

Interview with CEEMAN Champions 2015

by Maja Medja Vidic

Through the establishment of the CEEMAN Champion Awards in 2010, CEEMAN has committed itself to promoting and rewarding outstanding achievements of individuals associated with CEEMAN in areas that are considered critical for success in business education and management development: teaching, research, institutional management, and responsible management education. The CEEMAN Champions are among those from whom we can get first-hand insights into their personal and institutional success stories and an inspiration for our own endeavors for excellence and outstanding achievements. Their achievements and experiences can also offer learning lessons of broader value. For this reason, we asked the 2015 Champions - Prof. Can Akkan, Sabanci University, School of Management, Turkey (in the category of teaching), Prof. Dorota Dobija, Kozminski University, Poland (research category), and Dr. Marcela Ramirez-Pasillas, Jönköping International Business School (JIBS), Sweden (responsible management education category) - to respond to questions concerning the areas of their excellence, business education, and leadership development in general.

CEEMAN Interview with 2015 CEEMAN Champion Can Akkan

Maja Medja Vidic: What are the teaching-related challenges that your colleagues and you personally come across most often? Have these challenges changed since you first started teaching?

Can Akkan: The challenge that we come across most often is probably making the classroom experience more interesting, engaging, and rewarding. These challenges are, of course, essentially demands coming from the students. I would not say these challenges did not exist 20 years ago when I started teaching, because there were students with such demands even at that time. However, the nature and extent of these challenges have changed. If we look at different student groups or segments, we can understand the dynamics behind these changes. The new generations of undergraduates find it more difficult to concentrate unless they are actively involved, and they are used to instant gratification. They like to be rewarded quickly and question the value that they get from education.

On the other hand, more and more adult learners come to universities to learn management. Our Executive MBA program has been our fastest growing program. Due to the fact that they are busy professionals who are using their limited free time to attend our part-time programs, they are much more demanding in terms of their classroom experience. I should also point out

that these three characteristics of classroom experience are inter-related but they are distinct aspects of teaching that professors should consider separately. An interesting and engaging classroom experience would be more likely to be perceived as rewarding, but unless the content matches the students' needs and goals it would not be perceived as fully rewarding.

MMV: In your nomination for the CEEMAN Champion Award in teaching by Sabanci University, it was emphasized that you have been a passionate advocate of active learning in the classroom and innovations that you have introduced throughout the university. Could you tell us more about it?

CA: Due to my area of specialization, I have been teaching mainly quantitative courses, such as statistics and analytics (quantitative or mathematical modeling). So when I had the chance to design an introduction to a management course for our new Bachelor in Management program at Sabanci, I designed that course in such a way that it involved heavy use of MS Excel for all the requirements of the course, including the so called "in-class exercises".

The course contents were heavily influenced by courses designed by Prof. Erhan Erkut at the University of Alberta, Canada. My goal was to keep a classroom of about 90 students active while I was teaching. Since Sabanci University provided laptop computers to all its undergraduate students, I decided to use a web site to dis-



Can Akkan, receiver of the 2015 CEEMAN Champion Award in the teaching category

tribute to the students the examples that I worked on and the in-class exercises that the students had to complete. As a result, students did not just passively listen to me but kept working busily on the examples and exercises.

With a carefully selected and designed set of topics and a term project involving a preparation of a business plan, the course became interesting, engaging, and rewarding. It became one of the most popular courses in the university. Our annual intake is around 650 students. Almost 300 of them take that course each year. As a result, a colleague of mine and I received the Graduating Class Teaching Award.

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Encouraged by the success of this pedagogy, I gave active learning seminars to new professors hired by the university every year, and the current professors at the School of Management. Most of my colleagues started using active learning techniques after some changes that they felt they had to make so as to adapt the courses to their teaching styles).

All 650 first-year students take a science course. When it was being redesigned, the committee responsible for this project introduced active learning elements that I promoted both in lectures and recitations (problem sessions). The changes were welcomed by the students, and not only the course evaluations but also the students' learning performance improved measurably.

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MMV: As in any other profession, achieving excellence in teaching requires talent, a lot of efforts, and passion, as well as continuous learning and self-development. Faculty development efforts aimed at improving teaching skills play an important role. How do you see the complementarity of the programs carried out within an institution and those that are inter-institutional and international in their approach and nature, such as CEEMAN's International Management Teachers Academy (IMTA)?

CA: I believe that both intra-institutional and inter-institutional programs are essential and complimentary. I started experimenting with active learning in quantitative courses in the mid-1990's, when students did not have laptops but there were computer labs. Later, I benefitted from listening to seminars given by passionate teachers, such as Erhan Erkut of the University of Alberta, and then I attended one of the INFORMS Teaching of Management Science summer workshops in the US. Such engagement with the international community of professors who love teaching helped me learn and gave me the courage and the motivation to work further and experiment on these pedagogical approaches.

MMV: You and other CEEMAN 2015 Champions have already received a number of prestigious awards and recognitions for your past achievements. In this context, how do you view the CEEMAN Champion Award that you have just

received? Related to this is the question of how this award was perceived by your colleagues and the institution as a whole.

Most research universities claim that teaching and research are equally important but this is easier said than done, as teaching lacks visibility.

CA: The awards I had received before were those that were given by the institution that I was teaching at. CEEMAN's award is the first international award that I have received, this makes it very special for me. Research productivity has a lot of international visibility but teaching does not. So, international awards given by respected institutions, such as CEEMAN, fill an important void. Most research universities claim that teaching and research are equally important but this is easier said than done, as teaching lacks visibility. My institution announced this award to students, faculty, and alumni. I have received congratulatory remarks from all these stakeholders. A former student who took my Introduction to Management course 12 years ago wrote that he still thought that it was the best course he had ever taken and I deserved this award! The news spread outside my university as well, and a colleague from another Turkish university invited me to give a seminar at his university's teaching center.

CEEMAN Interview with 2015 CEEMAN Champion Dorota Dobija

Maja Medja Vidic: Dorota, in your nomination by Kozminski University it was pointed out that you have an extensive research record on your main research topic of corporate governance mechanisms for better monitoring of the information gap between an organization's management and its stakeholders. The CEEMAN Champion Awards committee found your research highly relevant. What are the key recommendations that you derive from your research?

Dorota Dobija: Let me first explain what I understand by corporate governance. It is a system that should balance the expectations of different actors and their selfish behaviors. It is a dynamic system that starts to evolve once its balance has been disturbed, until it reaches a point of apparent and relative equilibrium. New scandals or crises produce further imbalance. The events of the past decade have proven a significant disproportion in the access to information about



Dorota Dobija, receiver of the 2015 CEEMAN Champion Award in the research category

the actual management activities of other actors in the financial markets. Therefore, we have witnessed a growth in the number of regulations aimed at improving access to company information, including financial information, but also an improvement of information quality.

The main conclusion from my research is that corporate governance systems are contextual ... Therefore policy makers should be very careful when imposing different corporate governance regulations on companies.

Furthermore, investors who choose between alternative investment projects have more possibilities to compare the available options. I have focused my research (in part conducted with other scholars) in the area of corporate governance on two issues: the functioning and effectiveness of audit committees and the role of financial auditors in effective systems of corporate governance. The main conclusion from my research is that corporate governance systems are contextual. They are different because of the different actors and business environments for which they are designed. The Polish corporate governance system is totally different from the British one, and even the German one. It is not because there are one-tier and two-tier systems, but because of differences in economic history, economic forces, ownership structure, stage of development of the capital market, economy, culture, acceptable social norms, and so forth.

It is therefore very difficult to apply and integrate borrowed concepts even if they work well in their original environment. They may seem totally alien in a different environment. Independence, an audit committee, and fair value may mean different things in different countries. Therefore policy makers should be very careful when imposing different corporate governance regulations on companies. It is not surprising that audit committees in Central and Eastern Europe usually play a ceremonial role rather than provide effective monitoring of financial reporting of listed companies.

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MMV: You are vice-rector for research and faculty development at Kozminski University. You were also involved in various research activities and you chaired the 2015 conference of the European Academy of Management (EURAM). In your view, how could business schools achieve better integration of research in the teaching process? And how could business benefit from research?

DD: Just yesterday, when I was summing up the course that I taught this semester, I started to talk to my students about my latest research results. The project is about women's involvement in corporate governance. The results show that women can have an impact on the quality of financial reporting only when they are given voice. They should be chairs of supervisory boards, like in Poland. I was surprised to see the students silently listening to what I was saying. When I asked them why, they told me that I had caught their attention as what I was saying was interesting. I realized that theoretical concepts can be explained more easily when they relate to some research results or some practice. More importantly, students want to be involved in interesting research projects and actively participate. The projects however will have to have some practical or

policy-related application rather than be based solely on abstract theoretical constructs.

MMV: You and the other CEEMAN 2015 Champions have already received a number of prestigious awards and recognition for your past achievements. In this context, what do you think of the CEEMAN Champion Award that you have just received? Related to this is the question of how this award was perceived by your colleagues and your institution as a whole. This is not the first time that faculty members from Kozminski University have received a CEEMAN Champion Award.

DD: Yes, indeed this is not the first time. Professor Andrzej Kozminski and Professor Wojciech Gasparski received the CEEMAN Champion Awards before, but this is the first time that an award has been given to Kozminski University in the research category. This award is important for the Kozminski University community as a signal that research is embedded in the DBA program of the university. Above all, it is extremely important to me personally. I am so proud that I was able to continue to be engaged in research and at the same time hold the position of vice-rector for research at Kozminski University and have a baby. This requires a lot of strong will and commitment, but I think it pays off. I was raised in a family where self-development, discovery, and hard work were very important values. I think this self-development need is a very important feature of my nature. I get engaged in various research projects not because I need to or because I want to publish something. I do it because I love to discover and learn new things.

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I also think that I would not be credible as a research administrator if I was not working on my own research projects. I knew from my personal experience how much effort is required to write a research proposal and get external funding, what it is like to lead a successful research team, or how much time it takes to have a paper

accepted for publication. I can share my experience with others, and thus hope to influence the research spirit of Kozminski University.

CEEMAN Interview with 2015 CEEMAN Champion Marcela Ramirez-Pasillas

Maja Medja Vidic: Marcela, your nomination for the Responsible Management Award states that you became the PRME project manager in 2013 when Jönköping International Business School (JIBS) made the decision to include responsibility as one of its guiding principles. How was this done in practice?

To champion the "responsible in action" element, I built a strategy, anchored on three pillars: bottom-up work, lateral work, and top-down work ... with these three pillars, JIBS is building a stronger foundation of responsibility and sustainability.

Marcela Ramirez-Pasillas: JIBS is a young, EQUIS-accredited institution, situated in the heart of Scandinavia. Founded in 1994, with a vision to be a modern, entrepreneurial, and international business school, JIBS has thrived and grown in close collaboration with regional businesses in Sweden and through participation in international forums.

As a part of the continued work on honing our mission to "advance the theory and practice of business, with a specific focus on entrepreneurship, ownership and renewal" – and with reference to feedback from EFMD – JIBS has decided to strengthen its guiding principles to be "international at heart, entrepreneurial in mind, and responsible in action", and incorporate them further in its strategic work.

One of the school's first steps was to become a signatory to UN's Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). At the start of this project in 2013, JIBS appointed me PRME project manager.



Marcela Ramirez-Pasillas, receiver of the 2015 CEEMAN Champion Award in the responsible management education category

To champion the "responsible in action" element, I built a strategy, anchored on three pillars: bottom-up work, lateral work, and top-down work. The bottom-up work is centered on building partnerships with students and empowering them to become change agents. Students co-create their education with teachers, students, and the companies that they interact with, thus influencing the future of business schools. Together with a master student, I launched Re-Act, a responsible-in-action student club. The current (third) board of students has scaled up this organization, transforming it into a fully independent student club.

To promote responsible and sustainable business school leadership, it is essential to engage faculty, students and management in the development of initiatives and activities ... With the development of these vehicles, business schools can build a stronger foundation to promote responsible leadership.

The lateral work is centered on "walking the talk"; that is, leading by example by learning how to build an education for sustainability. I employed PRME and the global challenges of sustainabil-

ity as a tool to improve my own work, redesign courses, and conduct research.

The top-down work consisted of the creation of arenas for dialogue and competence development of staff and students, for instance by organizing seminars for academic staff as an arena for exchanging ideas and knowledge. We co-organized the first mini-conference on "Business Models and Sustainability" with the Center for Business in Society at the University of Gothenburg.

This award provides legitimacy for the work that JIBS is doing, and motivates people to find ways to work with the global challenge of sustainability.

Overall, with these three pillars, JIBS is building a stronger foundation of responsibility and sustainability.

MMV: What do you see as the main challenges for business schools in promoting the idea of sustainable development and responsible leadership? What long-term benefits do you see from the inclusion of the topic of responsible management education in the curricula and strategy of institutions?

MRP: To promote responsible and sustainable business school leadership, it is essential to engage faculty, students and management in the development of initiatives and activities. For instance, we organize faculty seminars, student seminars, and conference days with researchers and practitioners specialized in responsibility and sustainability. Thus, faculty seminars serve as a learning vehicle to inspire the inclusion of responsibility and sustainability in teaching activities and research agendas. They also provide an arena for networking with key faculty from other universities.

Student seminars and events serve as an enabling vehicle to inspire students to proceed with alternative career paths by learning about a new subject. They engage them to work with sustainability. Enabling vehicles need to be key elements in the curriculum. Students participate in guest lectures or seminars and link what they have learned with their course subjects and individual interests. We also need to collaborate with

the top management of business schools and entire universities. Continuous support from top managers is important to advance the work on responsibility and sustainability. With the development of these vehicles, business schools can build a stronger foundation to promote responsible leadership.

MMV: What do you think of the CEEMAN Champion Award that you have just received? Related to this is the question of how this award was perceived by your colleagues and your institution as a whole.

MRP: It has been an amazing experience. An award like this is never the outcome of the work of one individual. It is the outcome of many efforts. My colleagues surprised me with delicious cakes to celebrate the award! My colleagues, students, and friends from my home country, Mexico, celebrated this achievement with me. This award provides legitimacy for the work that JIBS is doing, and motivates people to find ways to work with the global challenge of sustainability. I am thankful to CEEMAN and the reviewers that were involved in the process!