

Reflections on the IMTA Journey

By Prof. Jim Ellert
Emeritus Professor, IMD, Lausanne, Switzerland
Academic Director, CEEMAN IMTA

Based on the chapter published in *Phronesis in Business Schools: Reflections on Teaching and Learning* (2017), a joint book by IMTA Alumni and faculty.

Introduction: CEEMAN and IMTA

CEEMAN (originally known as Central and Eastern European Management Association) was established in 1993 with the aim of accelerating the growth of quality of management education in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

In 2000, CEEMAN launched its first program, the International Management Teachers Academy (IMTA) to provide an affordable and high quality faculty development program for management institutions in Central and Eastern Europe. In its beginnings, the vision of this faculty development program was to “create a new generation of management educators for the new generation of business leaders”.

IMTA’s mission today is to enable motivated and high-potential faculty members to improve their skills, approaches, attitudes, and educational materials to contribute more confidently and effectively to the design and delivery of excellent learning experiences in their institutions.

The initial development of the IMTA program (2000-2011) was subsidized by grants from the Higher Education Support Program of the Open Society Institute funded by George Soros. Since 2012, IMTA has been a self-funding, not-for-profit activity within CEEMAN. In 2013, the IMTA Foundation was established to create new sources of external funding to enable IMTA to continue its work and to provide special scholarships for management institutions that could not otherwise finance participation of their deserving faculty members in the IMTA program. In recent years, these scholarships have allowed IMTA to increase the geographic diversity of its participant composition.

IMTA Faculty Recruitment

To achieve excellence in IMTA’s program design and delivery, CEEMAN recruited teaching faculty from prestigious management institutions in Western Europe, North America and Central and Eastern Europe. These faculty members have received many awards for teaching and research excellence and have a collective passion to transfer what they have discovered about effective learning to a new generation of management educators.



The current IMTA faculty teaching team has worked together for several years and is now composed of Professors Arshad Ahmad (McMaster University, Canada), Tony F. Buono (Bentley Alliance for Ethics and Social Responsibility, USA), Jim Ellert (IMD, Switzerland and IEDC-Bled School of Management, Slovenia), JB Kassarian (IMD, Switzerland and Babson College, USA), Krzysztof Obloj (School of Management at Warsaw University and Kozminski University, Poland), and Joe Pons (President of AXIOMA Marketing Consultants, previously Marketing Professor at IESE, Spain).

Expansion of IMTA's Geographic Reach and Diversity of the Participant Mix

During the last 24 years, CEEMAN has significantly expanded its geographic reach. Today, CEEMAN has more than 210 institutional and individual members from 50 countries in all major continents. CEEMAN is known today as the International Association for Management Development in Dynamic Societies. Paralleling CEEMAN's geographic expansion, since 2000, IMTA has educated almost 600 management teachers from 155 institutions in 49 countries in Western Europe, North America, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, South-East Asia, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. Most CEEMAN institutional members have sent faculty members to participate in IMTA.

In addition to geographic diversity, the mix of IMTA participants is quite balanced in terms of gender and with broad representation of academic teaching disciplines. While designed originally for relatively young faculty members, as IMTA's recognition and reputation increased, management institutions began to send more mid-career and late-career faculty members to participate in IMTA. IMTA's teaching faculty sees strong merit and enhanced learning opportunities in the growing diversity of the IMTA participant composition.

IMTA's Values and Program Design Philosophy

IMTA has always been an advocate of interactive learning methodologies that embrace the case method teaching approach and more recently other enabling technologically driven learning approaches that facilitate interactive learning (e.g. computer-based games and simulations, and social media interactions).

In contrast with other international faculty development programs, IMTA is designed to include one week of general principles for all participants and one week of when participants and teaching faculty work together in smaller groups to focus on the challenges and requirements of providing excellent learning outcomes in the context of specific disciplines (e.g. leadership and change management, marketing, strategic management, accounting and financial management, innovation). During both program weeks, all IMTA participants are brought together for plenary sessions, almost all of which are scheduled during the first week of the program.

In its current design, IMTA includes plenary sessions with the following titles:

- Teaching philosophies, approaches and techniques
- Student learning
- Assessment of student learning
- Technology enabled student learning
- Course design principles for different audiences
- Teaching and learning with cases
- Pedagogical foundations of interactive learning methodologies
- Preparing a case teaching session and managing the discussion
- Workshop on case teaching
- Developing a case teaching plan
- Career challenges and dilemmas regarding balance
- Case research and writing: principles and processes
- Case research and writing: experience sharing
- Participant group presentations on management education challenges
- Research based teaching and learning
- Collaboration and networking opportunities
- Management education for a better world



IMTA is all about **experimenting** in a **safe environment** with support of **mentors and colleagues**, because **students today can be ruthless**. It is **risky to test new tricks and experiment on them**. I think that **every teacher** should devote some time every year to **improve material and teaching abilities**.



Krzysztof Oblój

Professor of Strategic Management at the School of Management at Warsaw University and Kozminski University, Poland

The second week of IMTA, with smaller groups, provides opportunities for participants to focus on the challenges and opportunities to tailor learning experiences to meet the specific requirements of their particular academic disciplines and to teach session topics in their areas of expertise to gain feedback from faculty and participant peers regarding their teaching strengths and improvement opportunities.

IMTA is delivered by a small core team of faculty, each of whom provides several program sessions. The small size of the faculty team and the small size of working groups in the second week of the program allow faculty to gain familiarity with and provide individual counselling and coaching to IMTA program participants.

Delivery of IMTA is supported by the venue of IMTA in the small and beautiful lakeside town of Bled, Slovenia with the modern facilities of IEDC-Bled School of Management where its extensive art collection provides a peaceful and stimulating environment for reflection and learning.

IMTA Faculty Members Views on IMTA and Faculty Development

In 2010, CEEMAN published an interview with IMTA faculty members Arshad Ahmad, Jim Ellert, JB Kassarian, Krzysztof Obloj, and Joe Pons¹. I close this paper with some reflections that emerged from this interview. Some of the reflections below have been paraphrased for brevity and some have been moderately edited and/or extended to better reflect IMTA faculty viewpoints.

On Business Schools' Efforts for Faculty Development To Improve Their Customer Focus and Institutional Needs



Krzysztof Obloj: There are two components that make a good business school: one is very good students (and that is a crucial component); another is very good faculty. The problem is you cannot have the first without the other.

It was always the case that once you have very good teachers and very good academics, there will be better students. With better students there is a motivation for teachers to develop - so

called positive feedback. If you have very good teachers who are merging practice, theory, and teaching, you have good students, better teachers, and you have a better business school.

Joe Pons: Developing faculty does not come cheap. People are not born with teaching skills but it is possible to teach people how to teach. In many schools, they take teaching skills for granted. In many PhD programs, even in very good and reputable institutions, there is absolutely no time and effort at all invested in training people in the kinds of skills that will help them make a good classroom performance. That is why an initiative like IMTA strikes at the very core of a need that more and more business schools have.

Jim Ellert: Management education is a growth industry. It's been growing rapidly over many years. As management educators, we add value in that we are sharpening the decision-making skills and attitudes of executives. But many of us, certainly of my generation and that's a large number of faculty, will be retiring, many over the next five years. So, it is now time to develop a new generation of faculty who are skilled in communicating complex management concepts, issues, and dilemmas in a simple, persuasive, practical, and relevant ways for executives. This is a major imperative for IMTA.

¹ IMTA touches people's lives: Interview with IMTA faculty – Krzysztof Obloj, JB Kassarian, Joe Pons, Arshad Ahmad, and Jim Ellert interviewed by Milenko Gudic, CEEMAN News, summer 2010.

Is There an Ideal Profile for a Management Professor?

Krzysztof Obloj: This is a really tricky question. I think there are at least three separate approaches or models that address this question.

In the US, in a good school, the ideal professor is a researcher and nobody cares about how and what he or she teaches. This is because, if they do need very good teachers in executive courses for example, they can always hire excellent teachers from other schools, they can hire practitioners, use their global network, and in any case some of their own people will teach very well anyway.



Here, in CEE and Russia, we were for many years at the other end of the spectrum. We believed that a good professor was someone who teaches very well and has practical experience. So we were doing consulting, improving our teaching skills, and we did not pay enough attention to research.

The third model was reflected in Western Europe where management professors were typically neither very good researchers nor very good teachers but they strived to achieve both.

To answer simply, an ideal professor has to solve a dilemma that is very difficult to unravel because of time and resource constraints. You have to be a good researcher (you have to train your brain and keep close to new concepts) but at the same time you have to be close enough to business practice to understand how to move theoretical and research-based concepts into the classroom.

If you can meet three requirements: cutting edge and influential research, practical insights that can inspire managers, and excellent teaching skills, you are an ideal professor. If you excel in two it's still ok. But too many management professors excel in only one of these requirements.

Joe Pons: The ideal professor does not exist. An ideal professor would be a cocktail with a number of ingredients and I am not too sure on the precise amount of each ingredient since it depends on who tastes the cocktail – some might like it a little sweeter or a little bit bitter.

The components would probably include a lot of competence in their own specialization, a lot of first-hand business experience, mostly from consulting, particularly from direct strategic consulting with well-known institutions, quite a lot of research work that is somehow connected with both teaching and consulting, and teaching skills that make that person adaptable to very different student groups – able to teach undergraduates, graduates, MBA, EMBA students, and to teach executive programs at different levels - functional managers, senior managers, presidents of companies, and board members..

Jim Ellert: The ideal professor would be passionate about the work that he/or she does and be skillful in communicating theoretical insights in simple, practical, and relevant ways for practicing managers.

What Is The Meaning of a Participant-Centered Approach to Learning?

Arshad Ahmad: For many years I have been trying to learn it from others who do this very well and practice it in my own classes. One of the key things that makes communication from a teacher to a student is to try to “shift the light” from yourself to those in the classroom.

In fact it's a very liberating concept because you need to do less to do more, which means creating an environment where you engineer activities where you are not the center of attention anymore. Where you are more like a coach, or a guide, or someone who is there at those critical points where learning occurs. So you are intervening in situations that you've designed.

A faculty member who is attuned to key points of change that occur in teaching and learning sessions is the one that's going to be successful in student learning, much more than the one who says "I have this plan., I am going to come in, cover the content, and after my three hours are over, I've done my job". The shift to student learning takes us away from the pre-planned, packaged program towards really getting in touch with what is important for students today.

Does IMTA Have Impact on Participants?

Joe Pons: There is a certain percentage of time when participants are here in these two weeks where we help them to unlearn certain things they have to get rid of before we can start building the basis on which a more solid career can be established. At the end of the two weeks of the IMTA program, you can say that we have covered a certain territory in terms of our particular approach to teaching and learning. That does not achieve the balance we want to achieve in terms of the long-term impact on our participants development because it needs to be complemented with a lot of research and a lot of writing class materials.

Jim Ellert: After participating in the IMTA program, participants talk of many changes. One of them is gaining confidence in their teaching skills. With time, they also begin to report on accomplishments they have made in experimenting with new teaching approaches, developing new courses and new teaching materials, networking with other IMTA alumni in sharing new teaching materials and through collaborative research projects, and their success in being promoted to senior management positions in their institutions, including promotions to become rectors, deans, and vice rectors. Some IMTA alumni acknowledge life-changing and career-changing impacts that they attribute, in part, to their IMTA program experience.

“ IMTA was two of the most intensive and rewarding learning weeks of my professional life. The professors challenged me to step outside my comfort zone and work to be a better professor myself. The friendships I built with the other IMTA participants from around the world will continue to inspire me as I move forward in my career. ”

Jennifer Pope, IMTA 2017
Associate Professor of Marketing
at Grand Valley State University, USA

Final Reflection

As the current Academic Director of IMTA, I am very pleased that participants and faculty members in IMTA 2016 have collaborated together to share their insights on management education issues and opportunities with a broader academic community to reflect their enthusiasm, commitment, and experience sharing related to topics which are very much reflecting IMTA's mission, vision, and values. This is IMTA as its best.

References:

1. IMTA touches people's lives: Interview with IMTA faculty – Krzysztof Obloj, JB Kassarian, Joe Pons, Arshad Ahmad, and Jim Ellert by Milenko Gudin, CEEMAN News, Summer, 2010.
2. Various CEEMAN web-site sources of information.