



Taking the educational experience forward

This case study presents the use of ChangeMasters within Educational Institutions, in this instance ALBA, and in logical order the challenge they addressed, the previous method(s) they used, the implementation of ChangeMasters Services within the organization and the results and benefits achieved. ChangeMasters Services are innovative, highly engaging experiential-learning edutainment services that improve change and innovation management, at the level of both readiness and competencies, for individuals, teams and organizations.



Business/Organizational Challenge

ORGANIZATION AND THE TEAM THAT FACED THE CHALLENGE

ALBA was founded in 1992, through a joint initiative of the Federation of Greek Industries, the Hellenic Management Association and the Athens Chamber of Commerce. Its mission is to educate visionary leaders of tomorrow who will act as agents of change and help shape the future business world by pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge related to the management of business organizations and making that knowledge relevant to practitioners.

ALBA aims to be a leading centre of research-driven teaching excellence in postgraduate business education in Greece and in Europe, through our emphasis on generating and effectively communicating actionable knowledge that will lead to knowledgeable action. ALBA pursues continuous innovation in research, teaching, and the educational programs it offers, and is in close partnership with the business world in Greece and in Europe. Its international orientation is expressed through its faculty and students, as well as its collaboration with the best business schools worldwide.

The school runs several academic programs, including a full time MBA Program, a (part time) Professional MBA and a number of sector-tailored MBAs (e.g. Banking, Shipping) plus various management courses. The school has a vivid alumni body consisting of 1800 individuals.

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 Organizations that deal with constant changes, mergers, acquisitions, restructuring, may find a precious and at the same time “easy to digest” tool, to promote a culture of collaboration, effective communication & teamwork.



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PROBLEM ADDRESSED

Over the past thirty years, in both politics and business, the public discourse in Greece has been centred on terms such as “modernization”, “transformation”, “reform”, and “change”. For many companies in Greece, change means putting in place a professional attitude and formal management systems. For those companies that have conquered that level, change means responding effectively to, and taking advantage of, sweeping developments in technology and the global economy. This means that there has been a growing need among Greek companies for true “agents of change”.

ALBA has from its beginning strived to meet this challenge. Change management pervades all educational activities at ALBA, and the school has dedicated courses on change management plus several other courses on complementary subjects, such as leadership, emotional intelligence, organizational behaviour and entrepreneurship.

ALBA aims at disseminating state of the art knowledge through experiential learning approaches. Hence the widespread use of case studies, practical exercises, games, field consulting projects, business plan competitions, and guest speakers from industry.

The school had not, however, had any experience with change management simulations prior to the ChangeMasters project. Introducing change management simulations would therefore be a significant contribution to the school’s learning experience. The deployment of the program would in addition be the first attempt to apply change management simulations in a Greek context.

The specific deployment context has been the core MBA course in Information Systems, titled Enterprise Information Systems. The main challenge here is the positioning of the course vis-à-vis a heterogeneous (in terms of relevant experience) student audience. Typically students expect a technical course, where in actual fact the aim of the course is to elucidate the technological and organizational innovation involved in major IS projects, in combination. The organizational dimension eventually becomes clear at the end of the course, after all case studies and lectures have been presented. There remains a challenge, however, in pitching the content and nature of the course up front, in the first session. As a result of the fact that students start the course with a relatively unclear view as to what to expect, they miss out on the learning opportunities offered. Eventually it all becomes clear but by that time it is too late to digest all the relevant lessons.

CHANGEMASTERS SOLUTION

The first deployment took place in November 2006, and up to May 2007 several workshops have been carried out. The first was a pilot attended by ALBA faculty and invited HR managers. This simulation was used as an introductory exercise to set the scene for the rest of the courses.

Other workshops were carried out within the realm of the full-time MBA Program, the Professional MBA Program, the MBA in Banking, and one in-house Executive Diploma. Throughout these deployments, two different models were identified.

In the first model, the workshop spanned across two class sessions with one-week intervals. The course and the simulation were introduced in the first class session. Students in groups carried out the simulation online in their own time in the intervening week, according to fixed instructions. The facilitator “attended” all group game-plays virtually and intervened in combinations of roles. Debriefing took place in the second class session. In the second model the entire workshop (introduction, game, and debriefing) spans a single four or five-hour session.

Future plans envisage several variations in both subject context and deployment model. One will focus on change management per se, and will be delivered by two faculty members in the course of a two-day seminar. Another will be delivered in Greek, will have a generic theme, and will be targeted to representatives of SME and industry associations. Other non-specific (as of yet) plans involve deploying the simulation as an add-on in related executive seminars.

BENEFITS

The workshops have all been carried out as an integrated part of existing academic programs at ALBA, and participants were asked to evaluate them as such. Several lessons have been learned, both in terms of practical implementation (preparation, introduction, game, debriefing, and follow-up) and in relation to the actual learning experience.

One example is that the workshops have shown that the dynamic behaviour of the simulation game is highly realistic and of great value to participant’s overall performance. Internally, the change management simulation has to a great extent served the learning objectives of the courses. MBA students are able to pinpoint the content and relevance of the Information Systems course from the very beginning and, as a result, to capture more of the learning generated through the case studies and lectures throughout the course. ALBA has registered higher scores in classes where the change management simulations had been applied, in relation to previous years.

Externally, the successful implementation of change management simulations in ALBA has helped disseminate knowledge about change management simulations and brought attention to the fact that they can be of great value to both faculty members and companies. Already we have enquiries from potential Executive Education clients and we are pursuing more active initiatives to exploit this potential.

