

**Higher education management –
life cycle and leadership roles of Hungarian higher education leaders**

PhD Thesis booklet

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I. The importance and actuality of the topic

What does ‘management’ means in the vocabulary of higher education? Gábor Halász (2006) argues in a study: the subject of higher education management, as an autonomous research area that can be divided from other disciplinary areas, is basically the management or governance of higher education institutions. We must strongly emphasise that when dealing with higher education management in this context we deal with questions of management, governance and administration of certain institutions (universities and colleges) instead of management, governance and administration of national or regional higher education systems. The management (governance, leadership, administration) of higher education can be defined not only on the level of individual institutions but also on higher levels (e.g. on the national level or even higher levels), thus our perspective can be either micro or macro level as well.” (Halász, 2006, p2). Halász also argues in the study that as a matter of fact all the processes running in a higher education institution could be analyzed from organisational, governance or management perspective, and he at the same time argues that the analysis of these perspectives is indispensable and essential. It is obviously visible from these chain of ideals that higher education management can be interpreted either in a wider or a narrower sense.

This thesis focuses on the life cycle, management roles and typical leadership characteristics of the top level elected leaders of institutions and faculties within the research area of higher education management. Premises – if not empirical, but theoretical premises – of this study go back high in social psychology: Münsterberg – who has remarkable activity in work psychology as well – studied ‘professional character’, and argued for it, instead of national characteristics (Münsterberg, 1914, quoted by Hunyady, 2006). Management system and leadership philosophy of the institutional and faculty leaders can be remarkably varied in accordance with the special organisational psychology of higher education (Barakonyi 2004, Burgan 2004, Hrubos 2006, Petrov 2006, Whitchurch 2008, Godall 2010). Nevertheless, no empirical study has been executed about the systematic examination of Hungarian higher education leaders, notwithstanding that several publications has been made about higher education management. Meanwhile examining higher education leadership is a particularly exciting field for socio-psychological studies: the managers have plural identity (teacher, researcher, manager), dispose of budgets of billions, and have to hold on in a (partially) autonomic system that has secular traditions and values, special organisational culture and managerial psychological mechanisms.

This research, along McGuire’s ‘perspectivist’ or ‘contextualist’ science-psychology (1983, 1986, 1989, quoted by Hunyady 1998) aims to embed the phenomena: it tries to apprehend phenomena, to identify the aspects that the statements get verified of. The research of Prof.

Hunyady (1981, 1991) about the national characterization and social activity stereotypes provided the research paradigm for mapping the characteristics of higher education leaders.

Management research has gone through a paradigm shift: organisational structures, management contents, concept and content of performance has been reassessed as well. Challenges from the environment and the motivation of employees are the dimensions that enforce the changes (Bakacsi, 2005).

Management is being *spiritualised* again; inspiration, vision, charisma, charismatic leadership are turning to be key ideas. Max Weber mentioned charismatic leadership for the first time: the leader is the source, the trustee of strategy and initiation; leader is followed because adherence toward leaders is absolute, meanwhile leadership behaviour is directive and governing. In case of charismatic leadership the leader possesses the responsibility, thus there is no empowerment. The key of value-based leadership is the internalized commitment towards common vision; we also experience strong identification with the organisation and with the vision. According to this concept, inclination to efforts beyond the followers' self-interest and duty can be reached. As a combination of these two approaches, we can talk about charismatic, value-based leadership, where the charismatic is leader-based, while the value-based is employee-based.

According to Bakacsi (2005), this is the picture of the leadership of the future, where competition, flexible and flat organisation and development of personal motivation also have key importance.

II. Aims

During the definition of the focus of our empirical study, we leant on the theoretical background introduced in the thesis. I review the three main research aims and hypotheses connected to them hereinafter. Because of the lack of systematic collection of experience, no substantive literature is given, thus the intuitive expectations about the higher education leadership roles served as the basis of the premises.

One of our main aims was to examine the management attitudes of Hungarian, academic-type higher education leaders. Although the management system of higher education is not only consisted of academic-type leaders, but also financial and further management leaders take part and take responsibility – and the emphasis on their role is increasing. The focus of this thesis is still the top-level academic leaders – rectors –, because formally and also according to the relating legislation they are the holders of the principal responsibility. The same structure is mapped within the institution: financial and further management leaders working with the faculty deans – in general organisational meaning – are the second top leaders within the faculties.

The second main aim of our research was to identify the different life cycle of higher education leaders, and representatives of notable types within this circle.

The third main aim of these empirical studies was to examine the judgement of the Hungarian higher education – what people think about the tasks of higher education institutions and about higher education leaders.

III. Survey among Hungarian higher education leaders: life cycle, leadership roles and motivations of rectors and deans

We could record 41 fully filled questionnaires of the 158 leaders. This shows low (26%) willingness to answer, and even this result was reached after repeated contacting. Rectors and deans like their jobs: we registered the average 4.1 on the five-grade scale. However, they judge the leadership job differently: it is ‘moderately important’ according to the minor part of answers, and it is ‘significantly important’, ‘the peak of the career’ according to the major part of the pattern. It is the ‘closure of the career’ in two cases. Respondents describe their leadership job important both of professional and public life perspective, and examples were found for seeing their own activities both positively and negatively. We identified heterogeneous leadership motivations among the higher education leaders, and identified obvious factors at the same time that suits perfectly to McClelland’s division (1961): achievement, power, and affiliation motivation. Elaborating the question about the leadership motivation (‘You govern lot of people and maintain several kinds of relationships – what do you consider to be ‘the best thing’ about the management?’), we found the following kind of answers:

- Results, realisation of aims;
- Contribution to the success and career of the colleagues;
- Creative activity;
- Successes of common activities;
- Planning;
- If one’s importance is visible;
- Cooperation and consensus;
- Creating value.

We resulted the following groups of answers: position of power, task-orientation (achievement motivation), and affiliation motivation. We coded with this classical division, yet another dimension stands out: the community dimension. Most of the respondents consider their leadership job a specifically conflicted role, where conflicts within and beyond the institution are unavoidable, thus they must be prepared for and must be able to cope with them (average: 4.6;

five-scale grade). Teachers and researchers can have diverse roles also within an institution (e.g. a professor who is a head of a department and a member of the university senate, yet also an inferior to an associate professor, who is a head of institute). The accommodation of roles 'rector' and 'dean' to the professional teaching and researching activity is truly an important factor during the measurement of leadership attitude. 34,1 % of the respondents considers their leadership position as a direct sequence and organic supplement of their teaching and researching activity. We found interesting conclusions about respondents' self-description of their professional career. 28,2% of rectors and deans do not like the public appearance, the depressing responsibility of decisions in a conflicted situation, and the representation of the institution / faculty among changing and difficult circumstances. Rectors and deans themselves took stand on priorities and leadership roles of higher education institutions as follows.

The priority order within the rectors'/deans' jobs is the following (the degree of compliance had to be chosen on a four-grade scale in the survey):

- sense of responsibility for the whole institution and for all valuable colleagues (average: 3,75)
- to reach the common ambitions (average: 3,6)
- to govern others effectively (average: 3,48 ~ 3,5)
- to achieve acknowledgement for him/herself and for the institution (average: 3,46 ~ 3,5)
- performance within the institution (average: 2,9)
- personal development through the experiences – exceed him/herself (average: 2,75)
- to hold the power and ascendancy in favour of organisational order and efficiency (average: 2,5)

The loyalty of institutional leaders is strong: 92,7% of the leaders declined that it is fully true that they are committed to the institution. We performed a digressive factor analysis so as to examine the internal structure of the applied scales. In pursuance of this examination, three following factors have been identified: target orientation (community-self-centred), management style (authoritative / distinct – consensus-seeking), leadership roles (politician – full-time scientist – conflict-avoiding / relationship-oriented). Appellations are arbitrary and were made upon items that mostly fill the factors. As KMO measure is >0.5 , this task is appropriate for factor analysis. We disapproved both H_0 hypothesis of the Bartlett's test (variables are independent) and significance level as of <0.05 , thus our variables are independent, thus we concluded that a factor analysis makes sense.

IV. Case study analysis among Hungarian higher education leaders in terms of leadership attitudes, system of views and management roles

We elaborated the case studies with content analysis, and the code system created during the process was able to identify the different management roles and attitudes through the personality of characteristic, representative leaders. In the following period I align those management roles and characters that were identified during the analysis of case studies. We elaborated the analysis of clusters with content analysis and illustrated the certain leadership profiles along the categories obtained during the procedure: charismatic leader, scientist-type (research-university) leader, part-time leader, manager-type leader. All profile possesses the following features: loyalty towards the institution, consensus-seeking, cooperation, different forms of politician-attitude, heterogeneous motivations. Naturally these management roles and types do not appear exclusively in the repertoire of a certain leader.

V. Nationwide, representative survey among the Hungarian population so as to measure the expectations towards higher education institutions and the leaders of institutions

Issuing marketable diplomas, boosting scientific life, maintaining strict system of requirements (this aspect was not specified to teachers/students/researchers), – these are the most important things the society considers a higher education institution should deal with. Answers to certain questions are significantly different ($p < 0,001$), consequently people differentiate while responding. Accordingly, we examined the questions' relation to each other as well, which concluded that there is no differentiation in case of certain question pairs ($p < 0,05$). We emphasize that 'ensuring foreign part-time studies for students' concurs from the respondents' perspective with 'employ internationally acknowledged professors'; similarly 'employ internationally acknowledged professors' concurs with 'boosting scientific life'. Furthermore there is no significantly measurable difference about the strict system of requirements among the responses. 'Boosting scientific life' and 'evaluation of maintaining strict system of requirements' are also combined among the society. The second question measured opinions regarding the societal judgement of higher education leaders. Respondents actually considered all proffered answers very important except 'political connections'. Questions differ significantly in this case as well ($p < 0,001$). We determined from the results that all specified characteristics, endowments are considered significantly very important, except political connections. In terms of internal dynamic of the questions it is important that judgement of 'political connections' significantly ($p < 0,05$)

differs from the judgement of all further items. It is also interesting that we experienced significantly different evaluation ($p < 0,05$) at the judgement of financial expertise and good communication skills. It can be diagnosed on the whole that the Hungarian higher education has to count clear expectations from the society regarding its tasks and institutional leadership.

VI. Summary

The effect of social desirability is prevailed in the survey among higher education leaders, just as in case of every self-reporting process. Hence, as the effect of distortion, we can trace an image of an ideal higher education leader rather than the correspondence between the attitudes and leadership roles of the single leaders. Notwithstanding that the factor analysis of the survey's results revealed interesting common features beyond identification of the three factors (target orientation, management style, leadership roles). Participants implied through the case studies that there is no specific expectation towards higher education leaders (see case study No. 8. and No. 9.), nevertheless an implicit system of expectations can be observed in the result of our research: when asking the question 'what do you think how the elected members of university senates / faculty councils see you?', the following question also resides within: 'what do you think you ought to be?' And the 'order' in the course of this is:

- committed to the institution (3,75 at a four-grade scale);
- task-oriented (3,45 at a four-grade scale);
- ready for compromise (3,35 at a four-grade scale);
- authoritative (distinct) leader (2,6 at a four-grade scale).

The other main aim of the survey was to identify the different life cycle of higher education leaders and representatives of notable types within this circle. The cardinal virtue of the thesis is that we could successfully identify notable management types and the system of views attached to them. On the one hand, the applied cluster analysis through the survey in terms of the management types: operative leaders, laissez faire, leader and part-time leader. The management types identified within the case studies tincture this picture, furthermore they justify the H II.3 hypothesis of the research (we presumed that different institution types requires different management style and there is coherency between these facts). Case studies pointed out that leadership role-aggregations can differ at certain types of institutions. Naturally these distinct representatives do not have a clear profile – we experienced different constellations. Results of the nationwide representative survey point out that there is an order in terms of the tasks of higher education institutions, and answers significantly differ ($p < 0,001$), i.e. respondents differentiate when responding.

VII. Values and barriers of the research

We obtained the most important aims of this thesis with the research: we identified the Hungarian academic higher education leader types and their motivations, and traced the different leader profiles. Of course these are the initial steps: deeper and digestive research ought to be made, as rectors and deans cannot be uprooted from their agent and involvement of further leaders (management, administrative leaders, financial leadership) would be necessary in order to get a full(er) picture about the governing system of the Hungarian higher education. We could reach a more complex picture on the field of our socio-psychological research, if we asked the opinion of university citizens about higher education leadership. But knowing the distinctive organisational culture of the higher education: it would be an ambitious research, but everyone suspected a coup...

We keep count of the research's barriers the low willingness to respond, but it is important to note that the difficult mobilization towards the participation in the research could be attributed to the aptitudes of this sorely special pattern. Thus the interview-method seems to be more appropriate to the cognition and examination of the topic.

VIII. Outlook, practical significance

Results of this thesis points out that the governing system of higher education is sorely complex and its leadership requires diverse experiences and concurrent of availability of different skills. Formal and informal insurance mechanisms of leadership supply are different by institutions, and are totally absent here and there. It is conspicuous that some leaders considered their experience gained as a student self-governmental leader sorely important. The author also sees her former student leader colleagues' career: young colleagues with management approach and loyalty to the higher education have grown up and hold deputy leader positions. How much do they differ from their predecessors? They are presumably similar from several aspects, but as an intuition I suppose that potential descendants consider higher education leadership to be an independent profession and not a supplement to their scientific career. This intuitive expectation and the practical results – that could be used during organisational development processes – of the thesis offer an appropriate field for the development of the frames of higher educational leadership training programme.

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