[Mykola Yabchenko]: Hello everyone and welcome to the "Chats with STEMinists" podcast for the STEM4ALL platform. We are recording this episode of the podcast in Kyiv. Here is Mykola Yabchenko with you. I am a focal person on gender equality for the group of Democratic Governance projects in Ukraine, and the Digital Literacy Component Leader of the DIA Support Project.

Today we are again meeting with fantastic specialists and leaders of digitalization in Ukraine, and I am happy to introduce our incredible guests. They are Zoriana Stetsiuk, the Director of the Public Services Reengineering Directorate of the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, and Ruslana Korenchuk, Head of the Digital Skills Development Department and the Diia.Education project, which is an educational platform of the Ministry with up-to-date knowledge and skills.

Zoriana, Ruslana, greetings!

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: Hello!

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Hello!

[Mykola Yabchenko]: In principle, our listeners will be from all over the world, so maybe not everyone knows what your Ministry does. I will say right away that the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, in fact, made a lot of cool innovations over the past 5 years, and our guests directly relate to them. But if you can, please tell me, well, in a few sentences, what exactly do you do, what is the area of your responsibility, what are you up to at work every day?

Who will start?

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Well, maybe I will. So, our Directorate, directly the one I work in, is re-engineering, public service re-engineering. And people often ask the question, what is re-engineering? Actually, this is restructuring and building processes. Directly the Directorate is formed with two streams: this is re-engineering itself and normative reengineering of processes.

Our main goal in re-engineering is the analysis of services that are currently provided offline for the public services, analysis of their processes and construction of new processes in electronic services, i.e. digital electronic services.

And the second, normative direction is, accordingly, backing with proper legislation. Each service that is provided in the state has certain normative anchoring in laws, normative legal acts. And our task is also to analyze these normative legal acts and make [changes], and in finding whether it is necessary to make changes, to establish a new process and, accordingly, we develop and further support relevant regulatory changes.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: If you allow me, let me try to give an example, you will say whether I understood correctly. So, basically, you take an offline service where you need to collect 10 references to get the 11th, and you see if it can be done online completely. That is, so that these 10 references are pulled up automatically. If this is not possible, then you make changes to the regulatory acts, which there, relatively speaking, remove certificates that cannot be electronic, and leave only those certificates and which are electronic, which would be enough to get this new reference.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Yes, we are looking for ways how to replace it, how to simplify, perhaps, some reference isn't really necessary, it lived there for 10 years, and when you ask an institution why. "It has been always like that." As an example, I don't know, everyone might have faced with registration of place of residence?

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Oh, yes.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Yeah, an offline service, which was especially very convenient for men: go once to a military commissariat, twice. And especially if you live in someone else's dwelling, then take the owner with you or take power of attorney from him so that he confirms. So, we also sit down for the analysis how to transform it into electronic form, what are problems there.

So, we analyze: ok, you need to come, bring your passport with hands, a [tax] code, confirmation, a document that this is your address, and if it is not your home, in which you are registered, you need to bring an owner, who signs, agrees that you live there and is registered. If you are a man, then take a reference from a military commissariat.

So, we began to analyze how it can be replaced: if it is your confirmation, we have a register that confirms who you are (a name, family name, and patronymic name), citizenship, and the rest. The property, there is also the register of property rights of the Ministry of Justice, the same: they went, check – an owner. Is the consent of an owner needed? With Diia [Ukraine's government e-services mobile application], we sent a message: please, check, sign – by this address, one will be registered. Do you agree? Diia.Signature [*electronic signature - editors*] is applied. Military commissariats? There is a register of conscripts. Similarly, they went and gave data that this person changes this address for this. And it made it much easier.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: They went not by feet, but data "went."

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: The data "went" into a registry, and they gave to the registry: There was Ivanenko at this address, now Ivanenko will be at this one. And there is no need for Ivanenko to go and prove that he has changed his address.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Zoriana, this is superb! I finally saw a person who revolutionizes services. This is very cool. Thank you!

Ruslana, I understand that you are making a revolution in another part, so that those people who do not know how to use services could learn how to do it. Or did I get it wrong?

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: We are definitely moving in this direction. There are already good specific first results, but in general what I do is actually organize offline and online parts to teach about digital services for people and digital skills, respectively.

So how do we do it and what do we organize? For the first time in 2019, we actually conducted research on digital skills, and understood, at first, where we are. Because in order to move somewhere, in general, you first have to have help from data in order to have an understanding of the starting point we are pushing off from.

From this, we understood that more than 53 percent of the population of Ukraine had zero or super basic skills and ability to use computers or smartphones, or, again, various technical gadgets.

That really shocked us and led us to organize a national Diia.Education project that enables teaching people in offline and online formats.

We also understood from our experience, and also by comparing other countries' experiences, what enables finding this cool motivation and looking for additional opportunities of how to include people in education.

Because, let's be honest, for many, our studies could end at school or university, and not everyone has lifelong learning skills. It is a sad fact, and we are working to change this behavior precisely, to make learning a daily skill and understanding that not knowing something is not scary and not knowing some digital skills is not scary, because you can always learn them quickly.

With our project, we help people find these little specific skills and little specific ideas on how to acquire new skills and thus make life easier for yourself.

Again, as Zoriana said, in order to search for easy references, or to send your data [to the state registries] for you, you should be able to use a smartphone and a computer, to use all these sites, applications, and thus feel free in the space.

That is why our project actually helps to master different technologies faster. In practice, it is calmer, watching a video series, passing tests, and looking for additional motivation in everyday life.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: This is actually very important, and our joint Library Association partners gave an interesting example, which I think is generally a super success, when an older lady mastered a tool online for price comparison in different pharmacies, and she now buys medicine. Well, there is an opportunity, there is time to go to the pharmacy, where it is cheaper, and she buys medicine very profitably. Moreover, I think, that gives her an opportunity to show off among her friends that she is the most advanced. Therefore, I think, this is also some kind of such motivation for others to enter these gadget questions.

Thank you very much. I think that we even understand the basics. I think that even people who are far from digital things, understand, what is it about, what is it, cool, interesting, and important.

And tell me, please, and in general, how did you get there, into digitization. Do you have any specialized education? Did you work somewhere before that? Tell me, please, what was your path before the Ministry of Digital Transformation?

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: Well, let me pick up from here so that everything is fair. My experience is a kind of combination of different experiences. Where do we start? Let's start, plausibly, with civil organizations. Why is it useful? It is useful because you can get as much experience as possible by doing different work.

Well, in some parts of life, you work with people, and in some parts of your life, you work with other projects, directly on the implementation of something. Could it be the construction somewhere? Well, for example, I also had this. Somewhere there were other ministries, for me it was the Ministry of Health.

My experience consists of various parts. I was probably lucky that this parallax vision and approach to work allowed me to quickly string together these various experiences and implement them, to understand that, here, in construction, for example, in order to make a project, you have to move for such a flow; in digitization, probably, you can also introduce some particles in the same way.

The main is the project approach and understanding of the risks that you can face.

Having this flow in your head, you can absolutely calmly, what is called, solve any situation by simply applying common sense and some creativity on how to make a cool product with minimal resources.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: So, basically, you do not need to graduate from the academy of public administration or the academy, I don't know, with a pedagogical education. In the modern world, it is a combination of different abilities and skills that allow you to make a more flexible, more creative product. I understand that now people's requirements and needs are actually changing, and one has to adapt, well, just every day.

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: Yes, you are absolutely right. For example, I have a pedagogical education. I understand the logic of building those training programmes, components of educational practices, and so on. But objectively, we have to understand that the world is changing so quickly that for some specialties, objectively, you don't need 5 years of university.

Well, what the university gives is the base, relatively speaking, the confirmation that you are a widely educated person. But your specific specialty and your daily field of work can be mastered in other formats.

Including now, we are even more and more going online. Not only COVID-19 and the past two years of the full-scale war have already, contributed to it, but also it is a generally global trend that blended learning is becoming an everyday norm. We cannot deviate from this, and we should take this into account in everyday life.

Respectively, there are a number of specialties in your everyday work, which you can master in a week-two, in a month, in three. Objectively, if it is not the field of medicine, you are not a surgeon, where you definitely need practice, or law, where you also need more time for practice, and well, okay, we understand about other specialties, which do require it. But, for example, the sphere of the same digital marketing does not require 5 years of university to master it, for certain.

So, ==life experience and a bit of a creative approach can sometimes help us much more than standardized programmes.==

[Mykola Yabchenko]: I completely agree. I read somewhere that education throughout life and learning skills are the most important. Because the days when you could get an education and live your whole life with it are gone. That is why this component of Diia.Education, which your ministry does, it seems to me is extremely important, because ChatGPT will leave me without a job soon and I will need to master new professions, so I will go to see what courses you have there on Diia.Education. I saw there were more than 50 of them.

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: [These 50 are] new courses.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Yes, of absolutely applied professions. So, they are worth watching. Thank you.

Zoriana, how about you? What path led you to services reengineering?

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: I am a lawyer by education. For about 7 years, I have been working in various bodies of justice – in departments of state registration of civil status acts and court representations.

As the world is really developing, working in various spheres of justice bodies, I saw to what extent the sphere of digitization and reviewing existing processes and approaches of service delivery and provision changes. It was interesting.

As an impetus, I was involved in a legal hackathon, where teams gave their decisions on how to digitalize or transform into electronic component services that are really familiar to us, such as in the sphere of court notary.

It's really a good approach, why not? Why not try? Because the world is changing, approaches are changing, the world is becoming much faster, and during this period of time, let's say, in a week, you have to do much more than you had to do, and there was an opportunity, 10 years ago. That is, we should stop measuring ourselves by these old standards, and we should go forward and apply new approaches. So, I decided that I should try, and thereby provide people with new convenient services.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: I undersand. Well, in principle, your path is absolutely logical. And I am very glad that this path has led you to the Ministry of Digital Transformation, that you are doing this exact revolution both in services and in digital education, and now, as I understand, more broadly, in education.

Could you please tell me, well, today's topic is a bit about gender equality, and the IT-sphere and public service are considered, well, at least earlier, it was thought to be more of a male-dominated field, at least in civil service in managerial positions.

There is a fairly recent statistic that it seems that only a third of women are at the top positions, and it changes vice versa: the lower the level of the position, the more women are there. In the IT sphere, it seems to me that in the last 5 years, girls have begun to strengthen their positions there.

How comfortable is it working for you in this field? Have you encountered any kind of attitude as if "that is not yours," or "what are you doing here"?

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Well, it depends on what period to take. If you take the last period, in the field of digitalization, well, such examples, where you were looked at why you came here and what you are doing, never happened.

In principle, in practice in my work, in general, that I had earlier, there were indeed such situations. There were questions, there was non-acceptance, and there were even times when I was not allowed at certain meetings.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Oh, wow.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Yeah, even such situations happened. Because five men came to a meeting, and then you came in, and they are like "Maybe, you will replace a representative?"

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Oh. It is, of course…

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Yes. Of course, it was rare, not every day, but it happened indeed. I hope this will be a progressively more positive dynamic. I don't encounter it now and I hope I won't in the future too because these are very unpleasant situations.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Ruslana?

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: I will join too; it was quite different in different periods. Well, there is also a question of the ability to defend one's own boundaries, because I had a funny enough case, for example, when a mayor of one city, it is not important which one, we had a meeting with him and the three of us, two men and I, go into his room. A standard story, they shake their hands, and I give my hand too to greet, and for 20 seconds, shock, some processing, is going on, complex stories in his head are happening. Well, it's strange, you know, how mentality differs in people's heads.

And you stand with this open hand, he didn't have any other options and shook it. Maybe it was for the first time in his life, well, that was a good experience.

In general, we can say that in some periods, well, when you were younger, when there were simpler projects, probably, somewhere it could be felt on the level "a manager - not a manager," but recently, something like that is definitely not felt. And after all, in my bubble, there are many women managers, and it is absolutely comfortable to work.

Therefore, I hope that it will be so in the future, because yes, you can, of course, teach people to shake hands with everyone, but it would be desired that it can be a standard situation by default.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Maybe some recommendations? I understand that now, I think, everyone already knows you, at least in your field, for sure, and everyone understands, you know when glory goes before you. But if we are talking about young girls who will be listening to us who only study STEM specialties and the best is yet to come for them, maybe any tip from your experience on what you do in practice?

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Well, don't be afraid and defend your boundaries. ==Even if you encounter some non-acceptance, know that you came with a specific purpose. Yeah, they didn't accept that you came. But you came anyway, so go and stand up.== The main thing is not to worry, it will break. The new experience is always perceived this way, but after a certain period everyone will get used to it and it will be normal. The main thing here is not to be afraid and go further.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: I agree. In my bubble, I think, such sexists have been dealt with so many times that it seems to me that now everyone should at least pull their hands and treat people equally.

Ruslana, maybe you have some advice?

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: Well, I am to repeat what Zoriana has said, that's for sure, know why you are here and that what you are doing is correct, and actually, don't be afraid to listen to a person's arguments accurately, at least. It might be not quite an ethical point, but to make a person speak, why do you think that, or why this situation is happening - it puts a person in his place a little. And well, this is the ability to stand up for yourself.

You know, there is a good saying that kindness should be with fists. These fists really need to be trained and to be able to be ready to defend yourself, is the main thing.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Thank you. We have already mentioned these statistics about the fact that there are fewer women in managerial positions, but, I could be wrong, please, tell me, do you see a trend that this is changing? Or, as I said I do not see probably the composition of ministries daily and maybe, it just seems to me that is there really this tendency for women are all more and more often occupy leadership positions, and this does not surprise anyone, and this is supported by the management level and at the family level of these women?

Because last time we talked about the fact that in order for a woman to be able to fully devote herself to work, it is necessary that there be some, it shouldn't be said now simply like the word "partner," but a "reliable partner" at home. Is there a trend toward women becoming more empowered to realize themselves in some leadership positions?

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: Well, the tendency is obvious. I can't say exactly the percentage, but it is clearly visible when managers change, we really have more and more women in these positions. And I agree that it is "nice to have" if you have family support, but I know also examples when women are quite successful without even having it, a partner, a 'rear," but at the same time, they realize themselves by 100% and 110%, or even more.

Therefore, it depends again on the position and the character. If this unique intersection of an opportunity and the ability to find this opportunity with the character of an achievement to which a woman is striving, is formed, well, it obviously becomes a victory in her life.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: So, everything is possible, you just have to try?

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: Absolutely.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: I very much agree with Ruslana that now the trends are just progressing, and really [a number of women in leadership positions] increases, if you take even the last 10 years, I analyze, the progress is really visible, that the number is increasing and increasing.

And I would say that there are even more conditions. There are already social and other prerequisites for a woman to develop, to become a leader, to master new professions, which may have been considered more purely male earlier, and not only was a woman not perceived there, but even some legislative acts expressly prohibited women from occupying certain professions.

It all develops. So here, I think, it depends on a certain inner desire of a woman to develop, to learn to go, and not to be afraid. In many situations, society does not even look and is not surprised already "Oh, woman, what?", and then you need to leave and do something else.

Before it was more stereotypical what professions [for a woman to choose]: it is better to be a teacher or a doctor. Even in my time, when I was choosing a profession, I was told: "Why lawyer? Go for a teacher. It is a good profession for a woman." And now already most are not surprising. It seems to me that there are fewer and fewer social restrictions.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: It's great that we just moved on to education because the next question of mine is about education. We talked about how there are a lot of men in the IT sphere, it is far from parity, but still, girls choose these STEM specialties more often.

But perhaps you have an opinion, on how it is possible to do so that girls choose more often, go to STEM more often?

What might stop them, what perhaps can be done at the level of society? I am not talking at the level of the state but at the level of society to encourage them. Or maybe you think that they don't need it.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Well, I might step in a little bit in Ruslana's [domain], but a lot depends on education. Certain advertising of professions and awareness that the world is not ending at certain five professions known to us for many years, and it is much more diverse.

I believe it is one of the components that not only popularize, but simply convey that such opportunities exist. You don't even have to limit yourself to a certain age or some social conditions, that "I graduated from school at 18, then they told me that there is a nearby university, there are 3 specialties, pick one of them, or don't go. I have studied for 3 years there, I don't want it." Don't be afraid – if you studied for 3 years and you understand that the topic is not for you, it is impossible to relearn or gain any other profession.

Therefore, I believe that this is one of the components – this education and, not popularization, but conveying about how much everything is in the world.

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: I absolutely agree. Except for popularizing and promoting it, I would also mention this codependency: does demand create supply or does supply create demand?

In this vein, I really like it, for example, the same practice of quotas, as the one that can push a society to realize that it might be reasonable.

Again, if we are talking about even the last 10 or 20 years, the policy of quotas, a ratio of women in the Verkhovna Rada [Ukraine's national parliament], it gave its results[1], because this number [of women] objectively increased.

If we roll this story back and think, about what the number of women in the parliament would be if we hadn't had it earlier, the situation would have been a little different probably. And by this example we understand that quotas in Ukrainian society work, either these are gender quotas or quotas on the Ukrainian language in television and radio broadcasts[2]. Our society treats it normally. The presence of

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[1] Since 2013, a voluntary 30 percent gender quota has been in effect in Ukraine, according to the law on political parties: if it is adhered, based on the results of the elections, the parties receive an additional 10% of the annual amount of state funding. Mandatory quotas were valid only for local elections. On July 11, 2019, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the Election Code, which introduced gender quotas in Ukraine at the level of 40%. According to the amendments to the code, there must be both men and women in each top five of the party electoral list (at least two candidates of each gender). In the Verkhovna Rada of the eighth convocation (2014-2019) - 12% of women: there were 49 female MPs out of 400 parliamentarians. In the Verkhovna Rada of the ninth convocation (since 2019), there are 92 women (20.9%) out of 440 MPs. https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-48637941 and https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2021/08/23/infografika/polityka/30-rokiv-nezalezhnosti-yak-zminyuvavsya-hendernyj-sklad-verxovnoyi-rady

[2] In 2017, the Verkhovna Rada obliged national TV channels to broadcast at least 75% of the weekly broadcast in the state language. In the total weekly broadcast volume of the nationwide TV channel, programmes, films and news in the state language had to make up at least 75% in each of the time slots between 07:00 and 18:00, as well as between 18:00 and 22:00. For TV channels of the local broadcasting category, this quota was 50%. The

these quotas, as a minimum, makes one think "Why not." This at least gives an opportunity to think that it would be good.

It seems to me that the increase of these promotional materials about STEM specialties and additional, not quotas, but programmes allowing to increase the number of seats for women, that at least to move forward in this direction, to show women that we will be happy if you will also master certain specialties.

Such a policy, not only in private companies but also at the state level, still bears fruit, as we see historically. And accordingly, continuing this practice and giving, well, not that additional direct super "perks," but emphasizing that here, in IT specialties, you can get some additional bonus, relatively speaking, in the first month of work or, in principle for study, or there any special quota, it will make work this flywheel automatically, and after some time, I hope, in the nearest like 5-10 years, we are going to see this number [of women in STEM] increased because it became the norm.

So the question here is simply to bring this norm into people's minds as a constant value, that it is ok to go work in the STEM specialties, and the IT sphere is definitely not an exception here.

By the way, among my acquaintances, there are already a lot of familiar girls, who work absolutely calmly in the IT sector and in those 252 specialties, which were…

[Mykola Yabchenko]: 450 were prohibited[3].

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: 450, oh, sorry. Even in these specialties, they work calmly and proudly in them.

Well, that is, cool when by law, quotas, and media, from three sides, in fact, the need to include women is actually being promoted.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Thanks. I actually agree that this is very important to encourage. At UNDP, we have a lot of women drivers. Earlier in the announcements, we wrote that, of course, we will choose among all candidates, but we added a sentence that we encourage women to apply so that they know that they are also expected. And now in the conditions of martial law, in general, these are very important employees, because all trips through the border are carried out by women drivers. It significantly simplifies the procedure.

Please tell us, once again, returning to the topic of leadership, mentoring and all such things, of course, now, you are well-established leaders, but I remember that at one time you participated in a leadership programme, which UNDP did. Could you please tell me whether it was useful, or, more precisely, was there anything that you remember particularly, and it was useful for you? So, we understand for the future, if we are going to make programmes, what worked better, what is worse, what is necessary, and what is not necessary?

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decision helped protect the Ukrainian language and strengthen its position in the public space. https://lb.ua/news/2017/05/23/367024_rada_vvela_75nuyu_kvotu.html

[3] In 2017, the Ministry of Health of Ukraine canceled its order, which defined a list of 450 professions that were prohibited for women. In particular, Ukrainian women were prohibited from working in a number of important industries, such as underground works, driving certain types of cargo and passenger transport, working in the engine room of a ship, and a number of construction specialties. https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2370209-v-ukraini-znali-zaboronu-na-450-profesij-dla-zinok.html

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: First of all, thank you for this programme. It was a real pleasure to take part in this programme, and it was really useful. What I personally remember about it is at least a few pieces of training, at minimum, what came to my mind, that were personally useful for me. This was, for example, such operational time management in a situation when everything is on fire, burning, and well, this is a standard situation, in relation to own resources. We understand very well that we are not running a sprint, well, we don't have sprint distances in principle. We have an understanding of life and that throughout life, we need to spend our resources ethically, competently, and logically, and again, how to renew them if they run out. Because objectively, we understand that in the civil service, it can be a situation of burnout, and everything else. So, it was super useful, once again, to hear practical and good advice from experts and trainers. It is the first thing that comes to mind.

And the second story is, you always use... There was even a question from you about role models. And the ratio of these role models when you have one role model, your manager has another one, your partner – the third one, and so on, then, you still need to be able to logically manage and understand the advantages and disadvantages of your approach, which you usually use (again, there can be several of these sets) and be able to flexibly pass and, depending on the situation, pick up one or another role model in project implementation.

That was definitely useful for me, and I am definitely grateful for these topics, in particular, but also for many other things.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Thank you, Ruslana, thank you. Nice to hear.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Thank you very much for the programme. It really helped to look at some things in a different way, because you have been working all this time, you live in a world of your own. You have already set up a certain algorithm of actions and follow it, and thanks to the programme, including experts, it was very important, thanks to their advice and life experience, how they approach, in which areas they work, how they solve problems, rethink some moments of your life.

Perhaps, not of precise work tasks in the first place, but an approach to, as Ruslana said before, that balancing: life – work – work tasks – communication with a team. And this experience was useful from the experts but also because of communication with other participants.

The advantage of such a programme is that, because you get into an environment where you are not just there with a teacher, and you talk, but you are in an environment where, you can say, of the same participants of the same spheres on different positions, and their approaches and communication with them is already a different view. As you find yourself on the other side of a wall. This is actually very positive in terms of a reboot because you really need it. As you're going, going, and it's true, as Ruslana says, it is not a sprint, but a marathon, and that's why you can't go like that you need to see a different picture. And indeed, expert experience on how other people approach the solution [is useful].

Therefore, thank you very much, I hope the programme will continue to develop.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Thank you, thank you, I wrote it down.

And another question is, Ruslana already mentioned that really children must see an example to understand that some profession exists, that this profession is available for girls and women. And apparently, we are now already moving on to the topic of role models.

In fact, the fact is that now girls appear in IT, they are visible, and other girls see them and also choose a profession in IT for themselves. Similarly, your presence as leaders in the field of digitization in fact means that you are already performing in the status of such role models.

Please, tell me whether you have any female role models that inspired you. It does not necessarily have to be some celebrities, maybe it is some women you met on your way. If there are, let's name them so others know. Because it is said that "history" is a word that contains "his", what it is his story, and women were constantly forgotten, so if there are such women in your life, let's name them.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Well, I wouldn't say specifically, but for me in essence, in my life and professional path, at almost every interval, I met women who were managers, and leaders in certain areas. At first, maybe there were one or two, and then the environment increased. And it is possible to say that I took a certain part from each of them: "I want to [do something in the same way]. I just admire the skill, for example, confidence, the ability to set goals, to achieve them in the mines, the ability to support, unite, defend positions."

Every day, when I looked, I thought how good that was on my life path, I met them – it was my manager and a work colleague. And I thought that it is great that there are such people who can really manifest themselves, know their goals, and thereby, I think, they can inspire and have inspired me not only to go further, not to give up, but also other people in the environment, who worked with them or who may have known them in personal life.

In some moments, not of decay but some depression, you remember and think "She will never do that in such a situation." That's why it is very great that there are such women.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: But we will not name anyone. Ruslana.

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: Well, I can also follow this tradition and say in general that I was really lucky to have crossed paths with many women whom I had the opportunity to learn from and, well, just copy these best practices. Imprinting, in principle, still works.

Again, well, here you can look at a huge number of soldiers who are now serving the Ukrainian army.

It is a fact how many women are active doctors, active volunteers, and we are incredibly lucky that we have them.

Similarly, there are a huge number of women leaders in the Ukrainian government, who are in positions of heads of expert groups, or deputy ministers, and they make huge influence both on the international arena – in terms of negotiations, communications, diplomacy, as well as internally – for the country to live. So, indeed, depending on the field, we can just sink into names and surnames, and I'm happy, again, that they are among us.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Could you please tell me, we have such an inventive idea, which we are already trying to implement for the second or third year, is to create such a permanent programme of, relatively speaking, internships for girls who study a STEM specialty so that they could come to the Ministry of Digital Transformation and to become an intern by being attached to some woman leader – and I'm not just looking at you both now – so that they can be inspired, in the first place, and, in the second place, to adopt some things perhaps. Because mentorship is actually very important. We don't have it yet as a usual process, but it would be good.

Then, COVID got in the way, so we conducted the programme online, if you remember, which is not ideal, because to find an opportunity to ask questions between Zooms and meetings, or as from your side, to answer questions, is not very convenient. But, in your opinion, how do you think, will you be ready to be a mentor in order to take some of the girl students and maybe mentor them over a month?

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: Well, I am absolutely in, I like this idea. The idea of mentorship and tutorship is really something that is missing a little bit in terms of the presence of overall logic in society.

It is definitely necessary to start such practices, because always, after all, a person needs a mentor. Very often an online format does not work in terms of inspiration. Of course, you can watch a TEDx video, series on Diia.Education, but very often people may lack a good – I am looking for a Ukrainian analogue of the word – "kick," which a person with a sideways glance can usually give.

So, you know, it is very important for a person to have the opportunity to simply look in a mirror or reflect, at least, the best qualities in another person. So this is definitely a good example.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Great. Thank you.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: I am definitely in favor, and I will give you an example. You already mentioned that there were [internship] programmes. There was a UNDP programme, there was an online internship, and there was one of the girls who participated in this programme with us, well, in my team directly, now, she already works -

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Cool.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: - officially in our team. She was an intern. And thank you very much, of course, to my team, who have been very supportive to me in this and helped her during the internship. And now she has been working in our team for several months already, I hope she is satisfied.

So, that's why I support such programmes, for sure, because they are unambiguously two-sided, they work in two ways: on the one hand, they give an opportunity for girls to open themselves up, understand whether it fits them or not, in what field they want to develop, and on the other hand, this gives us, directly to the team, in which a person is interning, an opportunity to develop the team, recruit more people. Therefore, I can provide only positive reviews about the UNDP programme. Let's continue.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Super, very nice. We will definitely do this in the future then, and it is very nice to hear that you have such feedback.

I asked almost all the questions. But for the last time, please tell me, if you could go back in time to yourself, who started your path, what advice would you give yourself?

We are now actually talking about those girls-STEMinists, who will be listening to us, but with the thought of yourself, you may have hit some bumps, maybe you can give some advice on what not to do or what definitely should be done.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: My first piece of advice, and the most important, is to be confident. More confident.

Because many stops exist just in your head, and then after some time, you analyze and understand that you haven't finished something, you haven't taken, you didn't learn, you didn't share, because you were limited by these stops: "Oh no I can't," "No, it's not for me," "Someone else is better," and so on.

That's why you have to work on it, because it actually takes away some of your time, which you could spend, on your development and further movement.

I hope that fewer and fewer people will have such problems over time, but still, if they exist, you need to work on them and move on without them.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: Thanks. Thanks, Zoriana. Ruslana.

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: Probably, it is also a similar story, because, indeed, a huge mass of some stops and settings are only in our head. Of course, it is a question of upbringing and also some judgments of others, which definitely should not be paid attention to.

You know, there are words of some classics that "You have no idea how beautiful you are, when you have no fear," or something like that, with similar words. So, the ability not to be afraid and to be self-confident, as Zoriana said, is the main thing.

Of course, it should always be considered your movements and understand whether you need it here and now, but to you personally, not to your parents or friends, partners or colleagues.

Well, again, the ability to hear yourself and not be guided by the expectations of others, who also have their own limitations, unfortunately.

Therefore, the main thing is, really, not to be afraid, to have a sense of self-confidence, and understand that you can really do everything, and these glass ceilings simply do not exist.

[Mykola Yabchenko]: I thank you very much. I think our conversation turned out to be very insightful, very practical. And I think this amount of advice will be very, very well received. And I thank you for this conversation. I wish you success, because you do an incredibly important and cool thing, especially in times of war, and I wish you even more new achievements. I think that we will definitely meet and talk after some time in order to continue this story. Thank you.

[Zoriana Stetsiuk]: Thank you, it was very nice.

[Ruslana Korenchuk]: As always.