time ex-colleague of mine, uh, Grzegorz Gawronski, you know, it was a very, uh-- We were very deep into the pandemic, you know, twenty twenty. It was dark everywhere. Uh, we didn't know what is waiting, uh, around the corner.

Uh, and as you may know, uh, all of the consultants that time were rather sitting at home having too much time to think of, uh, you know, various new ideas what to do next because we couldn't be on, on client site. Uh, and from, uh, from one conversation to another with, with, uh, with Grzegorz, we realized that, you know, why not in this turbulent [00:04:00] times, uh, doing something crazy, doing something and starting something together.

And in fact, uh, we, we were aware that, um, there were, there were already a few, uh, consulting or, or interim management marketplaces, uh, in Europe or in

the US, but there was no solution in place like this in Poland or overall in the Central Europe. So we were like, "Okay, let's take this general concept and let's localize it to, to our conditions."

Uh, we had a very fragmented, uh, market here in Poland with a couple of, of course, big four or big five, you name it, uh, consulting players. But apart from this, fragmented with, uh, various hundreds, even thousands freelancers, you know, each of them trying to, uh, to, to get a project, uh, on their own, you know, competing with, with one another.

On the other side, you had the clients that, uh, were struggling with getting the best on board because, you know, being a, a Polish SME or, uh, even [00:05:00] a, a international business operating in Poland, uh, whenever you had a business challenge, you had two solutions to pick from. Either you go for a headhunter, you pray, you hope that you find someone, and that this person doesn't have a long notice period and maybe doesn't have too many expectations in terms of, you know, as we call it in Poland, pizza Fridays or, uh, other benefits.

Uh, or you could go to a consulting company, which is, of course, uh, one of the solutions, but, uh, consulting companies very often do not take over the, um, the execution phase in the project. So they di-they don't take the respo- responsibility for the implementation of the concept and strategies that they've-- they develop.

So, uh, we were like, "Okay, let's give the clients the, the third option," a kind of a hybrid solution between, uh, headhu-headhunting and consulting. So basically, we provide this very fast and quick, uh, access to [00:06:00] the, uh, top-of-the-top experts from the, from the market. Within actually, uh, two days, each client has access to a very precise selection of, of experts, uh, fitted and matched to, to, to the project and business challenge

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah, you know, first of all, you reminded me Una Herlihy, who started The Indie List exactly during COVID.

Yeah. So she had a similar idea, like, "Why don't, uh, we do something crazy?" And now she's growing this in Ireland. And, uh, yeah, like kudos for starting this amazing business, uh, at this such an, uh, an, an, I would say, dark time. Exactly. And, you know, it's interesting that you mentioned that, um, people are either hiring full-time someone or either going to these big consulting companies, and there is nothing in between.

But what I also see from my side, talking to different Polish companies and businesses, they are kinda afraid of hiring random people. So they want someone to sit in their office, and they want to kinda own them. That's the feeling that I get out of the conversations [00:07:00] that I'm having here on the market.

I'm curious, what is your take on this? How do companies, how do they react when you come to them and say, "Hey, we have these fractional senior professionals. Go hire them"?

Kacper Pupin: Well, Yurii, I, I, I can totally, I can totally understand and see your point. I relate to this 100%. It's, it is a challenge sometimes on-- in our market, this kind of, uh, maybe not old school, but this kind of more conservative mindset in terms of working with the, with the external resources.

But at the same time, I'm very optimistic since I see that over the course of the last six years that we have been developing Redegate, I see a huge e-evolution of, uh, of this, uh, of, of the way the companies perceive and see the, the external resources. Uh, and in fact, you know, six years ago, we were presenting the idea of the fractional experts or, or interim managers, consultants as something, you know, very strange, very new, [00:08:00] um, to the market, and people were reacting like, "Okay, I'm not really sure.

This concept is, you know, pretty, pretty fluid to me. Don't really get the point. You know, why wouldn't I just hire someone permanently?" But, uh, right now, I see that the, mm, that the companies do see this, uh, this option as a, as one of the scenarios to go for. And, uh, in fact, uh, more and more companies, uh, take this, uh, this opportunity to, to, to hire the external experts for precise project as a kind of a bypass or a kind of an extension to their, uh, HR strategies.

Uh, so I'm, I'm very optimistic. I see that, of course, the mar- the market in Poland is still not on the same maturity level like we see, I don't know, in the UK or in Germany, in the US, where actually the fractional, uh, leadership comes from. But at the same time, uh, I see the, the clients in Poland and overall in the region, [00:09:00] uh, getting more and more open to, to this kind of solution.

Yurii Lazaruk: If we are talking specifically about Polish companies, when they decide to work with independent talent, like, why do they do this? Like, what's in it for them?

Kacper Pupin: Ha. And this is actually one of, uh, very interesting conclusion that we, we, we came to, uh, I believe it was the beginning of the last year. Because, uh, once we founded Redegate, we considered it as a, as an option for, I would say, red alert companies.

So the companies that bleed money or, I don't know, they have a roof leaking or a pipe leaking, you know, whatsoever, basically with a, uh, very critical problem, very critical, um, obstacle that they cannot, uh, simply tackle themselves. Uh, very, very, very important and strategic challenge. Uh, and this was the, the, the, the way somehow or the, the, the thought behind setting up Redegate, like to provide, [00:10:00] uh, specialized experts for this kind of, uh, challenges, this kind of struggles of companies.

But with the, with the years passing, we realized that we, we got m- more and more clients from Poland, uh, that they do not come to us, you know, uh, in the, I would say, existential, uh, threat, but they come to get the experts to realize, uh, a very, uh, I would say, uh, profitable and promising, uh, business opportunity.

Yurii Lazaruk: Hmm.

Kacper Pupin: Uh, it could be market expansion. It could be the launch of a new product. Could be the launch of new production line. Could be the, the, the acquisition of even some, some foreign businesses, uh, because in fact, there are more and more Polish, Polish, um, uh, organizations that, uh, that, uh, do acquire, I don't know, German or, or even British, French businesses.

Uh, and once we did this, uh, summary of the four or five years of, uh, of our, uh, operations as Redgate, we realized that [00:11:00] actually more or less 60% of our clients are in fact the ones that do not come to Redgate to get the expert for, uh, as I said, existential threat, but in fact, for realizing a, a business opportunity.

Of course, we do help the ones that struggle the most or, or really need some, some fast reaction and some, uh, some experts, uh, on board next day, overnight even. Uh, but, uh, it really changed our mind totally because we really consider this as a, you know, kind of a red, a red alert button option for the cl- companies to get the experts in.

So it also shows that there are more and more companies that do see the, the, the solution of working with external experts with, with external resources, not only to, to tackle, you know, the ongoing challenge, you know, something critical,

something existential, but, uh, rather they see this as a, as a, as an asset, as a resource to realize a business opportunity.

And I think that it shows us that the, that the maturity of, of the [00:12:00] market is in fact growing.

Yurii Lazaruk: This episode of The Independent Workforce is brought to you by Freelancer Map, the home of freelancing. Whether you are looking to hire top freelance talent fast, or a freelancer ready to find your next big project, Freelancer Map connects the right people with the right work.

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Yurii Lazaruk: So first of all, when I thought about red alert, you reminded me of the game. It was Command & Conquer: Red Alert strategy game.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I remember playing as crazy as a kid. And, uh, you know, talking about this business opportunity, it's still like, let's imagine you have, like, the fixed, uh, kinda, like, older mindset that you want people to see in, in, in front of you, otherwise they do not deliver, and then you talk about business opportunity.

So why don't they hire full-time people? Why do they go for fractional professionals?

Kacper Pupin: Uh, well, I [00:13:00] believe as of now, also considering the, the, the legal background, this, uh, fractional professionals offer the companies this, uh, incredible level of flexibility in terms of the, in terms of the, uh, the, the, the collaboration.

So basically, in our model, um, you can hire an expert for, for a project. You do not, uh, need to commit to any specific number of days or, uh, uh, length of the project, uh, duration whatsoever. Basically, the, the client is only charged, uh, for every single day delivered by the, by the expert. Not only delivered, but also accepted by the client.

So the client can even overnight sometimes decide to, to step out of the project because of, you know, changing business, uh, uh, business, um, approach or

maybe the, the, the, the, the funding or some other strategic decision that might influence this project. So this, this, uh, low level [00:14:00] commitment on the, on the formal, I would say, in the formal area that, that they do not need to really see this as a kind of a burden for many, many months to pay or, uh, to, to be linked, uh, with us.

I believe, uh, it gives this amount of flexibility that is very attractive to the clients that really we know that we, we are now living in a super dynamic world. I believe every month we re- realize that it's, you know, more volatile than we thought it would be, although we thought that it cannot get worse, but in fact, this is the way it is.

Uh, and the companies do look for some solutions that are as flexible as it gets to, to, to, to be able to react to this changing environment.

Yurii Lazaruk: So when companies come to RediGate, which roles are in the highest demand? And like, what kind of business problem makes them say like, "Okay, we don't need another full-time employee.

We need an experienced independent professional to deal with this project"?

Kacper Pupin: Yeah. So, uh, this is not a, [00:15:00] this is not a mystery, not a secret that, um, at, at least in Poland, but overall in the Central Europe, the, the, the, the main piece of the market is op- is in operations. So everything that is, um, around, uh, manufacturing, uh, logistics, uh, procurement, quality topics, uh, this is like the biggest piece of, uh, piece of cake, I would say, in the, in, in the whole scope.

So typically we would be talking here about the, the, the projects, uh, such as greenfield projects, so, you know, production transfers, uh, from or to Poland or, or Czechia, Romania, Hungary, any country here in the region. We would be talking about the, the launches of new, uh, of new products, uh, in the production.

Because if you launch a new product, you also need to set up the, the, the procurement process behind it. You know, you need to source, uh, the components from somewhere. So this is, these are all the, the, the, the stages of the project that do not require, you know, [00:16:00] hiring someone permanently. You know, you get an expert for five to six months to fix your, uh, sourcing strategy, and then, uh, you just stay with your, with your core, with your core team, and this expert can simply go to a, to another business to help.

So operations definitely one thing. The second, uh, the second one would be finance. Uh, so it was also something refreshing for us to see that, uh, there are in fact many companies that, um, do struggle with, uh, with their finance teams We are talking here about accountants, we are talking about controlling roles or even CFO level.

Uh, so we provide here this kind of a bypass solution. So as long as the, the company doesn't have any-anyone in place, you know, in a permanent, uh, in a permanent mode, uh, we offer here this kind of bypass solution for a couple of months, you know, to keep the continuity of the, of the processes because the, the company is still there, but the, the finance [00:17:00] team is not there, you know.

But someone needs to do the taxation, needs to do the reporting to the headquarters, uh, needs to, you know, see the, the, the cash flow or like the, uh, needs to have the treasury topic also covered. Uh, so I believe the, the, the finance area right now is definitely our number two. Uh, and number three are the HR topics.

So, um, anything regarding, uh, change management, um, or some, um, uh, projects that, uh, are now in the field of remuneration strategy because after the new directives from the EU, many companies need to redefine their remuneration policy, uh, and adjust it to the, to the, to the new laws. So this is a very hot topic right now that, uh, we got many request, requests in this area.

And also, as I said, for this specific project, you do not need to hire anyone. You might not have the, these competencies in internally, but you can get them from, from outside. [00:18:00] Get a person that did it 20 times in, in, in, in her or his life already, and he will fix it for you within, uh, six to nine months.

Yurii Lazaruk: I have a feeling that also data privacy, all this thing connect with GDPR, AI is also like very hot topic- Absolutely.

and people need experts with ten years of experience even though like all the tools are less than five years. But anyway, who cares?

Kacper Pupin: Yeah. And we do, we do, we do cover also of course other, uh, areas such as, uh, uh, such as strategy management and as you said, digital transformation and AI topics, uh, uh, here as well.

Uh, but those three, uh, those three areas of expertise I believe are the definitely the key ones, yeah.

Yurii Lazaruk: Can you share some kind of example of a company that you worked with that brought in a fractional or interim professional instead of hiring someone full-time? Like, what was the challenge? How did the collaboration work?

What they asked you for? How fast [00:19:00] they connected with the person? And what happened for the business itself?

Kacper Pupin: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Um, I believe a, a very good example here, uh, also when it comes to the long-term thinking, how you can involve, uh, the, the external resources would be the company Żabka.

Yurii Lazaruk: Hmm.

Kacper Pupin: So for the ones that do not know, uh, Yurii, uh, we, we both live in Poland, so you see Żabka on every, on

Yurii Lazaruk: every- Everywhere.

Kacper Pupin: Everywhere Like, you know, Żabka is, like, the, the biggest chain of convenience stores in Poland. Uh, recently also acquired, um, uh, by, uh, by Circle K. Um, but, um, they do, uh, or, I mean, our collaboration with them, I believe, has been already, it's been already three, maybe four years that we work together. Uh, we also had the chance to, to, to host, uh, Jolanta Bąciorowska at one of our events.

Uh, and in fact, they, uh, what they do is that they see the, um, uh, [00:20:00] external resources, interim managers, external experts, you name it, as a kind of an add-on to their, uh, to, to, to their human resources, you know, to the, to the core team. So whenever they face any challenge that is not, you know, um, uh, that is not, uh, maybe or cannot be met with, uh, with the competencies that they have internally, or they cannot, that cannot be covered, they are looking outside.

Yurii Lazaruk: Hmm.

Kacper Pupin: And when they look outside, the, they, they typically work with us to get the best experts on board. Uh, we had various cases in HR area, in, uh, operations, uh, in, um, uh, in procurement. So, uh, now, right now also something, um, in the, in the, um, finance area. So this is a company that do strategically think of, uh, external resources as a, not as a threat to, to the core

team, but as, uh, um, as a kind of a solution that also can enrich, [00:21:00] uh, the, the core team when it comes to the know-how transfer, you know.

Because after each project like this, a lot of know-how stays in the business, and they can leverage on it, um, and, and work on it, uh, with their core resources.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, that's exactly the topic that I hear a lot that you mentioned, uh, threat the core team. Yeah. 'Cause sometimes people are exactly f- afraid of, first of all, saying that they don't know something or saying that they don't have experience in something, and then when they hire someone, they think that this person will come and replace them, specifically on a management level.

So, uh, talking about this Żabka example, how do they know that they don't have this experience internally?

Kacper Pupin: Uh, well, I believe Żabka is a fantastic example of a very much, um, aware, uh, and experienced and also open-minded, um, HR.

Yurii Lazaruk: Mm.

Kacper Pupin: This is an organization that is, uh, you know, they are a leader in the market, and they are a leader for a [00:22:00] reason, you know?

They are, uh, fantastic in terms of the commercial approach To, to, to grow the business, but also internally it's a, it's an absolute benchmark on the market, you know? And every time when they, when they face a new challenge that is ahead, it could be a remuneration policy, it could be, uh, you know, the setup of a new warehouse, whatsoever, they, they assess it if they can cover it with the internal, um, assets or they need someone from outside.

Mm-hmm. And they do it like this regularly, you know? It's a, it's a process in place, you know? So, uh, very often it's not a, it's not a question, um, they, they, they don't assess, you know, uh, who will do this, but they assess, you know, what kind of skills I need to make this happen, you know, what I want to achieve.

There's a business objective, there are skills required for this, and then they assess, okay, do we have the skills internally or do we need to source them from outside? And if they can do it internally, of course there is a core team for that and they cover it. If not, [00:23:00] they look for those skills outside and this

kind of interim management approach can, can very, uh, apply, apply very well and be a very good solution.

Yurii Lazaruk: It feels like I need to talk to some of them, to share- To ask them about their experience, how do they do it and, you know, that's, that is

Kacper Pupin: a- It's a, it's a very good example. In fact- Mm ... a very good example of, uh, of a, of a company. I, I always, uh, give Zabka, uh, as a, as an example of a very much, uh, I would say, um, business that is aware of the, of the, of the, of the flexibility that is required right now to, to grow the business, you know?

And as I said, we see Zabka with their successes, uh, in, on the commercial level, but they, they do come for a reason. Uh, they are very successful commercially because internally they can, uh, really, uh, grab it, uh, grab it fantastically.

Yurii Lazaruk: And I feel like they are in trend because there is this trend in workforce moving from titles to skills, not hiring for titles, but hiring for specific job done.

In fact, yeah. And I feel like they're already on [00:24:00] the forefront. And still, I spo- I've spoken, I still speak to, like, dozens of companies that still hire and see full-time employers as a safest option. So even when they need someone for a specific project, they will go through this hiring three, six months pro- process- Mm

just to own this workforce. And from your experience, from your perspective, what are the biggest misconceptions or the biggest barriers that you see among business leaders when it comes to hiring fractional professionals?

Kacper Pupin: Mm-hmm. Well, first of all, I wouldn't, I wouldn't like to do a kind of, you know, shaming of this kind of, of those people, you know, that are, are not yet open to this solution because I, I, I really believe that it's a, it's a, it's a process, you know?

For some people it takes longer, for some shorter. Uh, people have also different background in terms of business, you know, different experiences. You know, maybe very often what we could see is that, uh, one or another company had some, uh, [00:25:00] kind of bad experience with maybe some consulting, uh, business in the past And that's why now they believe that the only solution or the best one would be to, to hire someone permanently.

The other thing could be also that they are somehow worried for the, for the, for the, for the legal aspect of that, uh, or for the budget aspect because, uh, it might be, it, you know, it, it might come across as a, as something that is, uh, somehow more expensive comparing to the, to the, um, uh, permanent hiring.

But in fact, uh, I would say that But, um, with the clients that were maybe somehow hesitant to this kind of solution, it always comes down to a very first product realized together. Mm-hmm. You know? And then, uh, they can see in a, a real example in their business. It's not something that, you know, you or, or me would tell them, you know, how fantastic it could be, but they can see internally in their [00:26:00] business that this thing works.

And we see fantastic stories of the clients that in fact were super hesitant for one or even two years where there was no chance to, to do any project. But o- once they give a chance, they come back. They come back because this is, uh, the, the, the solution that, uh, uh, that, uh, is basically, uh, preferable. You know, becomes not even one of the solution, but it becomes a preferable one.

So, uh, um, I, I do believe it's just a process. You know, it takes time. You know, uh, in Poland for many years the, the permanent hiring was the solution, was the only way to, to, to get people on board. Uh, also in different areas in Poland we still have, uh, a bit of homework to do, uh, comparing to, to the, to the Western economies.

In many areas we, we even got better, but, uh, it's a, it's a mindset shift that needs [00:27:00] to take place. And I believe that everything that I said about this flexibility, uh, uh, growing, this volat-volatility of the market, this will basically push us, uh, towards this kind of solutions. You know, you, you cannot, uh, swim against the stream.

I mean, you can, you, you, you can try, but it will be tricky. And for someone it will take longer; for some maybe, maybe shorter time. Uh, but, uh, overall, uh, overall I believe that, uh, what we have observed in the last six years from the perspective of Redegate is a huge shift of this mindset. Huge one. So I could even name, uh, uh, a few people that now I, I think of that, you know, two years ago were excluding any kind of external resources in their plant or in their office, and right now they, they, they work with couple of, of interim managers.

You know? So it's, it's changing, uh, and it will change because the trend is clear.

Yurii Lazaruk: Let's play this game: [00:28:00] past, now, future. So you started in 2020 during COVID. No one knew about fractional experts and they were kinda like thinking like, "Why should I work with, uh, such professional?" Now, 2026, you see that it's changing.

What will happen in 2030? Plus, minus, of course. We don't have crystal balls, but, like, from your experience, from what you see, from the trend that you see.

Kacper Pupin: Uh, so I think that the, the trend will, will, will still be there, uh, when it comes to the, this, this, this mindset, mindset shift, as I said. Uh, we see, frankly speaking, also more and more players in the market that try to do, uh, what, what we do or maybe re-replicate it or, or, or get a piece of, piece of cake as well.

It's a huge effort in terms of education of the market, and I do believe that, you know, uh, with more players, uh, you know, this mindset shift will also, will also, will also happen faster. So hopefully we will all, uh, benefit from it, uh, [00:29:00] through this, through this education of the, of the clients. And in 2030, you know, when it comes to the traction we've had so far, um, I believe we will be talking about the, the, the, the, the Relegates in doubling possibly the business, uh, as, as, as we've seen it so far.

And I believe there will be also some, some other players also, um, on the market. And at the same time, this is something that we see already, uh, when it comes to the AI revolution. Um, there are more and more people that, um, are somehow forced or, or, or leave the, the, the businesses after many years. And, uh, the only possibility for them, I believe, to, to continue the, their career will be in the fractional leadership.

So this is what-- also something that we encourage and we support, you know, the shift from the permanent employer to [00:30:00] a, to an interim manager or an external expert. And we also would like to give the, the, the, them the, the tools, the knowledge to, to be able to, to deliver the, the project. You know, this is something different than they are used to, but, uh, I believe that there will be more and more people available in this, in this model as well.

So, uh, we're talking now 2026, 2030, four, four years from now, uh, considering, you know, the technological shift that we're observing n-right now, I don't know where we're gonna be, but this is more or less my, my assumption. So I would say, uh, more, more of the, more of the trends, more of the observations that, that we've seen so far.

Yurii Lazaruk: Now, I hear it's, it's interesting that you mentioned AI because there is this term called blended workforce that I hear more and more. Yeah. Meaning that you have your full-time core team permanent working, then you have independent professionals, and then you have AI. So from your experience of what you see on the market, how AI [00:31:00] and automation changing the independent or overall workforce market?

Kacper Pupin: Well, I must admit, when it comes to the, um, independent freelancers or, uh, or the interim manager that at least Redegate, uh, somehow provides to the, to the, to the clients, we do not see a huge change-

Yurii Lazaruk: Mm. -

Kacper Pupin: as of now. Why? Uh, because what we, what we believe is that, uh, we do provide the clients with the experts that do deliver or that do execute things.

So this is something that AI cannot replace, at least as of now, you know? Uh, we do have clients that, uh, that have fantastic concept, fantastic ideas, but at the end of the day, there is no one internally that, that can execute and deliver it. So we, we just provide them with the, with the expert that have done it, I don't know, 20 times already.

They entered the, the business, and they know what to start with and how [00:32:00] to execute and deliver. Okay? So AI, as of now, as I said, doesn't, doesn't replace the, the delivery. So I believe we are k-kind of, you know, safe because I think that also in, in some years from now, the execution and delivery will not be able to be replaced or AI will not be able to, to replace, uh, the, this aspect of the project.

But of course, when it comes to more junior, junior roles This changes, you know, the consulting market dramatically, you know. The, the junior roles are basically being wiped out of the, of the consulting companies right now, uh, because many things that, you know, I would typically do as an intern 12 years back, uh, at the consulting, uh, company right now, frankly speaking, can be, can be replaced by the AI, you know, uh, and the senior manager can do it himself, uh, using, using ChatGPT or some other models.

Um, but, uh, when it comes to the internal aspects of our work, [00:33:00] so I would say from Renegade perspective, how we manage to, to use AI on our side, you know, this is not a, not a secret that we as Renegade also develop our own, uh, in-house, uh, kind of platform to, to operate. And of course, AI is one

of the modules that we, uh, that we also somehow applies to, to, to the entire platform.

And this helps us, you know, being even faster than we used to be towards our clients. And, uh, I believe this, uh, supports a lot our, our USP.

Yurii Lazaruk: No, AI still can't buy and bring coffee yet. Maybe it will do it in the future, who knows? But yeah, there is still some hope for, uh, the initial positions. So let's, let's see.

But I totally get what you're talking about because sometimes it's, it's, uh, if you don't have the int-in-i-initial positions, how do you grow? How do you get, like, this experience? And I feel like there is this gap the AI is currently creating and, uh, yeah, but [00:34:00] it's, it's totally, totally different conversation because it's like a starter position.

It's not the senior level people. And let's talk numbers. So what does hiring fractional expert actually costs compared, compared to hiring full-time professionals? What I mean, because when people hire, uh, independent talent, they usually compare it to the full-time, um, internal rates. Mm-hmm. But it's different.

So what is the difference?

Kacper Pupin: Well, when it comes to the costs, what was also quite, quite surprising for us is that the, the cost, uh, for the fractional experts, for the external resources, blended workforce, there are all these different names that we can apply here, uh, that they are not so dramatically higher than the permanent hiring In fact, we have proofs from various projects where the external expert, uh, was even, um, [00:35:00] kind of cheaper solution f-- uh, comparing to the direct hiring.

And why is the case? There are two reasons for it. So on the one hand, it was, uh, sorry. It was kind of, uh, uh, kind of interesting for us to realize that, um, out of, uh, all the working days in the entire year, uh, there are so many, uh, so many sick leaves, you know, being reported, at least in Poland. I believe it's now eleven, eleven work days a person being reported, uh, yearly.

Mm-hmm. But when we, when we look deeper into the data, we see many people that reports, you know, thirty, forty, fifty, or even more days a year, you know. So this is something that you as a, as a, as a, an employer basically lose out of, out of, out of the, the, the entire year. Some of this you need to cover.

Uh, some of it is covered by the insurance and of course, uh, [00:36:00] uh, in-- at the same time you cannot really hire, um, another person at this, at this post, you know.

So you're kind of blocked as a business. So you lose on the one hand the, the money, uh, and on the other, the flexibility, you know, because the things are not being done. Uh, so this is one aspect. And, uh, we see that very rarely or almost we don't see it at all, uh, the external experts taking the sick leave Uh, I, I don't think that there are people that are healthier than the average of population, but simply they are, uh, operating as business entities and everyone that has his or her own business knows that, you know, if you cannot deliver, if you're sick at the, at the, at this very moment, you know, you don't earn.

You know, this is, this is as, as simple as that. So we see, uh, very few cases of, um, of the days being missed by the external experts due [00:37:00] to the, due to the sickness. Um, and the other aspect is also that for the permanent hiring, very often what you don't see as a manager are the benefits that are on top, is the insurance that is on top, all the taxes that you need to pay as an employer, uh, that, that are on top, all the bonuses that also come to this.

Maybe, um, even other things like, like events or, you know, spons-sponsoring the, the vacation and, and other kind of things, and they all come, come on top. Whereas for the external expert, basically you pay one fee for every day delivered and you do not negotiate, as I said, pizza Fridays or other kind of benefits.

You don't talk about bringing dog or not to the office, but you talk about the things that need to be delivered. I know that maybe I'm-- I, now I sound, you know, kind of too pragmatic, but we do not-- we do really focus on this very business challenge that the client has, [00:38:00] and this needs to be addressed in a pragmatic way simply.

Yeah.

Yurii Lazaruk: You, you do not talk about this way. You just all simply have it in contract. When you hire independent professionals, they tell that, "Hey, I will come with my dog and I expect pizza to be there." So it's pretty simple the way it works. And also, uh, you know, it's interesting because, um, when you work with, uh, independent talent, you hire them pretty fast.

But when you hire like a full-time professional, uh, internally, it's still hiring process, so it still takes the best case scenario, one month. The worst case can

up to one year. It depends on the level of the position, and it's also the money that you pay for someone to hire you this person. So it's like extra money on top.

And when businesses are starting to calculate, they're like, "Okay, yeah, uh, when I have the small project, uh, it's better to hire this person, or if I have this like new project."

Kacper Pupin: Yeah, so this way the whole calculation when you compare the cost is even, you know, more in favor of the, of the, of the, of the solution that we [00:39:00] promote, you know?

Yeah. Uh, 'cause, uh, as I said, one thing, uh, is the, is the, is the, the readiness time, I would say. So the, the, the time that the, the expert can, can work with the client and he's there to deliver. Uh, the second thing is the, um, the, the, the taxation, the bonus, the, the, the other benefits. And the third is like something that you do not

but stops operations So, uh, uh, uh, you cannot deliver initiatives, you cannot launch a new project because, uh, you know, doesn't get the proposal he or she was expecting. So, uh, uh, you don't see it in the Excel sheet, but this also cops comes, comes as a cost to this.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, I have so many questions, [00:40:00] and I really wish to have the sky as the limit, but time is the limit to our conversation.

So the final question: What advice would you give to companies just starting to work with independent professionals and to such professionals entering the market?

Kacper Pupin: Okay. So when it comes to the, the, the, the companies, and I believe we are, uh, pretty clear here on our side at Relegate, this is vital for every project, for every initiative with external, uh, experts to know the business objective.

What do we want this, uh, expert or this freelancer to, to realize, to deliver to us? So what is the final business objective, the final deliverable that we would like to, we would like to him? Because it's really easier then for, for, for, for both parties, for both sides, you know, to know what the expectation is- Mm

and to know the, the, the common goal, you know, the common objective we have. And indeed, we see from time to time the company struggling with this,

you know. Sometimes we do even help, you know, with specifying, okay, [00:41:00] this is a nice initiative, a nice thing, you know, cool idea, but what, uh, what is the, the ultimate business goal, business objective that we, that we have?

And the, the... when it comes to the, the advice that I would give maybe to the, uh, freelancers entering the market, uh, well, here I need to mention, w- we also observed as Relegate that there are many people entering the market without, um, you know, being aware of the differences between oper- working as a, as a permanent employee and working as a freelancer.

So apart from the, the, the pure difference that here you operate as a business entity, there's also another thing that, uh, you know, for example, as a former manager operating as a freelancer, you cannot elaborate on a, on a hierarchy working on the client. You know, you cannot just tell a, a junior at, uh, at, at your client, you know, "Do this, do that for me," you know, uh, "if not, I will fire you."

Don't have this power very often. Uh, [00:42:00] and you cannot leverage on the hierarchy. You cannot, you know, expect people to deliver things to you. You need to be the one driving topics. Um, so definitely, uh, we as a... we at Relegate, we ob- we, we, we saw it and, uh, that's why we, we developed this program with the Kozminski University, uh, the Business Expert Academy, Akademia Ekspertów Biznesu, and this gives the experts kind of a toolbox how to enter this market.

So in fact, there are many, many approaches. It doesn't need to be the one with Relegate. There are also other ways to To get the, get the know-how, um, how to, uh, you know, develop your career as a freelancer. So do reach out to the people you know. You m- you would find them on LinkedIn, you would find, uh, also various courses online.

You know, how to start your career as a freelancer, how to, uh, also adjust, uh, your business portfolio, your scope of services to the market needs. Because what we see-- Sorry, uh, Yurii is really the, the last point here. But w- when [00:43:00] it comes to my advice for the freelancers, really, we are very much aware very often that those people have twenty, thirty years of experience, and they're fantastic, excellent, excellent professionals But for a very specific project, the client has very specific needs.

And the, and the clients, uh, hiring external expert, they do not hire, let's say, the entire holistic business portfolio they have, but they hire them for very

specific skill set that they have. So I believe it's a kind of a mastery. It's a kind of, uh, uh, kind of, uh, uh, holy grail, I would say, for, of the, of the whole, uh, freelancer world to be able to specify the niche you can address with your, uh, with your business portfolio, with your, with your services.

So what the market really needs, not what I have, but what the market really needs.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah. I had just previous conversation with Elina Aliehu, and she told that, uh, sometimes people are coming with 20 years of experience and clients like, "Why? [00:44:00] Why this person want to work for this small project?" And then she's like, "If this person with this experience is a good fit for you, don't ask why they don't care about their experience.

Just take them and work with them. Their experience is their experience. If they can deliver, they can, uh, bring you what you need, just do it. Don't question it." Yeah. From the other side, as you've said, you don't have to bring all the knowledge that, uh, that you have to the table. You have to deliver specific result cl-clients needs for you.

That's it. No one cares about everything else. Exactly. And to keep the conversation going, name two people I should reach out to, to talk about the independent workforce.

Kacper Pupin: Ah. So, uh, uh, of course, we, we already, uh, addressed, addressed one today. Uh, John, uh, uh, all the best to you, uh, and your family. But, um, so when it comes to the interim management or independent workforce in the Central Europe and in Poland, I believe a [00:45:00] very, very good person to, to recommend here is, uh, Grzegorz Sobiecki, Dr.

Grzegorz Sobiecki. Uh, Grzegorz is our partner at Relegate, but also for many years in the, in the past, he was basically developing the interim management market here in Poland, also educating the market. You know, we are talking about the six-year perspective, but Grzegorz was there 20-something years ago already, uh, putting this idea forward.

So this would be one. Uh, and when it comes to the, the, the, the, the second person, I believe, uh, this would be, uh, Jan Szajstela.

Yurii Lazaruk: Hmm.

Kacper Pupin: Uh, I don't know if you, if you, if you heard of him. Not yet. Jan was one of the co-founders of, uh, Comatch.

Yurii Lazaruk: Mm-hmm.

Kacper Pupin: Uh, and I believe, uh, Jan, who is now not, not so much involved in the, in the freelancer market anyway because he exited from Comatch, that is now part of Mold.

I believe he could, uh, share with [00:46:00] you, uh, even maybe more insights on the, on the way the freelancer, the, the freelancing world, uh, somehow developed in the, in the, in the European market because Jan was really one of the key creators o-of, o-of it. So Jan would be the, the second guess.

Yurii Lazaruk: I would definitely ask you to connect us and to keep this conversation going.

Yeah. And, uh, first of all, thank you so, so... I'm super happy that John connected us, and you have such a great positive energy, and I just enjoy talking to you and specifically learning from you. So thank you so, so much for sharing your experience and also for growing this market because it's something that not just businesses, it's like the whole economy needs this, uh, thing.

Because people are also turning from being, having this secure job. It's not secure anymore. You have to also be able to have your full-time job if you'd like to be there, and then you have to have some kind of a brand. You have to work with different clients because that's exactly how you work. And clients is happy because you're bringing them more experience, [00:47:00] more value, faster, more flexible, et cetera.

And everyone is happy. You know, it's kind of like win, win, win. There are alw-always wins. So thank you so, so much for what you are doing with Grzegorz and growing ReadyGate and, uh, yeah, thank you so much for growing this economy.

Kacper Pupin: Uh, again, uh, Yuriy, it was, it was pleasure, uh, to be here with you, and thank you for, for having me here on your podcast.

And also a special thanks to you for also, you know, contributing to developing of, of this market, not only in Poland, but overall in Europe, making, you know, growing the awareness around this topic, uh, and, you know, educating the clients, educating also the, the, the future freelancers, you know, uh, that maybe

will see one of your podcasts and will think that, "Okay, it's maybe, uh, my, my next step in the career."

So thank you for that, and, uh, I believe we all somehow... Everyone has a pr- a, a, a role to play, uh, in this market, and we all, I believe, um, develop it in the, in the, in the right direction, uh, with, uh, smaller or bigger contributions. [00:48:00] But, uh, as I said, the, the clear, I believe, the trend, I believe, is clear. Uh, and I'm very happy that we are, uh, together on this journey.

Thank you.

Yurii Lazaruk: Thank you very much. And, uh, yeah, see you in the independent talent market. And for listeners, thank you for joining us on this episode of the Independent Workforce. I hope you've taken one step closer to working smarter with freelance talents. If you enjoy this conversation, subscribe to learn even more and share it with your colleague.

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