Chapter XXIV

Real Live Cases in Training Management of Information Resources During the Transition to Market Economy

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the use of real live cases, based on students’ experience, in training for the Information Resources Management (IRM) course is discussed. IRM is a core-required course of a MIS MBA program. This approach is compared with one that explores cases drawn from textbooks. The objective of comparison is student’s learning outcome. Two groups of students, trained under the two paradigms, were selected, and their performances, after graduation, were compared. The students play key roles in their companies. Assessment shows that in given circumstances (transition from centrally planning to market-oriented economy, small enterprises, and underdeveloped information infrastructure), the use or real live cases offered by the students allows training to be kept relevant to the business practices.
INTRODUCTION

Two models of training the course “Information Resources Management” (IRM) are compared, according to the students’ learning outcomes. IRM is a core course in the MBA-MIS program of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski.” Initially, the course was taught by exploring cases drawn by Western textbooks. The second paradigm explores cases proposed by students, which reflect students’ experience. The comparison of the two models is based on students’ performance, during class discussions and during their professional careers after graduation.

The primary objective of this research is to collect feedback about how students apply the IRM principles and adjust the course content and training model to their needs.

The research also addresses the issue of using real life cases offered by students, and in which circumstances this approach serves better in meeting given learning objectives. The experience of using different types of cases is shared by Earl Chrysler (2002), but in his review, real live cases offered by students are not discussed.

BACKGROUND

The objectives of the IRM course are as follows:

- To develop understanding about the role of information in a social institution as a valuable resource, critical for successful management, which needs to be managed as well as any other resource
- To clarify that information as a resource is not limited to data, but it also includes technologies of data processing, organizing, and using information effectively in decision making
- To define information needs for decisions made on different levels in a company’s hierarchy, and the basic forms of support an information system has to provide
- To shape the role of Computer-Based Information Technologies

The MIS MBA program was established in 1996. During the first three years of this period, the author used a “standard” lecture-type training model, following a Western textbook — the primary text was Kanter (1994), and some lectures were based on Bucland (1991) and Schoderbek, Schoderbek, and Kefalas (1990), and cases were drawn from other Western sources, as Beaumont and Sutherland (1992). The students learned to interpret theory and to analyze cases from the textbooks. Students with broader experience expressed concern about difficulties in applying that knowledge in Bulgarian business practice. To achieve course objectives and to build practical skills to identify and solve problems, during the last 3 years, a seminar-type model was applied, which explores students’ personal backgrounds and business experiences.

In class, students presented cases drawn from their experience. The case represents a company and its managerial practice. The cases were analyzed, using brainstorming and other group analytical techniques to specify the properties of the information systems the given company needed. The specification also included recommendations for improving administrative structure and business processes, as well as recommendations related to data modeling and information technologies.
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