

Interview with CEEMAN Champions 2016

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 2016 Champions to respond to questions concerning the areas of their excellence, business education, and leadership development in general.

Interview with Krzysztof Rybinski, winner of Institutional Management Award

Olga Veligurska: Krzysztof, in less than two years at Narxoz University you have managed to implement a very comprehensive reform of institutional practices and processes. What is your vision and what institution-building and institutional management philosophy and strategy did you develop to achieve your aspirations and objectives?

Krzysztof Rybinski: We are building a value-based organization. Peter Drucker once said that corporate culture eats strategy for breakfast. I would extend this also to corporate governance. We believe that values are always at the core of every successful institutional reform, and even the very best strategy and governance system will not succeed if they are not based on values. At Narxoz, every stakeholder - management, faculty, staff, students, and graduates - know our core values: "I am a leader. We are a team. All for the student". And not only do they know these

values by heart, but they implement them in their everyday activities. Our values were developed through many internal and external consultations. We benefitted from the wisdom, engagement, and passion of all stakeholders. Values matter a lot to us. For example, during our annual assessment process we ask ourselves whether management, staff, and faculty acted in line with these core values.

The second principle is the involvement of all Narxoz stakeholders in the process of university management. University strategy and its annual revisions are developed with the active participation of all stakeholders. We meet, argue, and disagree, but at the end we always have a strategy that is owned by all our people, because they have contributed to its creation. Students and faculty members participate in all university committees with a right to vote. Corporate partners and students participate in the annual review of our academic programs and research projects.

The third principle is closely related to our vision to become the best and most innovative economic university in Central Asia. We create and sustain the culture of innovation. We invest in and develop new learning technologies, such as modern e-learning, using Moodle, gamification, and other recent methodological advances. We abolished the traditional style of teaching and use the flipped classroom method across a wide range of courses. We gave up writing traditional degree theses. Now students work in groups on diploma projects to learn how to be part of a team. Topics for diploma projects are sourced from our business partners and students contribute to solving real life problems. We understand that in the 21st century the role of the university

Krzysztof Rybinski



has changed. Knowledge is now easily accessible from Professor Google. Our role is to facilitate the learning process and make sure that students find their right professional path. This year, we launched a compulsory skills and attitudes test for first-year students that helps them find their talent and strengths. The test findings and a subsequent mentoring program will assist students in making right study path decisions, closing skill gaps, and building on their revealed strengths.

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The fourth principle is continuous improvement. We constantly look for new ideas. We implement the world's best practices and invest sizeable resources in the training of our faculty and staff. The most recent example is a special seminar conducted at Narxoz together with CEEMAN on case-writing and case-teaching by legendary IMTA instructors.

OV: The reforms that were implemented at Narxoz University fall into a wide range of areas: reforming the strategy and values of the institution, human resource management, creating a student-centered environment, fundraising, fighting plagiarism and corruption, and innovations in teaching and learning. To undertake such a complex transformation of an institution and get your colleagues on board is an immense task. Where did you see the biggest risks and how did you ensure the commitment of the team?

KR: The biggest challenge in such a massive reform implementation is the sustainability of changes. Given the limited human and financial resources that we have, we must plan carefully how to split our resources between following up on what has already been achieved and new projects. Efficient management tools are also needed to improve our internal communication. For example, the university's management uses a

Google calendar to plan all its meetings. All unit heads have access to these calendars. We have regular breakfasts and lunches with students, faculty, and staff to discuss progress and plans and receive direct feedback. Each Friday we distribute our newsletter, *Weekly Spy*, to faculty and staff to let them know what key meetings were held during the week, what decisions were taken, and what meetings and events are planned in the following week. In November we began a biweekly program of open breakfasts for faculty and staff. They will be able to come to the university cafeteria, enjoy a free breakfast, network, and discuss any topic.

We make sure that there are many occasions where people can meet, give their feedback, and ask questions of senior management. These meetings help us to make sure that senior management is aware of all emerging problems as early as possible. They also contribute to the creation of a culture of open opinion exchange.

To mitigate these risks, we make sure that the university strategy is cascaded to university units and individuals. Every manager, faculty, and staff member has a set of KPIs cascaded from the strategy. During our annual review process, the Human Resource Management Committee carefully analyzes these KPIs together with other indicators, such as findings from student surveys after each course, and takes decisions about bonuses, wage increases, and promotions. The efficiency of the KPI system is reviewed every year. This year, we are introducing the 270-degree assessment principle for units that have internal clients.

OV: Narxoz University received CEEMAN International Quality Accreditation (IQA) in July 2016, a prestigious international award for institutional excellence and relevance. Based on your experience, what are the main benefits from the institutional accreditation process and award in the context of business education and management development at your institution and in Kazakhstan?

KR: The CEEMAN institutional accreditation process was very useful. The accreditation questions helped us to review our activities, reflect on the efficiency of our key business processes, and rethink our practices. During the six months prior to the expert visit, all university units actively participated in the preparation process, which led to the implementation of many innovations and the improvement of our management practices.

The expert team visit was very valuable. We received a number of deep and insightful recommendations that are being implemented, leading to further improvement of our academic and executive programs. But this also had another very positive impact. People who worked very hard in the past two years reforming the university, and felt some reform fatigue, were

very encouraged by the words of support from CEEMAN experts. This gave them new impetus and energy to continue their efforts.

The CEEMAN accreditation process involves the entire university, all its units. It is a unique opportunity to look at a mirror and see what we can do better. I would honestly say, it is very hard work. But it is definitely one of the most useful exercises I can imagine, and it creates long-lasting value, helping us to become a better university. We have measurable proof that this is so. Our recruitment this year is up 50 percent in a period when the number of high school graduates is at an all-time low. I would wholeheartedly recommend that other rectors apply for CEEMAN accreditation. It is not only a quality assessment process, but above all an exercise that makes you stronger, better, and even more determined to continue reforming.

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OV: You personally and Narxoz University have already received a number of prestigious national and international awards. Narxoz University's position in the business schools rankings is further recognition of your results. In this context, how do you perceive your CEEMAN Champion Award? What does it mean to Narxoz University as a whole?

KR: Although the CEEMAN Champion Award is personal, as I said during the award ceremony, it is the Narxoz team that has received it. "We are a team" is one of our core values. It helped us achieve this success. It is a prestigious international recognition that we do a good job, that our institution offers quality education to students, and that Narxoz is a well-run institution. Both the accreditation and the award make it easier to find new international partners, to launch new international projects, and to enhance our reputation as a high-quality institution.

For me personally, this award is the most important one that I have received in my life. Our goal is to help thousands of young people and business professionals become successful, advance their careers, and become responsible citizens who have a positive and lasting impact on their companies, communities, and countries. The Champion Award for Institutional Management not only confirmed that we achieve this goal but also gave me great satisfaction and even more motivation to continue our efforts to become the best and most innovative economic university in Central Asia.

Interview with Vladimir Soloviev, winner of Institutional Support Award

Olga Veligurska: Vladimir, you have been the chief information officer at the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation since 2011. You are responsible for information technology strategy development and implementation. You are also in charge of the introduction of new technologies that increase the efficiency of knowledge generation and propagation and ensure that the information technology infrastructure satisfies the present and future expectations of the users. What are the greatest accomplishments in this area that you are personally most proud of?

Vladimir Soloviev: I think that it is great that the Financial University has rethought the concept of a computer lab. In the 21st century, all students have several computational devices including PCs and notebooks, smartphones, and tablets, and even smart TVs. So, a computer lab in a university is a vestige. At the Financial University, students and teachers can use all the specialist software required in their educational or research activities, not only in the computer labs, but also via the Internet from anywhere on earth and from any device. How does this work in a major university? Students and professors log into their accounts on their personal devices and start using applications installed on the university cloud. There is no need to purchase additional licenses, rely on the system administrator's help to set up personal devices, or buy additional servers.

What is available on the users' devices is not only standard IBM, Microsoft, SAS, MathWorks, TC, and Diasoft software. The university offers its students interesting, practical training based on two types of business games developed in the university: computer simulators and virtual labs.

Simulators are software applications that model real markets and organizations' behavior. For example, in the Corporate Management simulator students are divided into teams representing companies working on the same market. They

Vladimir Soloviev



assign themselves roles and make decisions that influence their companies' market positions. This simulator is based on a mathematical model that calculates future market development depending on the players' actions and external variables. One round takes an hour, which corresponds to a company's development over half a year. During that hour, students make 400 decisions.

The use of unified communications has helped increase the productivity of faculty and staff by 30 percent due to the elimination of traveling.

Virtual laboratories are simulated working models for training future bank employees, financial directors, accountants, and analysts. In games of this type, every student plays a certain role in a virtual company. At the moment, a virtual retail bank, a virtual trading floor, a virtual accounting department, as well as a virtual training data center are available at the Financial University. All laboratories and simulators can be accessed remotely over the Internet.

There are other important new services, for example a self-service film studio. At the Financial University, there are about 2,000 courses. In the era of electronic education, there is a strong need to support all courses with video lectures. To record just 20 hours of video for each course in the traditional film studio that works 40 hours a week, it will take 20 years to produce all the video lectures. It is not the right approach because in 20 years the video materials will be absolutely outdated. The solution developed at the Financial University is the self-service film studio available to faculty on their personal devices. Without any infrastructure costs, this self-service studio allows not only for the developing of all the video lectures in one semester, but also keeps all the video materials constantly up to date. Our professors are now actively using the self-service film studio while recording video lectures using their home PCs.

The next important service implemented by the Financial University information technology team is the cloud CRM solution. Using CRM best practices has helped the Financial University improve its quality and results in terms of student, alumni, and research community relationship management.

There are a lot of other important and interesting information technology projects that were completed recently, including the integration of the university's ERP solutions into a new solid Student Information System. We also developed a new university portal with extensive personal services for students and faculty, renovated our LMS, etc.

OV: Considering the size of the University - 12 campuses in Moscow and 29 branches in various regions of Russia - what are the direct and indirect benefits of the information technology strategy? Also, what is the percentage of those who use the technology regularly?

VS: We moved from 250 physical servers to 1,000 virtual servers running on 150 physical hosts in the hybrid cloud. It is very important that the cloud gives a clear view on pricing: the total cost of one CRM workplace is 900 rubles (about 11 euro) per user per month, whereas remote access to the specialist software costs 750 rubles (about 10 euro) per user per month. As a result, our information technology expenses have dropped 50 percent while the number of information technologies services has grown significantly.

The cloud information technology infrastructure of the university is elastic and could easily support an increase in the number of students, as in 2012, when during the acquisition of several educational establishments, the number of students of the Financial University grew from 18,000 to 90,000. It can also deal with a decrease in the number of users as the university now has only 50,000 students, and there is no redundant infrastructure that is not used. Also, we reduced our time to product. We can implement new information technology services in a short time without capital expenditure. This helps us to concentrate on the projects giving the most value to university stakeholders.

Now, all 7,000 employees and 50,000 students of the Financial University use the unified communications system, including email, video conferencing, and collaboration tools. The use of unified communications has helped increase the productivity of faculty and staff by 30 percent due to the elimination of traveling between the 12 campuses in Moscow and 29 regional branches. It has decreased the cost of communication by 60 percent.

The students and faculty are actively using the opportunity to run educational software, simulators, and virtual labs on their personal devices via the Internet, and to record video lectures and video presentations using their home PCs. The increasing use of software on personal devices at home or any other place has been accompanied by a 30 percent decrease in information technology infrastructure costs due to the optimization of the license utilization in the cloud.

OV: At the end of September, during the 24th CEEMAN Annual Conference in Tallinn, we discussed the topic of "Management Education for a Digital World" and its implications for the relationship between businesses and management education. What is your opinion of this topic? Do you see management education institutions as responsive to the changes in the so-called digital world? How is your university preparing its students for the new realities?

We are also changing the way of communication with the industry, implementing joint academic programs with industry leaders

VS: Of course, in the digital world the way of using information technologies in a university is changing. The fact that our students can use the university curriculum, the training specialist software, the virtual labs, and the simulators, not only in the classroom but all over the world through the Internet, definitely constitutes a competitive advantage for the Financial University. It is important for the students not only to be able to listen to lectures and discuss case studies but also to practice working in a virtual bank, a virtual trading floor, a virtual production enterprise, etc. But that is not all that the university needs to change. We are also changing the way of communication with the industry, implementing joint academic programs with industry leaders such as Microsoft, Diasoft (a major Russian banking software vendor), KPMG, VTB Bank, the Russian Federal Tax Service, and others. The industry provides us with the latest technology, current real-world situations, and real-world data to analyze, as well as with advisors for students' capstone projects. As a result, we are not providing the students with particular competencies in mathematics, economics, and finance, but with new digital competencies in data science for finance, data analysis for economics, and Fintech. I think that the development of the digital world will never end and the continuous change of educational institutions will never stop.

OV: The results of the Financial University's cloud transformation were recognized by three Project of the Year Awards in 2014, 2015, and 2016 from Global CIO, and you personally have received a number of awards as well. What does the 2016 CEEMAN Champion Award mean to you and your institution?

VS: I have been with CEEMAN since 2007 when I graduated from IMTA. Meeting Danica Purg, JB Kassarian, Milenko Gudić, Joe Pons, Krzysztof Obłój, and Arshad Ahmad changed not only my teaching but also my whole vision as a professor and manager. In particular, after IMTA I realized that the only way to achieve success at the university is to combine teaching and research activities with industry consulting and university administration. The position of chief information officer at the Financial University is the best place to mix all four activities, and I am grateful that the Financial University has given me the wonderful opportunity to introduce and promote information technology innovations.

The CEEMAN Champion Award encourages academics and university managers to go further and seek excellence in their work. Winning a CEEMAN Champion Award is a great honor to me, boosting my confidence and inspiration to realize new ideas. I feel excited that the results of our work can be recognized by a prestigious professional society, and I am pleased to be among the 2016 CEEMAN Champions. Thanks to IMTA for changing my professional vision and thanks to the university information technology team for continuously creating new ideas during the implementation of our information technology strategy.

For the Financial University, the recognition of its information technology transformation by CEEMAN means that the university is proposing the new value not only to its students but also to the international management education community. Most importantly, understanding that our experience can be replicated in other educational institutions is very inspirational for our university.

Interview with Krzysztof Obłój, winner of Research Award

Olga Veligurska: Krzysztof, in your nomination by Kozminski University it was pointed out that you have a stellar record, both as a researcher and a teacher. You have written 18 books in four languages and are one of the few Central and Eastern European researchers to publish in leading international journals. Your work has been cited 4,306 times. The volume and peer review recognition of your publications makes you one of the most prolific Polish authors in economics and management. What is the secret of your success?

Krzysztof Obłój: It is simple. It is about doing research and publishing it. Both are the essence of an academic job, but let me briefly make a few comments that might be helpful to my younger colleagues. I always liked to do research, since my PhD dissertation, which was a longitudinal qualitative study of cooperation between research and development units and

enterprises. I converted it later into a series of articles and a book on games that actors play in organizational field. Research is like drugs. The more you do it, the more you get addicted to it. And you become more competent in it. And you like it more and more. So it becomes a virtuous circle. In my research, I studied organizational change, organizational identity, dominant logics, competitive responses, competitive perception, strategies, internationalization, and entrepreneurship in emerging economies, such as Central and Eastern Europe and China. I think that I was relatively successful as a researcher for three reasons. First, I always tried to convert these studies into conference papers and relatively early I started to attend conferences of the Academy of Management, American International Business, the European International Business Academy, the Strategic Management Society and recently EURAM. They are very competitive and a few times my papers were not accepted or ended up as working papers instead of competitive papers. But this is OK, as I got reviews and feedback which helped me improve them and convert them into publications. By the way, I have not always done this and I think it was a huge mistake of mine. I had probably 20 or more good research papers that I abandoned because I lost interest in the topic or could not improve them and make them publishable. One should always try to convert conference papers into publications.

Second, I often invited my international and Polish colleagues, such as Lars Kolverid, Mike Pratt, Garry Bruton, Anne Davies, Marc Weinstein, Monika Kostera, Mariola Ciszewska-Mlinaric, and Ola Wąsowska to cooperate with me on particular papers. It is pretty difficult to write a paper or an article alone. Sharing the burden helps a lot, and makes writing a more enjoyable exercise. Third, I tried very hard for many years to publish in really good journals. It was always very difficult, and it is an even harder uphill battle today. I did manage to publish only four or five papers in A-class journals whereas the rest of the papers went to the lower-ranked journals, but I am probably still one of very few researchers in

in our discipline in Poland with such a record. And I think that one has to work and try very hard to publish in really good journals whenever it is possible because they have a much wider scientific reach and impact. I see that some Poles that have emigrated and are working at fine business schools, such as Rotterdam, MIT, HEC, or Harvard, are publishing in A-class journals, but we still do not have enough of this phenomenon at home. But there is hope, especially because the younger generation of researchers are taking over and they have better skills and motivation.

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My final reflection is that I was too eclectic, moving from one topic to another, often losing interest in my former research and papers. Today such an eclectic approach would be a huge mistake. Today one has to be focused because the literature is enormous, research is plentiful, and the competition is intense. So in order to publish you have to develop a relatively narrow interest, have a few good ideas there, cooperate with good people globally, and be very persistent.

OV: How do you see the relationship between research and teaching? How could research be better integrated into teaching and business practice?

KO: I think that we underestimate the connection. It is very important. First, research legitimizes you in the eyes of your students. When my students come from Erasmus trips to Western business schools, most talk a lot about research done by their teachers there. Second, it creates a context to the standard teaching material, which is a bit boring and it is not ours! So it is nice if you have your own take on it, thanks to your research.

Third, research gives you beautiful stories and anecdotes that make your lecture more interesting and lively. Let me give you an example. I am doing a lot of research on the internationalization of Polish companies and how they cope with psychic distance. So I interview a lot of chief executive officers and business owners in Poland. Yesterday one of them told me a funny story. She is selling infrastructural goods to cities. She does a lot of business in Germany, which is a very competitive market. So she sits with a public bidding commit-

Krzysztof Obłój



tee and a mayor, and tries to build her business case. She has a good offer but it is not much better than that of the German competitors and the mayor is not very interested. Finally she says that she would like to do business with this city because they have such famous terrier breeding farms nearby. The mayor looks at her and says, "I have a terrier! Do you!?" They started to talk about dogs and she got a contract. I will use this story in my IB classes to show how personal touches can bridge psychic or institutional distance and to show students how details matter!

OV: As a long-time faculty member of CEEMAN's International Management Teachers Academy (IMTA) where you lead the Strategy track, you have first-hand experience with young faculty from all over the world. You have also been a mentor to a number of young researchers and educators at Kozminski University and Warsaw University in Poland. Where do you see the biggest challenges for young faculty and what is in your opinion the value of faculty development programs, such as IMTA?

In order to teach well one has to continuously improve technology and methods, search for new material, and experiment.

KO: I think that the main problem is that people think that they teach well and usually they do not. Normal distribution applies – most of the faculty is just average. And sometimes those that teach well become complacent with time and eventually less competent, so there is regression to the mean. In order to teach well one has to continuously improve technology and methods, search for new material, and experiment. This is what IMTA is all about: experimenting in an unnaturally safe environment, with the support of mentors and colleagues, because students today can be ruthless. It is risky to test new tricks and experiment on them. If it does not work, they will kill you easily with negative feedback. So I think that every teacher should devote some time every year to improve materials and teaching abilities. For example, I attend special pedagogical sessions at the Strategic Management Society conferences and I learn a lot from some young researchers that I know at Kozminski University, Warsaw University, and other schools. I review their material, I ask them how they teach, and sometimes I even go to their classes to learn hands-on. I also look at the programs, outlines, and transparencies of MIT, HBS and other super schools. And I am thinking of taking some MOOCs in my discipline to see how smarter and

younger people do it today. Otherwise, routine will take over. I think that literally everybody should once every 10 years or so go to IMTA at Bled or IMTA-like programs at other good business schools and recharge one's batteries.

OV: What does the 2016 CEEMAN Champion Award mean to you personally and to Kozminski University?

KO: It is a recognition and therefore it is valuable. I am not an awards or recognition-oriented person, but I admit that it is a nice feeling if your work is recognized. It is like citations. The average number of citations of articles in our discipline is close to one. And even if you do not care too much, it is not funny if you work for two years, publish a paper, and nobody cares to read it. It is plainly depressing. I feel much better if my paper is cited 500 times. It is as simple as that. It is the same with the CEEMAN Champion Award. I am happy that my research is recognized and respected. And I hope that our community of researchers at Kozminski University is proud of it, too.

Interview with Peter Hardi, winner of Responsible Management Education Award

Olga Veligurska: Peter, your nomination for the Responsible Management Award by CEU Business School demonstrates an extraordinary record of successful implementation of responsible management education courses, curricula, and programs. What do you see as the main challenges for business schools in integrating and promoting the idea of sustainable development and responsible leadership?

Peter Hardi: In order to properly answer the question "What are the main challenges to the promotion of the idea of sustainable development and responsible leadership?" I need to deal with the issues both together and separately. In both cases business education needs to go far beyond the business-as-usual and only-the-bottom-line-matters type of thinking that penetrates the approach of a significant percentage of students and faculty in most business schools. In both cases, new discussions and analyses are needed in stakeholder

Peter Hardi



management and value creation that have been missing in previous educational offerings. In the case of sustainable development, it is important to discuss the impact of corporations and business in general on global and local resources, such as climate, energy and carrying capacity. In the case of responsible leadership we need to integrate the analysis of business impact on development in general and on social, human and community relations specifically.

...new discussions and analyses are needed in stakeholder management and value creation that have been missing in previous educational offerings.

Another challenge to teaching is the lack of convincing positive cases from the region of Central and Eastern Europe.

OV: What long-term benefits do you see from the inclusion of the topic of responsible management education in the curricula and strategy of institutions? What is the impact outside the institution in the wider (regional and international) context?

PH: The main long-term benefit would be a new managerial mentality on the market that would help reshape the character of business competition and would help achieve a more leveled market field. It would lead to a new generation of business leaders who better understand the importance of contributing to social values and would share the burden of economic and social development. Concerning education, responsible management principles already penetrate other fields at our parent university and integrity education has become a strategic priority of the university, not remaining isolated at the business school.

At the same time, it opened a completely new area of research at our institution, and helped create and test a curriculum that already has major international recognition. Research in responsible management helped create an inter-disciplinary approach, including business anthropology, economics, law, philosophy, sociology, and management sciences. It also triggered a new PhD program at the business school.

An additional benefit is the successful mobilization of student interest in these topics. Since the introduction of responsible management courses, my students have volunteered to enter into international case competitions even if that

meant significant extra work for them. My teams have won a number of prizes in several consecutive years, thus further enhancing the interest of incoming classes.

A practical benefit is the complete re-thinking of our executive education and training. Issues such as anti-corruption, collective action, compliance, and risk management have received major attention and have been linked to strategic thinking, leadership, supply chain management, and human resource management.

OV: CEEMAN is on the Steering Committee of the UN's Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and one of the founders of the PRME Chapter for Central and Eastern Europe. Throughout your work, you have been a strong PRME ambassador. What are the key benefits of initiatives such as PRME for management development institutions, and their involvement at the international or regional level, with the general PRME or its chapters?

PH: PRME is an important international reference point that helps students and faculty better accept the concept of responsible management. It also helps receive quality accreditation like AMBA. And it helps me as an educator to access best practice examples and new methodologies. We have participated in the PRME Methodology Working Group that developed important new tools for responsible management education. The on-line collection of tools and cases helps us in our teaching and training efforts.

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PRME membership has contributed to the establishment of new international partnerships and helped us connect to other business schools and universities in our region and beyond. We are looking forward to having additional educational and research partners through the newly formed Central and Eastern European regional chapter.

OV: What does the 2016 CEEMAN Champion Award mean to you personally and to your institution?

PH: Personally it is a strong positive feedback that my efforts are on the right track and it gives me further encouragement to increase these efforts.

It also proves that we are not working in isolation to promote these principles but there is an important international community that cares about such efforts. For my institution, it is a confirmation that the inclusion of responsible management principles into the educational offerings has an impact not only internally but also internationally. This award increases the reputation of our institution and hopefully will have an impact on the future development and eventual restructuring of our school.

Interview with Rosie Ching, winner of Teaching Excellence Award

Olga Veligurska: In your nomination for the CEEMAN Champion Award in teaching by Singapore Management University (SMU), it was emphasized that you are a passionate teacher of the highest caliber and dedication. As part of your teaching of a statistics course, you have developed a CSI innovative statistics game for which you were awarded the Global Bronze of the 2015 Award for “Educational App” at the Wharton-QS Stars Reimagine Education Awards. Could you tell us more about the game and what makes it unique?

Rosie Ching: My CSI game focuses on the Customer Service Index for each country, with students honing their statistical skills through interactive game elements. I apply a step-by-step method for students to analyse data progressively against benchmarks in seven countries, from France to China, and from USA to Australia, ending with Singapore. Each step offers secret missions in customer service on which the country's reputation hangs, and each agent earns scores and stars according to his or her performance. A leaderboard gives a competitive edge and students have time for self-reflection on performance with feedback provided during and after the game. I wove in the mission theme to give students a spy thriller feel across the world, as they embark on their missions, applying their newly found statistical skills with hypothesis tests



Rosie Ching

and linear regression. The voices of their statistics seniors' voices inside the game always tickle and amaze them, the result of days within the recording studio of SMU recording, directing the script exactly like a long animation movie!

It has been thrilling to bring the education of statistics to a whole new level of innovation for students who become CSI Agents traveling the world to crack CSI statistical missions. My idea began in 2011 and five years on it has evolved from a Flash online game into an iTunes app which has received a global award from Wharton-QS at the Oscars of Higher Education. I could not have done it without my lovely students and the Center for Teaching Excellence at SMU who staunchly supported me in this endeavour.

The CSI offers a completely different experience of learning statistics for any student learning introductory statistics at university level. It can be used both within and outside class, and encompasses the whole gamut of students from five disciplines that I teach every semester, from business and information systems to law, social sciences and accountancy. It suits each student's own pace of learning in a manner that allows them to reflect as they slowly compile their own CSI mission dossier through their CSI briefs and life-like passports which I print for every one of them on high-density 200gsm paper. Every agent has to get his or her passport physically endorsed with the CSI custom chop that I created as well.

It has been thrilling to bring the education of statistics to a whole new level of innovation for students who become CSI Agents traveling the world to crack CSI statistical missions.

The CSI is unique because students get to apply statistical techniques directly in a truly original setting. Although the CSI may stand alone as a learning tool, I use it to consolidate the students' learning in a slow, digestible, step-by-step process in tandem with the class across six weeks. For the learning process, I begin with my blended learning video, followed by in-class CSI introduction, after which the students have about four weeks to complete their unique missions. As the weeks pass, students compile their missions and participate in class experiments to enrich the interactivity and learning process.

I am now actively working on the next and completely new phase of the CSI. It is really exciting for me to think of what my students will gain from this in their learning!

OV: 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?

RC: It could be the significant, and often vast, differences in the level of statistical knowledge that students bring with them into this core module. As I teach 180 to 225 students every semester, across five different degree disciplines, with students ranging anywhere from freshmen to final-year students, this is a challenge I encounter every time. Their backgrounds of statistical exposure go from zero (never done before) to ample prior exposure at pre-university level. Therefore, we face these problems, but I consider them manageable because I can use all sorts of different techniques to get all of them engrossed in the learning process, learn because they want to, and enjoy it, too. There is tremendous meaning in helping those who need it, and in elevating those who think they do not, to a whole new level of learning.

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

RC: Such programs are definitely instrumental in aiding teachers along the path. For example, when I was exposed to the SMU peer-coaching program as a mentor, I was all agog in learning the different angles from which different teachers may view the same class. It began for me a five-year-long and continuing process of engagement with a professor colleague who asked to be my mentee. We have learned so much from each other through sit-ins, observations, and many memorable discussions over meals about our teaching and everything else along with it. Though I have not yet attended IMTA, I have heard many glowing reports of IMTA's rigor and quality by my senior colleagues who have attended, attesting to the strong complementary character of IMTA with teaching at SMU.

OV: This is not the first time that a CEEMAN Champion Award in Teaching goes to an SMU faculty member. What do you think makes SMU a great place to support teaching excellence, and what does the 2016 CEEMAN Champion Award mean to you personally and to your institution?

RC: SMU is like home to me. It has given me supportive faculty seniors and colleagues, and thousands of wonderful students. Our teaching facilities, seminars, and classrooms, are top-notch due to the overwhelming dedication of our information technology support staff. I have been so blessed to be given the flexibility of exercising creativity and originality in my lessons, in ways that are only limited by my imagination, with students conducting statistical experiments that allow them a hitherto-unseen vista of statistics, often, in their own words, with hilarious and unforgettable outcomes that deeply entrenches their learning.

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We are young and small in Singapore, vibrant and pulsating with verve and continued vision of a city campus in touch with the world for our young to grow and blossom. To win CEEMAN's Champion Award in Teaching sends such a strong message of endorsement for which I feel very happy. I feel so honored that words are inadequate to fully describe my feelings. It is this award that has also led me to tread my first steps in Europe. I owe a huge thank-you to my parents as my first teachers, and every teacher who has gone before me, all those who showed me what true teaching really is.

Everyone who has heard the news, from the vice-provost for faculty matters to the associate dean, the director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, and my huge numbers of current and past students, local and foreign, all of them have written to say what a great honor this is, given CEEMAN's excellent reputation. I could not be happier as I bring joy and honor to the institution that has been my second home for all these years. Thank you so much, CEEMAN.