Podcast Name: *ACM ByteCast*
Episode: Episode 65 - Darja Smite

Welcome to the *ACM ByteCast* podcast, a series from the Association for Computing Machinery! The podcast features conversations with researchers, practitioners, and innovators at the intersection of computing research and practice about their experiences, lessons learned, and visions for the future of computing. In this episode, host Harald Störrle is joined by Darja Smite, a Professor of Software Engineering at Blekinge Institute of Technology and a part-time research scientist at SINTEF ICT. Darja has written numerous articles and books on her research on globalization, offshoring in software companies and across multiple international companies.

To begin, Darja shares her background. She was always very good at math, but didn't want to become a teacher. She had a passion for solving math problems but wasn't passionate about working with kids. She wanted to select a profession that the job profile would be interesting to her, and in the late 90s she started in the IT field and would absolutely make the same choice again. Darja came from Latvia, and in that country, you are allowed to work and study at the same time, which makes you study in a different way. You can look at the knowledge knowing where and what is applicable. There is a drive towards knowledge more than a theoretical perspective. She moved to Sweden and has a part time job in Norway conducting research. In terms of industry and corporations, they employ people who have had experience in industry and most people share a passion in solving problems. Research in academia can't go any faster, but you also can't sit on the results. You can't wait on published articles because your findings might not be relevant anymore. You must share data when you can to prove relevancy and that we're not so slow.

Next, Darja shares her findings on outsourcing. The main reason to leave is not money, but talent. There are some higher and lower costs in different companies, but there are also various alternatives to cost. They also discuss automation and the effect it will have on outsourcing and profitability. Darja says the main question is what we outsource. For example, we could outsource basic things a machine could replace or problematic areas. Or, we could outsource the maintenance phase because no one wants to maintain them. We need to utilize talents in the best way and understand what we pay for. You can't compare hourly rates, but experience. She believes productivity and workers won't work against each other in the future because most people in the western civilization stay at their jobs a long time because they are loyal to the company. Most people quit because of deeply rooted cultural differences or not being challenged enough. She has studied Indian society where they place a high value on manager roles and being responsible over others. Culture is a central difference, but individuals are much stronger than culture but culture impacts how we approach certain behaviors. There is no good or bad culture, but we can work around or agree on a common situation or solution. Over time, work cultures can change, and you will find a common ground on what is acceptable, and the norms of the team.

In addition, Harald and Darja discuss how work practices have changed globally in the past 5 years due to COVID. The main idea they talk about is working remotely which can impact productivity, talent, staffing and sourcing talent. Darja has found the long term driver of working remotely is the focus time– people are not interrupted and they have a state of flow for getting their work done. However, this is not good for someone new to the career or someone without the right skillset. They have found more senior developers work remotely but junior ones want to work in the office to learn from the more experienced developers. There is more flexibility in working at home with being more productive during different times of the day. There is also no traffic with commuting, and people can have more of a work life balance. However, they have found that people who work from home tend to work more hours than those at the office. There is also more tension between the group and individual because there is less camaraderie. Some companies have created mandatory office days and some stick with the flexible hybrid working, but don't make it the formal requirement. They all have the same goal but different processes. Lastly, Darja shares her advice for people thinking about IT as a career. She suggests collaborating with others and working with diverse, skilled people across disciplinary themes.

Key takeaways:
0:00 - Welcome to *ACM ByteCast.*
0:59 - Darja shares her background.
2:43 - Would you make that job decision again?
3:19 - When did you start working in industry?
5:44 - How do industry and corporations work?
8:23 - How do you overcome the time constraints with industries?
10:25 - Darja shares her findings on outsourcing.
14:21 - Will automation make outsourcing less profitable?
17:41 - What will productivity will look like in the next 10 years?
23:26 - How can culture and professional experience work together?
28:54 - How have work practices changed globally in the last 5 years?
34:41 - How have you seen companies function differently?
37:20 - Advice for people thinking about IT as a career.

Links
Learn more about Darja Smite.
Learn more about the ACM ByteCast podcast at https://learning.acm.org/bytecast