

*Interview with **Alina Constantin**,
Associate Nuclear Engineer,
Division of Nuclear Power,
IAEA's Department of Nuclear Energy
on her participation in **the United
Nations E-learning Leadership (UNEL-e)
programme***

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(Photo credit: A.Leszczynska)



Power.

Alina Constantin (far right) at the Interregional Training Course on Understanding the Physics and Technology of Small Modular Reactors using IAEA's educational simulators, organized by the IAEA in Vienna, Austria during 5-8 July 2022

AL: What was your motivation to pursue a career at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)?

I have always wanted to work in the international environment, particularly in the nuclear field focusing on the use of nuclear reactor technologies for clean energy production. After graduation, I joined the Romanian nuclear community, and in 2019, I started working with the spent fuel management team within the IAEA's Division of Nuclear Fuel Cycle and Waste Technology. Currently, I am the Associate Project Officer dealing with non-electric applications of nuclear energy within the Division of Nuclear

AL: What was the most interesting and beneficial part of the United Nations E-learning Leadership (UNEL-e)¹ programme organized by the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC)?

For me, the highlight of the UNEL-e programme was to work with the UN System Leadership Framework. One of the defining characteristics of UN leadership is being transformational. The essence of this is to help oneself and others in developing and applying a better mindsets and transformational leadership behaviours. This can be achieved by utilising the UN System Leadership Framework, as well as exploring personal leadership styles, recognizing strengths, and overcoming relevant challenges. During the programme, I learnt that transformational leadership consists of four key I's: Idealized influence, Individual consideration, Inspirational motivation, and Intellectual stimulation.

AL: Has being aware of different layers of transformational leadership helped you in being more effective at work?

¹ United Nations System Staff College, UN Emerging Leaders e-Learning, <https://www.unssc.org/courses/un-emerging-leaders-e-learning-1>

As a professional working in a multicultural environment, I have encountered situations which showed me how we face biases in the way we read emotions and we express them. These biases stem from our background, experiences, and culture. However, being aware of their existence, the various reactions of individuals, even if not able to fully eliminate such biases, can make a significant impact on our working relationships, teamwork, or in solving conflicts. The intensity with which we display our emotions differs between cultures, as well as gender, and this can affect workplace communication significantly.

AL: Can you please elaborate on the concept of Idealized influence?

Idealized influence refers to being a role model for transformational behaviour. Basically, you behave in a consistent manner with high integrity, through your messages, your spoken words, and the actions that you carry out. Inspirational motivation is motivating through a shared vision and sense of purpose and meaning. Individual consideration refers to acting in a way which facilitates progress to better understand your peers and colleagues on individual level and promote learning and development. This stimulates trust, and a sense of cohesiveness among the group with a shared vision. Encouraging people with whom you work with to think independently, reframe challenges, assumptions, express alternative views and seek potential solutions to promote intellectual stimulation. I remember well an inspiring message from one of my mentors that “a leader’s success consists in building new leaders”.

AL: Can you provide a concrete example on how your gained knowledge during UNEL-e programme was utilised?

At the end of the exercise, I checked how the four key I’s are reflected in my daily actions through self-reflection and gathering feedback from my colleagues. For example, some cultures may consider it important to downplay and conceal emotions, by speaking “rationally”, to ensure harmony, by endorsing maturity and efficiency. On the other hand, other cultures value expressing one’s emotions, for one to understand the importance of the matter. The underlying values may be honesty and authenticity. As staff members at the UN, we need to be aware of these differences so we can focus on others’ positive intentions and not on the judgements we may have about how emotions are expressed. We had in-depth discussions, on these biases, illustrating them with case studies during interactive webinars.

AL: What are other strengths of the UNEL-e programme?

The 360° leadership assessment report from this programme provides an additional insight into my skills, has helped me better structure my leadership roadmap, and defined my own personal development plan. I attained a snapshot of my current situation, contrasting the way I think and act in my work, with the way my behaviour is perceived by my co-workers. Knowing how to adapt my leadership style in line with expectations of good leadership, helps to increase my ability to influence others and drive change.



Ms Constantin at the International Conference on Fast Reactors and Related Fuel Cycles: Sustainable Clean Energy for the Future (FR22), organized by the IAEA's Department of Nuclear Energy in Vienna, Austria during 19-22 April 2022