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WIRTSCHAFTSFORUM  
DER FÜHRUNGSKRÄFTE

Wir Leben Leadership

# Success with highly motivated team players

*Werner Mueller-Veith, CEO of Photoneo, talks in his interview with LEADERSHIP about the rapidly growing technology start-up scene, sustainability strategies, incentives and employee motivation.*

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW  
WERNER MUELLER-VEITH

**You have been CEO of Photoneo Sensors & Automation since summer 2021. What can you tell about successes and challenges in a high-tech start-up?**

The Photoneo BU achieves high growth and profit, with the highly motivated employees. Start-ups are extremely dynamic communities whose success is largely based on exceptionally motivated and intelligent team players. The agile, innovative group dynamics could be increased through clear goals and structures. At the same time, necessary processes were gently introduced. That was the key to the mutation from a “cash-consuming start-up” to a profitable, fast-growing, agile company. The greatest success lies in achieving respectable profitability within just 15 months without losing agility. It was especially rewarding to win over this group of young high potentials for the change process and orchestrate it with resilience. Initially, I found it a challenge to be a generation older than my executives, and even more so to be “The Austrian” in a shining Slovak company. Due to the internationality of Photoneo, the foresight of the founders and the emotional intelligence of everyone involved, this was never really a problem.



**Which technology transformations could you, as trained telecom-engineer, observe in your professional career?**

Highly innovative companies, measurement technology and customer-specific developments run like a red thread through my CV. All of the technology transformations I've seen are dwarfed by the AI transformation that's happening right now. Application-specific artificial intelligence will revolutionize every single production and logistics process in the next 3 to 8 years. The AI transformation is also not comparable to previous upheavals, because since the Chat-GPT hype, daily new AI applications have been born. And this trend will intrinsically continue to accelerate. So the evolutionary motto must be: Embrace AI or die out

**Your company has developed the world's highest resolution 3D camera for dynamic applications, and unlocked the potential of machine learning. Is Austria technologically fit?**

Photoneo was founded in 2013 in the garage by 3 brilliant Slovak engineers. They had studied at MIT in the USA, but wanted to set up a technology firm in their home country. For our 10th anniversary we exceeded 300 employees. Our Slovak intellectual property is not only used for sensors in industrial applications, but also made fit for new applications in cooperation with universities and globally active corporations. Austria has certainly proven to be technologically capable of producing similar high-tech start-ups. We have comparable visionary talents. On the other hand, what strikes me is



that the hunger for success, the unconditional will to achieve, is actually much greater 50 km east of Vienna. In my relatively well-fed home country Austria, the spoiled sense of entitlement on the part of many university graduates slows innovative strength.

**With the help of digitization, in the form of the much discussed twin transition, the achievement of climate goals should also be made possible. How sustainable is Photoneo?**

Sustainability plays an important role for us. Not only the PV system on the roof should be mentioned here. Also the reduction of more than 40% in energy consumption and plastic waste in the last year are respectable achievements. Furthermore, the own ISO14001 certification and the selection of the suppliers accordingly. Local supply chains are optimized with reusable rotating containers. Our young employees like to come to work with public transport or by bike. We support this with tickets and infrastructure. However, the sustainable effect of the robotic transformation per se seems particularly important to me. Our solutions help to achieve energy savings in the logistics and production process, to increase yields in agriculture and to make dangerous jobs safe.

**The shortage of specialists and workers will burden Austria as a business location in the coming years. How realistic do you rate automation and robotization strategies?**

Simple manual activities will largely be eliminated in 3 to 8 years. We are already permitted to equip a General Motors car factory in the USA, where only intelligent robots will build vehi-

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cles in the dark according to the “lights out” principle. We also automate the food logistics of the parent company of Gurkerl. at throughout Europe with fully automatic order picking systems that are more efficient, more accurate and cheaper than human labor. In this context, calls for shorter working hours are also to be viewed positively, coupled with an education offensive for new, higher-quality professions that will make classic warehouse workers and order pickers obsolete.

**How does your high-tech company manage to convince new employees?**

Photoneo is a very young role-model company in Bratislava. Thanks to our great corporate culture, the prominent market position, the benefits, two free meals a day, parking for everyone and exciting team building events, we can build on sufficient specialist staff from the university environment. People want to work for us! We also make targeted use of decentral organized teams, some of which are based in the east of the country near the more remote Slovak universities. Working from home is widely supported, minimizing the need for commuting.

**How inclusive would you describe your company and how important is diversity?**

Each applicant is evaluated independently of personal characteristics in the application process

according to objective criteria. There must be no discrimination or preference. I think quotas are counterproductive in the MINT environment.



#### AD PERSONAM

Werner Müller-Veith is since 2021 CEO of Photoneo Sensors & Automation. The certified communications engineer completed his varied educations at the Danube University in Krems as a certified member of supervisory boards. His 30 years of international management experience includes successful assignments in the USA, Switzerland, Germany and Austria. Previously, he led business units at AMETEK and Danaher, both US Fortune 500 companies. Werner Müller-Veith acted as a member of the Advisory Board of the WdF for many years.

#### ABOUT THE COMPANY

The Photoneo Brightpick Group is a leading robotics and AI company with more than 300 employees and 6000 technology installations worldwide. The multi-award-winning group, with its headquarters in Bratislava, consists of two business areas. Photoneo is a leading provider of vision sensors, robotics and intelligent AI software for automation with customers such as General Motors, DHL and Volkswagen, and Brightpick provides AI-controlled robots for warehouses to handle every phase of order fulfillment in e-commerce and e-grocery automation, with customers like the Rohlik Group and Netrush.