

PhD thesis

Recruitment and the professional image of the students of a talent management program in the first phase of the program

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Objective of the thesis, definition of the topic

The talent management program of the University of Debrecen (DETEP) was set to operate in 2001. This period coincided with the age of the mass admission of students to Hungarian higher education with the expansion of higher education peaking in 2004. Starting just with a quarter of a century delay in Hungarian higher education, in the 1990s and 2000s this expansion pervaded Hungarian higher education within a very short while, making its phenomena, processes, problems very similar to those of the higher education in countries, regions where higher education had witnessed the emergence and march of this process even earlier. The mass admission of students altered the forms of education, the internal structure of universities, generated financing problems, and contributed to material changes in the leadership the institutions of higher education, the spread of a managerial approach. The value judgments associated with this expansion focused on the drop of standards, the quality of academic education became questioned.

Concerning DETEP, it is primarily the issue of “mass admission – elitism” that has arisen from the above-described particular characteristics of expansion in higher education. In this context, it is important to raise the question how much the examined talent management program can be regarded as an “elitist” scheme with respect to its objectives, operation and the composition of its students.

This dissertation was in search of a response as in which areas the composition, social backgrounds of the students having been admitted in the first phase of the talent management program of the University of Debrecen (DETEP) differed from the composition of the corresponding student groups at the University, and what differences could be seen among the students in the successive phases of selection for the talent management program. We wanted to know what chances students of different social backgrounds had had to enter program, whether there had been any status reproduction effect surfacing, or by the second year at the university these effects had been overshadowed by individual achievements. Accordingly, one of the goals was to compare the composition of the student groups undergoing the three-phase selection process and – where it was possible – that of the entire student population, i.e. describe and characterize the groups of students having entered and not entered in the program. In this way, we can give a response to the question what differences there are the

composition of second-year full-time students and the students of the successive phase of the measuring process, and what explanations can be offered for the given differences.

Another goal of the dissertation is to see whether there is any difference between the professional image of students who have and have not been admitted to the program, meaning if admission to the program is accompanied by any specific professional image. As throughout the steps of the selection process, the composition of students becomes modified in several respects – that is in association with our first research goal the recruitment of students will be different –, their professional image is also anticipated to be disparate. In consequence, a close correlation is assumed to exist between the two research goals: recruitment and the professional image. The analysis of the differing recruitment and professional image can be suitable for outlining more general tendencies in higher education, such as in relation to the explanation of deviating anticipations and proper consideration of disciplinary differences. Therefore, the question we have raised is how much the profession-related expectations and the professional outlook are associated with admission to the program? Can those students enter the program who have more particular professional images (as the data and information connected with admission are analyzed, it cannot be assessed how much the operation of the program shapes the professional image)?

To these theoretical issues, the dissertation is in search of answers by analyzing the recruitment of the talent management program and the professional image of students participating in the selection process. It is important to note that the operation of the program is not analyzed, and therefore the concept of talent is also handled as the framework of the assessment and interpretation of the selection process. Beyond outlining the major talent theories, primarily the procedures for talent identification are presented as they have been adopted for the purpose of DETEP, meaning that references are also made to the theories underlying the selection procedure, as well as the established techniques and methods of talent identification. This dissertation is interested in the definition of talent only to the necessary extent, and does not undertake to discuss the theoretical issues of talent management in a comprehensive manner, but investigates the declared objectives and substantial operating fields of the examined talent management program in the context of the professional image of the students concerned.

The students' professional image is analyzed in the context of the existing profession theories. Our study is preoccupied with the known profession theories and the process of professionalization (and to a smaller extent with the issue of professional socialization). The composition of students with respect to their majors, potential careers and professions gives

way to the comparison of various approaches to professions; the professional image of students of high-status professions can be compared with that of the students belonging to semi-professions, the impacts of deprofessionalization processes on the self-perception of students and their professional image can be analyzed. In Hungary, similar researches have been conducted among students of medicine, would-be teachers and social workers, and their results do not deviate from the processes we have investigated. The empiric results of our research enable us to shed light on the professional ideals of students and their self-identification with the selected profession.

Hypothesis

Our hypotheses are associated with the theoretical framework of the dissertation, reproduction and capital theories, profession theories, as well as the means offered by empiric analysis. As a result, these hypotheses are suitable for testing reproduction and capital theories, profession theories, as well as the relevant professions status theories empirically. When setting forth our hypotheses, we also considered recruitment at the various faculties, as well as the emergence of differences of capital habits, as well as those affecting professionalization.

Our first hypothesis relates to the effect of the parents' schooling on admission to the program. On the basis of status reproduction theories, the parents' school qualification influences school performance, and thus the further careers, schooling and ultimately social positions of the descendants. The parents' school qualification can describe social status, or in the case of children parentage has an indirect impact on the descendants' schooling, while it directly influences attained positions. Other factors to be considered include the upward effect of parentage in the lineage and the emergence of selection impacts with the broadening of the educational base. In this context, it is expected that the *parents' school qualification has only an indirect impact* on admission to the talent management program.

Our second hypothesis is connected with the influence of the cultural capital. Cultural capital theories emphasize reproduction effects. In view of the theories serving as the basis of the direct and indirect impacts of the parents' social status (parentage), the empiric studies of cultural capital theories stress the mediating effect of the cultural capital in between the parentage and the descendants' social status. With respect to the influence of the cultural capital on the admission to the program, the *cultural capital itself is anticipated to have an indirect impact on admission*.

According to our third hypothesis, in Coleman's interpretation the forms of social capital can efficiently support the individual in school performance and progress. On the basis of the empiric studies confirming the compensating effect of social capital, it is expected that *the availability of social capital has a direct influence* on admission to the program.

In our fourth hypothesis, on the basis of the theories relating to the differing effects of the cultural capital on the two sexes for women cultural capital contributes rather to status reproduction, whereas in the case of men to status mobility. In view of the results of the Hungarian researches supporting this concept, it is anticipated that in the program *the men's "gap" behind women can be somewhat closed*.

In our fifth hypothesis, with respect to the theories pertaining to the status and prestige of professions, the status of professions is shaped by multiple factors, and the established status often appears in the form of the prestige of the profession in the hierarchy of professions. *In connection with the prestige and statuses of faculties, it is foreseen that the different positions influence the distribution of various capital types*.

Our sixth hypothesis relates to the differences found in the preferences for Super's work value inventories. Preferences for Super's work values show characteristic differences between the individual *sexes and professions, or majors and faculties in our case*.

Our seventh hypothesis is associated with the habit-oriented differences in the students' choices, preferences and attitudes. In socialization in higher education, habit, life style and subcultures have a key role, and they often lead to the emergence of habit types. The question is how much the habits in the family of origin and the university coincide with each other, and how much university culture encodes belonging to any specific class. There may be cases when the dominant culture inflicts power patterns on the weak, those with lower statuses cannot fit into the elite system of higher education). It is expected that students will *shape their self-view and mutual opinions in line with the differing habits of the faculties in question*.

Overview of the applied methods

The number of elements in the available database allowed the establishment of a number of indicators, and therefore we could verify our hypotheses in the light of "tailor-made" indexes. (N= 3.183)

a. Cultural capital index

A particular feature of the cultural capital index we have established is that it does not make a distinction between the cultural capitals of the parent and students involved in the study. As the effects of the established cultural capital index on the admission to the program were examined, only such variables could potentially be studied that were associated with the students' earlier life in secondary school; the applied questionnaire would have allowed the formulation of a cultural capital "operating" during the academic studies (still a question would have been how much this cultural capital had been attained at the university itself), but here the goal was to consider the cultural capital "brought" by the students. In the first step, the cultural capital index was set to cover the school qualifications of parents and grandparents, as well as the place of the student's residence. The use of these variables seemed to be reasonable not only in the light of the experience of other studies, but also because the student's "own" cultural capital is shaped by the family background and the given settlement alike.

Most of the variables used in the analysis as bases of the cultural capital index show correlations with the social status of the family of origin, as for instance class and secondary school specialization, language certificates, preparatory classes for academic entrance examinations and private teachers are all more frequent in the case of families with better social positions. The established cultural capital index takes the capital assets belonging to the group of objectivated and institutionalized cultural capital types into account. The cultural capital index has three attributes: low, average and high, and they have been defined with respect to the values observed for the index.

b. Social capital index

Established to interpret research results and serve as explanation for the admission to the program, the social capital relies on considerations that are similar to those of the cultural capital. We wanted to know to what extent the social capital brought from the family influenced admission to the talent management program, i.e. whether it mitigated or compensated for the differences originating from the social background. For this very reason, the social capital elements emerging at the university (for example, memberships in various voluntary organizations) were not taken into account.

Accordingly, the established social index considered the impacts of the family, because it was fundamentally studied to what extent the social background, e.g. the parents' school qualifications (and occupations) influenced the chances to be admitted to the program. Therefore, in the case of the established index, the forms of social capital surfacing in the

family were examined. From among Coleman's forms of social capital, intra-family relations, cooperation, enforced norms, obligations and expectations, as well as the information potential were taken into consideration. The operation of intra-family relations were viewed in the light of joint decisions, meaning as to what extent the decision on the preferred major was made by the student jointly with the parents (K33, 2. – jointly with both parents –, K33, 3. – jointly with the mother –, K33, 4. – jointly with the father). The relevance of the "information potential" to the family were investigated and made a part of the social capital index by examining from where the student could obtain information about the preferred major (K34. 1), the University of Debrecen (K35.1), while the parents' advice in connection with the selection – as corresponding to parental care and attention to the child – was assessed in view of the parents' advice concerning preference for any major (K36.1) and the parents' advice to choose the University of Debrecen (K38.1). The social capital index has three attributes: low, average and high, and they have been defined with respect to the values observed for the index.

c. Motivational index

The motivational index has been worked out for the selection process. As it has been explained in the chapter "Principles of talent identification", the selection process took the study results, the outcomes of the Raven test and the result of the motivational index into account. The theoretical background to the selection process was given by the Otto, Renzulli, Renzulli-Mönks and Czeizel models. In the case of multi-aspect talent models, motivation is deemed to be an important factor, because in the absence of motivation the latent talent is not able to unfold. To assess motivation, the corresponding questions of the recruitment and career motivational questionnaires have been considered. From Question K37 focusing on the reasons and motifs of seeking admission to the university, Item 5 (part of the career structure) and Item 7 (the profession the student is interested in) have been used in the index. From Question K44 examining the things that are important for the respondent in the course of the university career, the following items have been involved: 1. good average results of the studies, 3. scientific student work (TDK), 4. appreciation by the teachers, 5. appreciation by the peer students, 8. preparation for the preferred profession, 9. establishment of relations that may "work" in the future, 10. grants for studies abroad. From Question K45 inquiring about the current situation and academic objectives of the respondent, the following items have been considered for the formulation of the index: 5. whether any publication has been released, 6. whether the student has participated in a teacher's research work, 10. whether a grant has been

received to study abroad, 11. whether the student is a member of any student organization, 12. whether the student is a member of any specialized scientific society of students, 13. whether the student does any sport, 14. whether the student is a member of any voluntary activity group.

The value of the motivational index has been established by increasing the motivational index by 1 unit (the initial value was 0) in the items of Question K37 and K44 value 3 or 4 was chosen. In question group no. 45, the value of the index was increased if positive responses (1) were given to the priority questions, and thus the value of the indicator could be up to 16.

d. Faculty prestige index

The dissertation interprets the concept of the professional status (i.e. the statuses of the majors, professions) in broader terms, with one of its constituents being prestige. In consequence, the “prestige of the faculties” can be defined – in the case of the prestige assessed in the course of the research – as the criteria of belonging to the communication and intersubjective communication, and it also assumes “advantageous situations”. The “prestige of faculties” index was established in view of the responses given to Question K39 (“How would you rank your own major among the majors of the university?”), and K42 (“Where do you think the “public opinion” of the university would rank your major?”) on the ten-grade scale, by considering the values on both scales. Although the question was oriented at the majors, due to the large number of majors the analysis was conducted for the faculties, which could influence the results only in the case of larger faculties that were rather heterogeneous on the basis of the majors covered. On the index, five potential positions were distinguished, and then on the basis of the answers the faculties were classified in four groups: groups with low, average, high and outstanding prestige.

e. Professional status index

The other index focused on the situations of the faculties, or to be more precise the professions associated with the given faculties after graduation in order to assess the statuses of the professions. The relevant question (K59) used a ten-grade scale to examine how students saw the situations of the individual factors. This approach also corresponded to the examination criteria of the prestige of professions, but as nine characteristic dimensions were investigated for professions and their statuses, the established index was suitable for the description of the status of any profession, demonstrating what students thought of and how would they rank their own professions in this hierarchical system (at the same time, it served

as the anticipative element of their professional image). The variable described as the statuses of majors had five attributes: very low, low, medium, high and very high, and they were been defined with respect to the values observed for the index.

f. Applied techniques of statistical analyses

The data were processed and statistically analyzed with the use of SPSS for Windows 19.0. The applied techniques included descriptive statistics, correlation, regression and contingency table analysis, t-tests, standard deviation analysis and logistic regression analysis. The significance level was 0.05 for all tests.

As in the course of data analysis we were hindered by the constraints of SPSS and other statistic programs, the TETRAD program was also used as an application that was suitable for unveiling and graphically presenting the causative relations among the variables.

Our empiric studies were associated with the first phase of the talent management program at the University of Debrecen. The Talent Management Program of the University of Debrecen was launched in the academic year of 2000/2001, while the first phase of the program lasted until the 2008 recruitment of students for basic studies.

Thesis-related description of results

The objective of this dissertation has been to analyze the recruitment and professional image of student in a talent management program. Under the circumstances of the recent expansion in higher education, it has been a reasonable issue to raise how much the recruitment of the examined program, the goals of its operation and principles could be regarded as “elitist”. In the light of our results, with respect to their social recruitment the students having been admitted to DETEP disaffirm the potential “elitist” hypothesis. On the other hand, the program itself as a talent management scheme – in view of its goals, principles and operation – is not “elitist”.

In the field of recruitment, the differences among the students of the program arise from the distinct characteristics of the faculties. In the social recruitment of the individual faculties, there are very notable discrepancies; these differences are the results of the consequences of the selection mechanisms, as while the students arriving from varied social groups do not see different chances in terms of entering higher education, while there are wide opportunity gaps when preferences for the individual fields of education, faculties and actual admission are

considered. It is confirmed by the faculty-based comparative analysis of the students involved in the program with respect to their social recruitment, as well as the deviations in institutional habits, prestige and status. The differences in the recruitment of students having been and having not been admitted to the program are outlined in the light of our hypotheses.

With respect to the professional image of students, differences were foreseen to occur among the majors, faculties, as well as students having been and having not been admitted to the program. These expectations were confirmed, there indeed existed differences among the students. Those admitted to the program proved to be much more motivated, and tended to identify themselves more deeply with the selected major and profession, while their professional vision was found to be more congruent, and were willing to opt for their actual majors again.

Our first hypothesis was connected with the effects of the parents' school qualifications, i.e. that the parents' school qualifications, and in general their social statuses were just indirectly explanatory to the students' admission to the program. Our expectation was supported by the comparison of the student groups, while the regression analysis reflect that the combined school qualifications of the parents did indeed have a – though quite moderate – reproductive impact. Accordingly, we are to accept the statements of the theories pertaining to the social statuses of parents, namely that in higher education the effects of parentage weaken, while our hypothesis has been confirmed just partly.

This influence is also associated with our hypothesis concerning the direct impact of the cultural capital. The differences in the cultural capital between students having been and having not been admitted to the program, as well as the discrepancies between the cultural capital of student who attend faculties of different prestige confirm the effects of cultural capital on the disparate chances of university careers. On the other hand, the regression analysis shows that influence of the cultural capital is similar to that of the combined school qualifications of the parents, and smaller than the one belonging to social capital.

Nevertheless, our hypothesis connected with the effects of the social capital could be sustained, i.e. admission to the program was considerably influenced by the social capital, and therefore our assumption proposed in relation to the impacts of the social capital was evidenced. Differences were not only found between students having been and having not been admitted, but similarly among faculties of disparate prestige and statuses. The regression analysis supported that the social capital and the statuses of professions had nearly identical influence on any student's admission to the program.

The impact of the cultural capital was examined with respect to the differences between the two sexes, as well. We anticipated that in the case of female students the influence of their own cultural capital associated with the secondary school career would be larger than in the case of male students, meaning that female students were to embody cultural reproduction, whereas male students would realize cultural mobility. This assumption could just partly be confirmed, because among the students having been admitted to the program there were no significant differences in terms of cultural capital or social capital. At the same time, the comparison of the entire population of second-year and those in the successive stages of the talent management program (in view of the gender composition of students) reflected the male students entered the program in a somewhat larger proportion in comparison with their share in the entire population. It indicates the disappearance of the “male disadvantage”, which has been suggested by the results of other studies, too.

In view of work value preferences, differences were expected to occur among the students in terms of the sexes and faculties. These expectations could be affirmed, as actual differences could be seen between the sexes and among the faculties in the field of work value preference. It indicates that work-related values and expectations – similarly to the prestige of professions – exercise their influence in the long run.

Our next hypothesis was associated with the self-view of students and their mutual opinions, which are shaped by the disparate habits of the individual faculties. The students’ opinions in relation to mutual stereotypes suggests that there indeed exists a faculty-associated institutional impact, institutional habit that well characterizes the thinking of the students of the individual faculties. It has also been confirmed by the results of our model, because a mutual correlation can be detected between the prestige of faculties and the institutional habit, which serves as evidence to our hypothesis. On the other hand, the differing institutional habits of the faculties seem to formulate the intent, preference on the basis of which one would choose the given major again.

In the light of our results, our final conclusion is that in higher education faculties represent the institutional framework to which students are the closest, partly due to their selected majors, and partly because of the related, but more generally surfacing institutional habits.

The author’s publications on the subject-matter of this thesis

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