

## Interview with the 2021 CEEMAN Teacher of the Year - Dietmar Sternad



*Dietmar Sternad*

**Živa Žmavc Thongvanh:** Your nomination for the CEEMAN Teacher of the Year Award points out the original innovative teaching methodology that you have developed, the IB.sim International Business Simulation. In this simulation game the students get the chance to explore the challenges of internationalization and of creating and running a global business in a very engaging and interactive way. Could you tell us more about it? How does it work and what inspired you to develop this method?

**Dietmar Sternad:** The main idea behind the simulation game was to give my students a chance to get a hands-on experience of the complexity of international business. In the simulation, teams of students work in “virtual companies.” They make strategic decisions (e.g. which markets and market niches to enter, or how to position themselves in the market), investment decisions, manufacturing decisions, sales decisions, financing decisions, and trading decisions (trading between teams is possible and encouraged). After each decision round, the teams automatically receive feedback about the impact of their decision in a dynamically changing market environment. A market model simulates real market conditions, and the teams are also confronted with external events and developments that could also happen to real companies on international markets.

The market results and implications are discussed after each round, and after all six virtual simulation “years” are completed, we hold a debriefing session with an in-depth reflection and discussion of the learnings, including establishing links to relevant concepts in strategy and international business management.

The inspiration for the simulation game actually came from my students. I have noticed that their energy level always goes up whenever they have interesting and challenging tasks to work on in

teams, especially also when there is some kind of competitive element involved. So I thought about how I could get across the main concepts of international strategic management in a highly engaging way for my students – and that led to the design of the IB.sim International Business Simulation.

**ŽŽT:** The game was originally developed as a board game and later transformed into an interactive online environment. Given the differences between in-class and online teaching, what was the biggest challenge you encountered in the adaptation process?

**DS:** Yes, the simulation started out as a board game which we played several times in around seven hours in one-day in-class sessions. It was a great experience, especially because you could also feel the emotional states that the teams were going through—with a lot of buzz and excitement.

*I am deeply convinced that learning experiences are more profound when there are emotions involved.*

As an online simulation these immediate emotions, which also result from the competing teams directly seeing each other, are less visible, which is also one of the main challenges. On the other hand, however, the online version also opened up new possibilities for cooperation across borders. For example, we played one round of the simulation together with student

teams from Skidmore College in New York, which was a wonderful cross-institutional and cross-cultural learning experience.

**ŽŽT:** What do the students enjoy most about learning through this kind of methodology? What is the biggest value-add for them?

**DS:** One of my students gave me the following feedback about the learning experience with the simulation: “We are able to feel how the decision-making process feels like and also feel the consequence based on a decision made.”

*I think that it is this deeper learning and understanding that comes from actually experiencing how it “feels” to make a decision and to directly see the results rather than just learning about it in theory that makes the difference.*

Students also appreciated the opportunity to put into practice what they learned about international strategic management, that everyone was involved, that it helped them to develop their strategic thinking skills, and especially also, as one of my students said, that they were “having fun with colleagues and strengthening relationships.” It was really great to get such positive feedback, and I was particularly happy to hear that the simulation helped the students to acquire both professional and social skills.

**ŽŽT:** Is there a chance that this simulation game could be used by other institutions as well?

**DS:** We are currently looking for a distribution partner for the simulation game with the aim to make it available to other institutions too. We will of course let the CEEMAN community know when we have found a suitable partner.

**ŽŽT:** You have received several national and international awards for creating case-based teaching materials and for teaching excellence. What does the CEEMAN Champion Award mean to you?

**DS:** The CEEMAN Champion Award is a very special award for me, because it comes from the place that sparked my passion for teaching. Over a decade ago, I was deeply inspired by the great teachers that I met at IMTA. I had the great privilege to be able to learn so much from Arshad Ahmad, Joe Pons, Krzysztof Obloj, JB Kassarian and Jim Ellert – wonderful people who teach with a big heart. For me, the Champion Award actually looks a bit like a baton that is used in a relay race. And I also see it this way, as a kind of “Olympic torch” that I was lucky to receive from others. I just try to keep the flame burning with a lot of passion for teaching and then, hopefully, will also be able to hand it over to the next generation of teachers who would like to make a difference in the lives of their students.

## Interview with the 2021 CEEMAN Researcher of the Year - Tomislav Hernaus



Tomislav Hernaus

**Živa Žmavc Thongvanh:** You have published over a hundred peer-reviewed papers, out of which four authored and three edited books, nearly two dozen book chapters, and a significant number of scientific papers in top-tier academic journals to date. What is your secret recipe for thriving in academia?

**Tomislav Hernaus:** I do not believe in secret recipes, although it would be handful to have the magic potion made by Gauls (see Asterix: The Secret of the Magic Potion, 2018). Each individual has to find his or her own 'key' to unlock the academic success. What worked for me, might not be optimal for someone else. As another CEEMAN Research Champion (Matej Černe from the University of Ljubljana) and I emphasized in our latest book on academic careers (Becoming an Organizational Scholar: Navigating the Academic Odyssey, 2021, p. 240), "The uniqueness of each individual has to be emphasized, leading us not to a universal or average academic that we should all strive to be, but an authentic, original, unique one, finding his/her own place in the academic sphere not only because of unique personality traits, individual characteristics and personal strengths but also weaknesses, which determine who we are." In my case, being curious, persistent and humble, as well as having an inspirational and supportive research team, made a difference.

*I guess it is all about the attitude. Only intrinsic motivation and a sense of calling could wake you up early in the mornings and keep you awake long into the nights.*

**ŽŽT:** Your multi-level research interests include organization design, business process management, human resources (HR) organization, work design and job interventions, innovative work behavior, and knowledge hiding. What would be the one key recommendation that you would give to

management practitioners on the basis of your research?

**TH:** I had a luxury of being able to read and learn, analyze and write extensively throughout my career. A lot of ideas are out there, waiting to be picked up by practitioners; some of them are very juicy and seductive, not all are well-coined or beneficial.

*While we cannot influence the supply of information, we can definitely develop filters and process only the right stuff. At the end of the day, managers should entrust themselves and follow their gut feeling.*

No matter who recommended what, they are responsible for the outcomes. Evidence-based management is certainly helpful in reaching high-quality business decisions, yet be sure to evaluate the validity of results/conclusions before taking them for granted.

**ŽŽT:** The CEEMAN Champion Awards jury pointed out your active engagement in bridging research and management practice. In your experience, what is the best way to bridge the research-business community gap?

**TH:** We should communicate and do things together. Only by engaging in joint efforts, scientists and practitioners could develop mutual understanding and respect. Whenever possible, I use the opportunity to share and discuss the most recent theoretical insights with practitioners. It is a control check for me to see how appealing are our research ideas. On the other hand, it is equally important and even more useful for me to be an active listener, to become aware of practitioners' concerns and business challenges. Very often, sound research ideas arise from these discussions. You cannot be creative if you are not informed.

**ŽŽT:** What research topic are you currently most interested in why do you think it is important?

**TH:** Organizations are nowadays more than ever exposed to competing (strategic and functional) demands. As an organizational scholar, I am looking forward to study organizational paradoxes and dualities across different levels of analysis (i.e., organizational/system, team/unit, and individual/job). Our four-year research project "Multilevel organization design configurations: Understanding the heterogeneity-homogeneity duality" initiated at the beginning of year 2021 (<https://sites.google.com/net.efzg.hr/multiorgdual>) will tackle the issue of how organizations do things similarly or differently (design choices), as well as address differences in how well they do things (capturing persistent performance differences).

The extent of relative similarities and differences among strategic initiatives and actions, structural forms and workflow processes, as well as people management practices in an organizational population will be in our research focus. Hopefully, we look forward to reveal high-performing organizational configurations (as well as recognize the low-performing ones) that occur within - or between- different business contexts. Such insights are much needed if we want to make our companies (Croatian, Slovenian and Serbian organizations are the subject of research) more competitive in the global arena.

**ŽŽT:** You have received several awards and honors for your scientific contributions. What does the CEEMAN Researcher of the Year Award mean to you?

**TH:** The CEEMAN Researcher of the Year Award is the crown of my scholarly achievements. This internationally recognized recognition represents a great career boost and will certainly motivate me to continue providing engaged service to academia and business, both domestic and internationally.

**Interview with the 2021  
CEEMAN Responsible Management  
Educator of the Year  
- Jaliyyah Bello**



Jaliyyah Bello

**Živa Žmavc Thongvanh:** Your nomination for CEEMAN Responsible Management Educator of the Year by Faculty of Business and Law, Coventry University points out a significant number of broad and varied sustainability projects that you have initiated or were involved in up until now. Which one is the dearest to you personally? Could you tell us about it?

**Jaliyyah Bello:** The Carbon Literacy Training (CLT), I delivered as part of PRME COP26 campaign is dearest to me, so far. I took the training in November 2020, joined the UN PRME Working Group on Climate Change and Environment, and committed to share the knowledge. Seeing this come through in 2021 is heartwarming. I delivered 4 sessions of CLT to a small number of academics from Coventry, India, and Mexico. It is hoped that academics will pass the knowledge to their learners by incorporating aspects of CLT into learning resources possibly creating high impact climate solutions.

**ŽŽT:** What or who inspired you to become so active in the field of sustainability?

**JB:**

*The science is clear, our actions or inactions have consequences. Since we are all in the business of living, being socially, environmentally, and economically responsible, we all have a role to play in the field of sustainability.*

Second, it is our responsibility as educators to equip our learners with right knowledge towards a more sustainable future, and to be leaders of positive change.

**ŽŽT:** You have done an outstanding job in integrating sustainability within the curriculum through a series of audits of modules, with 86% of modules reached covering sustainability. What were the biggest challenges you faced in achieving that?

**JB:** The greatest challenge was doing this during Covid, at a time we abruptly switched to online classes. Individual module online audit meetings during transition did not allow for subject group deliberation and social moderation.

**ŽŽT:** What advice would you give to the educators in terms of embedding sustainability into disciplines that are not traditionally linked to sustainability?

**JB:** The time has come to stop referring to disciplines as “not traditionally linked to sustainability”. Once we understand what sustainability means, we will realise that all disciplines are linked to sustainability. For instance, significant development is observed in the Accounting and Finance subject group with emerging themes on sustainability and climate change.

*My advice therefore is to engage, join networks, implement peer learning, and eventually modify practice.*

Many professional organisations run CPDs on sustainability and I found the CPDs to influence my academic practice in a positive way.

**ŽŽT:** What does the CEEMAN Champion Award mean to you personally and for your institution?

**JB:** I am grateful to the leadership of Coventry Business School for nominating me and CEEMAN for electing me the winner. To receive an award from such prestigious institution for the work I enjoy and devote my time to, is gratifying. It is the highlight of my career. Business schools are consistently charged with the responsibility of teaching new and relevant skills therefore, embedding sustainability competencies is vital in all we do as we continue to cultivate ethical culture in our students.

Coventry Business School is a proud global business school, transforming the world through teaching and learning, research, and enterprise. CEEMAN membership contributes immensely to our Internationalisation agenda and the CEEMAN Champion Award is an affirmation of our business school's and University's Internationalisation values, and dedication to higher education.

## Interview with the 2021 CEEMAN Leader of the Year - Gulnara Kurenkeyeva



Gulnara Kurenkeyeva

**Živa Žmavc Thongvanh:** You were the long-term Dean of the Graduate School of Business, first Vice Rector, and now the Rector of Almaty Management University. Under your leadership, GSB has grown significantly and is now an important institution in the region with international accreditations and world rankings. Did you always know that you would follow this career path? When did you realize that you can be a strong leader?

**Gulnara Kurenkeyeva:** I am honored to receive the CEEMAN Champions Award. This is a recognition of not only individual achievement, but of a teamwork. AlmaU Graduate School of Business as the leading business school is actively advancing business education and advocating its high standards in Kazakhstan and abroad. Thank you for your support. It is a privilege to be recognized internationally, especially this year. 2021 marks the 25 years of GSB leadership and impact.

Answering your question, the career progress was of little interest to me. Of all positions, I have always chosen those that are most interesting for me not from the career advancement standpoint, but from the standpoint where growth opportunities professionally and personally open for my self-actualization. The most important and inspiring for me is to have a valuable team to lead.

Initially I had no goal of becoming a Rector or Vice-Rector. The position that I took with special excitement is the Dean of the AlmaU Graduate School of Business. This is a position that allows you to work in the field – with partners, students, faculty.

I believe that the center of gravity at the university should be in the schools. The fact that we have become leaders in the region is a merit of the schools' leaders and the team.

*A leader is not a one-person story. Leadership can only be shown when there is a team. The leader's mission is to create a team that performs various tasks and works as one organism. When you have formed such a team and lead it forward, this is the moment when you can say "I am the leader".*

**ŽŽT:** What was your vision for the School when you first took over its lead in 2014, when it was established? Has that vision changed over the years?

**GK:** Firstly, in 2014 there were definitely big ambitions, and there are goals that we have achieved, and some that have not been achieved. Now we want to improve on international recognition by accreditation agencies. There are goals that are still on our agenda since 2014, I hope that the new team and the new dean of the Graduate School of Business will be able to achieve this.

Secondly, in terms of rankings, actually, in 2014 we did not participate in any rankings, except for the Eduniversal ranking of business schools. Initially, we didn't even aim at rankings. Everything changed after I have personally took

part as an expert in accreditation of other business schools in China, France, Russia, and Ukraine. I saw world-class business schools and I compared our level with theirs. In those moments, I realized that our school can reach the world level and even be recognized for its excellence. My task as a Dean was always to inspire the team that we are going in the right direction, meeting the global standards' requirements.

When we passed the first AMBA accreditation, and then were re-accredited, we got to understanding that all these international standards are becoming our DNA.

**ŽŽT:** What was the biggest leadership challenge you have faced in your career? How did you overcome this?

**GK:** Probably for me it is to build a team. Sometimes you're wrong. There were different situations, but every time you have to ask yourself what your mistake was, admit the mistake, and then try to fix it.

*The most difficult part for leadership is admitting your mistake. And the main thing here is to take steps to improve the situation.*

**ŽŽT:** Your nomination points out that you have declared social responsibility as one of the main values of the School, and you and your team personally demonstrate these values. Could you tell us more about that? How does it look in practice?

**GK:** Social responsibility is not a one-off action. This is a value system. Social responsibility is a cross-cutting issue for all our activities and programs. It goes through each course, and all lecturers understand that this needs to be promoted. This is part of our mission, and instilling social responsibility in our students is part of our daily life.

*Moreover, social responsibility is impossible to embed if you do not demonstrate it yourself.*

There are such projects when we provide grants to people with disabilities, but here it is important to understand that providing grants is only part of the work. There is another part when these people need to be adapted to the group. In Kazakhstan, the policy of inclusion has just embarked on the path of development. We work with faculty to engage students with special needs, and work with other students to accept them.

This is not only a question of personal development. As a result of this complex work, we have graduates of this scholarship program who help their own community. We see how almost all of them become leaders in their industries and do big projects. For example, our alumna Zakhira Begalieva, who is the chairman of the public foundation "ITeachMe Competence Development Center". This project aims to train people with disabilities, adapts them, and teaches digital skills. More than 4000 people across Kazakhstan are graduates of her project.

Another example is the Business Lifehacks series of free open webinars. As part of the project, our teachers provide free consulting assistance to businesses in this difficult time of Covid. We organized alumni together to discuss how to get out of a crisis situation during the pandemic. We were one of the first business schools which conducted a series of master classes on how to organize work remotely, how to support employees, while bringing not only HR, but also IT tools. As soon as the government started talking about quarantine, in 3 days we created and delivered the first webinar.

Over the past 2 years, we have delivered many master classes as a part of our social responsibility. A huge amount of work has been done. When we got out of the strict quarantine, we were very tired. It was work for 12 hours a day, but we believed and understood that these



webinars should be held to help the society, because everyone was pressured with the new life and work conditions.

**ŽŽT:** What does the CEEMAN Leader of the Year Award mean for you personally and for your institution?

**GK:** The CEEMAN Leader of the Year Award is valuable because it is the recognition of our activities by the professional international community. This is a recognition of the merits of a huge number of people who believe in their leader and trust. It is a recognition that Kazakhstani business schools can be an example of leadership in the world practice. This is the proof that we are on the right path.