



Chapter 5

**Real-World Learning of
Information
Resource Management**

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The chapter describes an Information Resources Management course in a Small Business Management program at the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Maribor, Slovenia that is based on real world learning principle. The aim of the course is to provide students with knowledge and experience to deal with information technology and systems in small business from a managerial perspective. The theoretical part of the course is conducted in a classroom and the practical part is experienced in mentor firms. Thus, students have an opportunity to compare, combine and verify “theory” and “practice” instantly and develop capability to transfer the acquired knowledge and skills into practice.

INTRODUCTION

Although small and medium sized companies form an important part of national economies all over the world, business and management schools don't really consider them as being important enough to tailor curriculums to their needs. Small business is not shrunk big business, and individual managing functions in smaller companies cannot be specialized to the same extent as those of large companies. In general, the education process at university institutions is still fo-

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cused on big companies and educates specialists in different fields such as marketing, finance, accounting, etc. But small business can not afford specialists; it needs highly competent, practically oriented individuals capable of handling a broad array of business problems.

The other problem is that the majority of university programs still train people only to be employed by somebody and to work for somebody, and does not train them to be self-reliant owners and entrepreneurs, or to be able to take care of their own professional career. In the majority of business programs all over the world, students get first hand experience in managing a company after their graduation when they start their business careers. This change from academia to business environment causes quite some problems, frustrations and takes time which could be spend more efficiently.

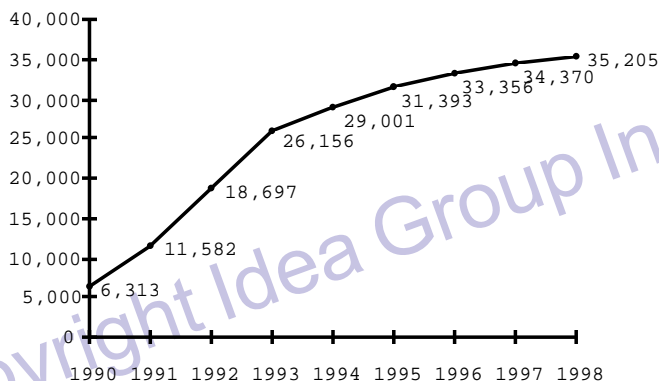
To avoid the above-mentioned problems we designed and developed a Small Business Management program based on action-learning and real-world learning principles. To illustrate how this real-world learning takes place an Information Resource Management course will be presented and discussed in the chapter.

The need and idea for effective Small Business Management program

The number of Slovene small business has increased six folds since 1990, when the transformation of Slovenia's economy began (Bulletin..., 1997).

Until 1993, none of the institutions of higher education in Slovenia offered education and training programs for management of small business. Representing one of only two Slovene universities, University of Maribor's Faculty of Economics and Business started and runs an undergraduate Small Business Management program.

Figure 1: Number of Small Firms in Slovenia



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