

PARALLEL UNIVERSES: CHEATING AT THE UNIVERSITY. COMPARING LECTURERS' AND STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENT CHEATING

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Abstract: Anecdotal evidence coming from everyday discussions with Hungarian lecturers points to the fact that student cheating is prevalent in Hungarian business higher education. This seemingly widespread (and often collectively practiced) student activity can not only cast a shadow on the validity of the degrees issued by Hungarian business schools, but also raises concerns about the long-term effects of cheating in terms of the operation of higher education in general. Based on semi-structured interviews conducted with students and lecturers of a Hungarian business school, in this paper we aim to map the attributions of these key stakeholders in relation to the specific causes and effects of cheating. The aims of the paper are twofold. Firstly, to provide a detailed account of the main causes and effects appearing in the social scientific discourse. Therefore, the paper provides a short literature review summarising the most important studies dealing with the causal factors of cheating published between 1990 and 2016 (based on a search in JSTOR and EBSCO). The paper's second aim is to compare these features of the relevant literature with so-called 'practice'. In order to do so, under the umbrella of an ongoing research project, we conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholder groups in higher education, namely with lecturers and students in a Hungarian business school. As far as data analysis is concerned, the process has three stages. As a first step, we map the causal connections identified by the interviewees, or—to utilise the social-psychological terminology—we highlight their attributions in relation to cheating. Then, we visualise these attributions by drawing causal diagrams, which illustrate the perceived causes and effects of cheating. Lastly, we compare two diagrams—one based on students' and one based on lecturers' answers—reflecting on both their similarities and differences. In the final part of the paper, we compare the key findings of the literature review with the experiences and perceptions of the key stakeholders regarding both causes and the short and long-term effects of cheating. Moreover, we connect the results to the wider social and political context, especially focusing on Hungarian values and beliefs.

Key words: student cheating; unethical behaviour; moral reasoning; attributions; causal loop diagrams; literature review

1 Introduction

Some scholars, such as Davis et al. (1992) and Lang (2013), point to the fact that student cheating is prevalent in higher education institutions. This widespread (and often collectively practiced) student activity not only casts a shadow on the validity of the degrees issued, but also raises concerns about the long-term effects of cheating in terms of the operation of these institutions. In this fashion, cheating not only has immediate and short term effects on lecturers and other students, but might also have

long term effects on the workforce as these students enter the labour market. These issues are particularly relevant in Hungary and other Central European Countries (CEE) where student cheating seems to be more rampant compared to Scandinavian countries (Orosz and Farkas, 2011) and people in general are more likely to believe that it is not possible to get wealthy from 'honest' work (Tóth, 2009; Csepeli and Prazsák 2011).

Apart from cultural values and practices, students learning economics or business studies are quite interesting as a group in itself since it seems that they are more likely to focus on their self-interest in game theory experiments (Frank, Gilovich and Regan, 1993). These results might have implications which transcend present concerns since today's business students could become business leaders in the future, in other words, unethical behaviour of business students of today might be linked to unethical business practices of tomorrow. In relation to this, as scandals of recent decades demonstrate, the unethical behaviour of business organisations (Pitesa, 2015) can cause considerable economic losses for a large number of people and might affect society as a whole (Sridharan, Dickes and Caines 2002; Ariely, 2009). Therefore, the question of cheating is especially sensitive given how future members of the business world see and justify unethical practices in achieving their goals.

In relation to these questions, this paper's central theme is the attributions of key stakeholders in relation to the specific causes and effects of cheating. We call these causal inferences 'attributions' (Heider, 1958; Malle, 2011) in order to emphasise that the paper does not try to reveal real causal connections but to show the causal network around the issue of cheating as these groups perceive it. Even if these attributions can only be regarded as perceived, actors form arguments, ponder about possible strategies and decide on their course of action based on these presupposed causes and effects. In other words, perceived causal inferences, that is, attributions have real world consequences as expectations, affective reactions or behaviours (Kelley and Michela, 1980).

The aims of the paper are twofold. Firstly, it attempts to provide a detailed account of the main causes and effects of cheating as they appear in the social scientific discourse. The second aim is to compare these features of the relevant literature with so-called 'practice'. In order to do so, under the umbrella of an ongoing research project, we conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholder groups in higher education, namely with lecturers and students in a Hungarian business school.

Based on these aims, the structure of the paper is as follows: the first section provides a short literature review summarising the most important studies dealing with the causal factors of cheating published between 1990 and 2016 (based on a search in the digital libraries of JSTOR and EBSCO). Then, the results section maps and describes the causal connections identified by the interviewees in relation to cheating by drawing causal loop diagrams. Finally, the discussion section connects the results to the main conclusions drawn from the literature review and to the wider social and political context, especially focusing on Hungarian values and beliefs.

2 Literature review

The relevant literature concerning academic cheating goes back to Bowers (1964), who conducted the first research of academic cheating in higher education. Since his influential work, many aspects of the phenomenon were examined. The main questions were addressed to describe mainly who cheats, why students cheat and, to a limited extent, how students cheat (see for example the edited work of Anderman & Murdock, 2007). As a basis of our research, a literature review was conducted using the databases of EBSCO Academic Search Complete and JSTOR. The keyword was ‘student cheating’ and the time criterion was between 1990 and 2016. The list of results was narrowed to articles where the whole text was available. Within these limitations, 127 articles were found to be relevant to our research. In the following literature review, we have used the articles which deal with the causal aspect of academic dishonesty on a personal, situational and cultural level.

The engagement in academic dishonesty in relation to personal characteristics is a well-researched question of the field. The different characterising dimensions of students who engaged in cheating behaviour have been researched such as age (Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes and Armstead, 1996; Smith, Nolan and Dai, 1998) and gender (Ward and Beck, 1990), with controversial results. Sheard and Dick (2012) also report that the reasons can be personal, situational or simply traced back to characteristic traits. Their paper points to several important factors in relation to cheating, such as a lack of time and the need to avoid failure. Identifying these relating factors could help teachers reduce various types of cheating.

To enhance our understanding of the process of engagement in dishonest acts, other factors such as motivation and self-efficacy should be taken into account. Further distinctions are made between different types of motivations such as intrinsic (mastery) goals, extrinsic and performance goals. Authors examined these fields with the following main questions: “What is my purpose?”, “Can I do this task?”, and “What are the costs associated with cheating?” (Murdock-Anderman, 2006). According to Jordan (2001), intrinsic goals influence the engagement of academic dishonesty in a negative way, while other factors like witnessing peers’ cheating behaviour correlate with it positively. With higher levels of self-efficacy, students are less likely to cheat (Murdock-Anderman, 2006). This result appears in Umaru’s (2013) study conducted in Niger State, too. He found that teachers and other school employees should encourage students; otherwise they tend to feel less self-efficacy in an academic environment. Umaru (2013) identifies other factors which affect students’ views on cheating, such as the pressure to achieve good grades, not having enough time for (or spending enough time on) school work and parents’ lack of reproach in connection with their children’s cheating activities. Jones (2011) aimed to identify the main reasons behind cheating. She concluded that generally students wish for good or better grades, however due to difficulties with understanding course materials or time limitations, they tended to cheat. Küçüktepe’s (2014) results are similar: the qualitative study conducted in Turkey found that 26% of respondents not only cheated when they had no idea about the question at all, but also when they were dubious about the answer. In some cases, they felt compelled to look at someone else’s test.

Besides the personal factors, the situational and interpersonal causes also influence engagement in dishonesty. Orosz and Farkas (2011) researched basic factors which influence students' cheating behaviour. They found that situational and interpersonal factors such as the conduct of peers and the willingness of peers to cooperate also increased the likelihood of engagement in dishonesty. McCabe, Butterfield and Trevino (2006) also found that the perception of peers' cheating had the strongest impact on the likelihood of one's own cheating, but the fear of being reported by other students also had a strong (negative) effect. Palazzo et al. (2010) examined why physics students copy homework from the web or other students. According to them, there is a positive correlation between this kind of academic dishonesty and tight deadlines. Other influential factors were found to be the level of difficulty and a lack of interest. On the other hand, Jordan (2001) states that the best predictor of cheating probability is the lack of strict institutional policy and a permissive system. Gallant and Drinan (2006) also claim that a solution may be found in organisational aspects. In a comparative study, they collected a lot of potential reasons behind cheating. The essence of their findings is that academic integrity and coherence need to be communicated to the students with the consequence that violations of the rules would occur less frequently.

Cultural norms and expectations can also incite students to cheat. Institutional norms such as honour codes can affect cheating as well. McCabe et al. (2003) suggest that honour codes support academic integrity which reflects on the faculty members, the likelihood of cheating decreases as opposed to students where no honour code was introduced. However, national cultural norms can affect cheating behaviour. Magnus et al.'s (2002) overview on tolerance towards cheating examined the cultural backgrounds of Russia, the US, the Netherlands and Israel. The values of populations differ across nations. The most important distinctive factors are whether competition is part of the educational system and the attitude towards officials (such as civil servants, police officers and teachers). If competition is an intrinsic element in the system (like in the US), cheating is regarded as the application of unfair means. Moreover, if officials are regarded with hostility and suspicion (like in Russia) because of the role they played in the past in a totalitarian regime, cheating is more likely to be tolerated and the act of reporting on others is considered morally unacceptable.

Generaux and McCleod (1995) surveyed 365 college students (equally boys and girls) from entirely different courses and programmes about their learning and cheating practices. The questionnaire consisted of 21 items to be evaluated by the respondents on how each statement would influence engagement in cheating behaviour. Causes were identified by each category: social norms; personal preferences; pressure of peers; and obviously, situational forces. However, the authors focussed mostly on whether cheating was planned or spontaneous. Planned cheating depends primarily on the college environment, such as course workload, instructor concern for students, punishment for cheating, fairness of exams, and so on. Unplanned cheating mostly depends on situational factors, like exam seating or teacher's vigilance. As the results suggest, the phenomenon of academic dishonesty occurs on a multi-dimensional level including personal, situational, interpersonal and cultural levels.

These findings are relevant to our research in several ways. Firstly, it is important that several years or decades of research cannot conclusively determine the individual

characteristics of those who tend to cheat. Nevertheless, personal attributes such as self-efficacy and motivation seem to play important roles in student cheating. So, individual characteristics can be important, yet they are not fixed personality traits or socio-demographic attributes, but tend to change with the situation. This leads us to situational factors, such as deadlines, the perception of peers and institutional norms, which seem to be highly relevant as far as the decisions about cheating are concerned. Moreover, cultural norms and belief systems provide frames for giving interpretations to cheating—since these frames tend to differ significantly—as do the moral judgments on different forms of cheating. As the reader will see in the results and discussion section, elements of all three dimensions are represented in the attributions of the stakeholder groups.

3 Methodological considerations

In order to explore the causes behind academic cheating by students, we made interviews with representatives of two relevant stakeholder groups: lecturers and students. For the analysis we applied causal loop diagrams to delineate the main causal effects regarding the perceived level of cheating. In the following section we describe our sample and give a short summary of causal loop diagrams as an analytical tool.

3.1 Sampling

In order to identify the main causes and effects regarding cheating, we made semi-structured interviews with members of two stakeholder groups. We applied a purposive sampling strategy to find interviewees for our research. As Devers and Frankel (2000) argue, this approach is utilised “to enhance the understanding of selected individuals or groups’ experience(s)” (Devers and Frankel 2000: 264). Therefore, the main aim is to select “information rich cases (...) that provide the greatest insight into the research question” (Devers and Frankel, 2000: 264). We will briefly demonstrate the main principles we took into consideration.

We took into account for the sample selection that according to some previous research (Frank, Gilovich and Regan, 1993), business students have special perspectives on cheating. Thus we chose a business school for the first phase of the research. Even though the school has more than one business faculty, we decided to involve lecturers and students only from one of them. The reasons behind this decision lay in our future plans, as this faculty is the most similar to other business faculties at other Hungarian universities, where we would like to continue our research for further comparison.

As for the selection of lecturers, on the one hand, we tried to find those who have experience with different types of assessments and teaching forms, on the other hand, we attempted to compile a broad range based on the lecturers’ subjects. Our sample contains 9 lecturers at this point, who came from finance, entrepreneurship and human resources, language, and economics departments (3 men and 6 women). This sample of lecturers had no connection to the students involved in the research project.

In the case of the students, we had to consider two issues. Firstly, students might not be comfortable reporting on the topic of cheating to teachers. Secondly, we tried to find students who are embedded in the social network of students, assuming that they have

many connections with other students, and therefore they heard more about student life in general and even cheating in particular. Based on those premises the student interviews were made by student members of our research group, and they contacted student organisations operating at the faculty. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that finding students who openly speak about cheating was very difficult. Although before the project our experience was that many students speak about cheating practices quite openly in everyday conversations even with teachers, the possibility to speak about it in what seemed to them an “official” setting was quite frightening. After the first round of rejections, we started to utilise a diverse set of approaches (asking for help from student assistants at departments and from students with whom we have personal relationships) for finding willing interview subjects. With this approach, we were able to conduct interviews with 6 students (4 women and 2 men).

3.2 *Research ethics*

As for research ethics, our research has been authorised by the Vice-Rector for Scientific Affairs at the higher education institution where the study was conducted. It is worth mentioning that the student members of the research group are students in a different institution, therefore conflicts of interest do not arise. Procedures for the interviews were clearly explained to the interviewees before the interview and the researchers asked for their permissions to record the interviews. Both the explanations and their consents given are recorded at the beginning of each interview. Confidentiality was also a key concern during the research process. All results are presented anonymously so research subject cannot be identified. Moreover, the interview recordings can only be accessed by members of our research group (in a password protected common folder) and are not stored on university based computers or networks.

3.3 *Causal loop diagrams*

In order to make our findings more understandable, we visualised them in the form of causal loop diagrams (CLDs). This special type of diagram originates within the methodology of system dynamics, a school of systems modelling developed by Jay W. Forrester at MIT in the 1960s (see Forrester, 1971). In this way we can see multiple-step causal chains, or, indeed, causal loops in which the chain returns to its point of origin. The emergent properties of systems eventually arise as the outcome of several causal factors, while the high number of linkages helps us understand the dynamic nature of the systems (Sterman, 2000: 12–18; Sherwood, 2002: 12–16).

Causal loop diagrams are made up of variables and the causal connections between them. Normally, they constitute the first step towards a quantitative simulation model, and therefore have to conform to a number of ‘rules of the genre’. First, variables have to be named in such a way that both an increase and decrease in their levels are intelligible. Causal arrows point from the cause towards the effect and have a single sign. A positive sign (+) means that—provided that everything else in the system is constant—the effect changes in the same direction as the cause, i.e. if the amount of the cause increases, that of the effect also does; while if the amount of the cause decreases, that of the effect will do so too (compared to what it would have been in

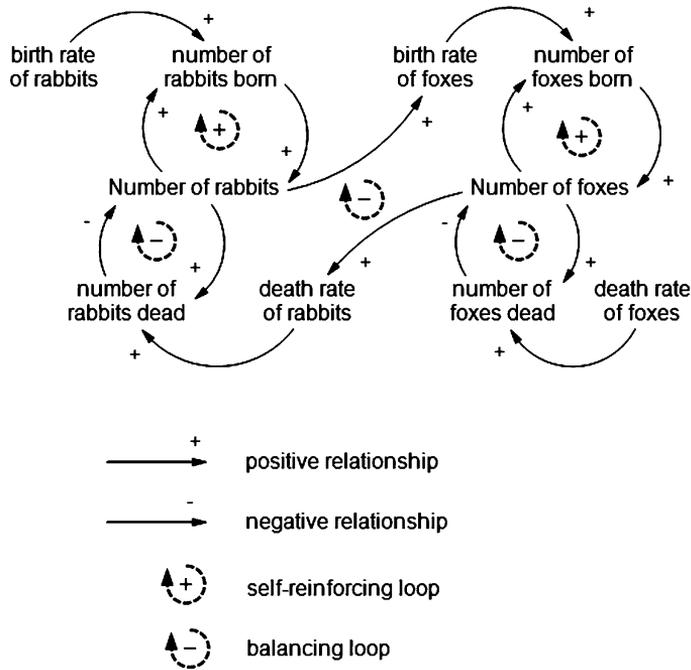


Figure 1. Example of a causal loop diagram (product of the authors)

the absence of any change). A negative connection (–) means that cause and effect go “in opposite directions”: when the cause increases, the effect will decrease; when the cause decreases, the effect will increase. These relationships can form two types of causal loops: self-reinforcing ones, in which the initial change runs through the system so that it returns to reinforce its initial impulse (think of examples of ‘vicious’ and ‘virtuous’ circles from life); and balancing ones, where the initial change runs through the system and returns to ‘mitigate’ itself (think of a predator and prey relationship, where populations of animals mutually control each other) (Sterman, 2000: 138–153).

Figure 1 shows an illustrative example of a CLD.¹

¹Technically, the number of births and deaths of animals in a population is the product of the number of the whole population and the corresponding birth or death rates. That is why, for example, ‘rabbits born’ is positively influenced by ‘Number of rabbits’: the bigger the population, the more babies are born, given that the birth rate remains constant in the meantime. Therefore, the number of births and deaths of animals are in self-reinforcing and balancing relationships with population size, respectively (as indicated on the diagram). Whether the total number of each population goes up or down will be a result of these two processes. Additionally, there is a balancing mechanism between the number of the two populations: the loop should be read as “the more rabbits there are, the higher the birth rate of foxes (i.e. caused by better availability of food in the form of rabbits), and the bigger the fox population becomes. As there are more foxes, the death rate of rabbits (because of predation) increases, leading to a lower total number of rabbits”—a prime example of a balancing loop, where the initial change (“the more rabbits there are...”) returned to mitigate itself (“...a lower total number”).

CLDs show mental representations by various individuals or groups (Sherwood, 2002: 188–200). Our method in drawing up CLDs on student cheating was to take interviews as descriptions of the world—whenever the interviewee spoke of factors that influenced cheating in some way, we created a variable and a causal connection to represent it. Thus a statement such as “if there are more people taking the exam together, it is easier to hide and cheat” was transcribed with the help of the variable “number of people taking the exam”, in a positive relationship with “perceived level of cheating”, the arrow itself representing the mechanism of ‘it being easy to hide’. (We could have created a variable for “difficulty of hiding”, but this level of detail was not necessary this time. Also, we would emphasise that we did indeed operate with perceived levels of cheating, since the systems we described involved the perceptions of students and lecturers. We took the ‘true’ level of cheating to be practically unknowable.) Since our goal was to represent the perceptions of our interviewees, the boundary of the system was determined by what they explicitly said: we did not add causal factors of our own. Even the linkages shown are purely those of the interviewees, we only represented the connections they made explicit or strongly alluded to.

4 Results

Based on the previously mentioned method, we were able to construct two causal loop diagrams. One of them is based on the interviews with the lecturers, while the other is based on the student interviews. First we will introduce the maps, and then provide a brief comparison.

4.1 Lecturers’ map

As shown in Figure 2, many issues emerged regarding the causes of student cheating in the interviews with the selected lecturers: we could identify 38 items connected to the perceived level of cheating by lecturers. A discussion concerning all of the items individually is beyond the scope and length of this paper; therefore, in the following section we will summarise the main fields detectable in the CLDs.

If we look at the causes and effects regarding the level of cheating mentioned by the lecturers, we may point to five main fields: institutional elements; external effects (i.e. factors at the social level); assessment and teaching practice; personal and group characteristics of students; and personal characteristics of lecturers. Naturally, these fields overlap with each other; therefore, there are variables which are at the intersection of these areas (details later). Nonetheless, by identifying these main fields and their contents, we could delineate the major forces concerning student cheating, as lecturers perceive them. Furthermore, CLD-type visualisation helps to understand the connections and effect mechanisms between these fields in relation to student cheating.

One of the fields identified above was that of **the institutional elements**. This refers to the conditions in which the lecturers are working in a given higher educational institution. Some of these conditions relate closely to cheating, like ‘harshness of sanctions’, ‘clarity of the institutional regulations’ and ‘degree of the lecturer’s possibility to control’. Other ones are more general characteristics of the institution,

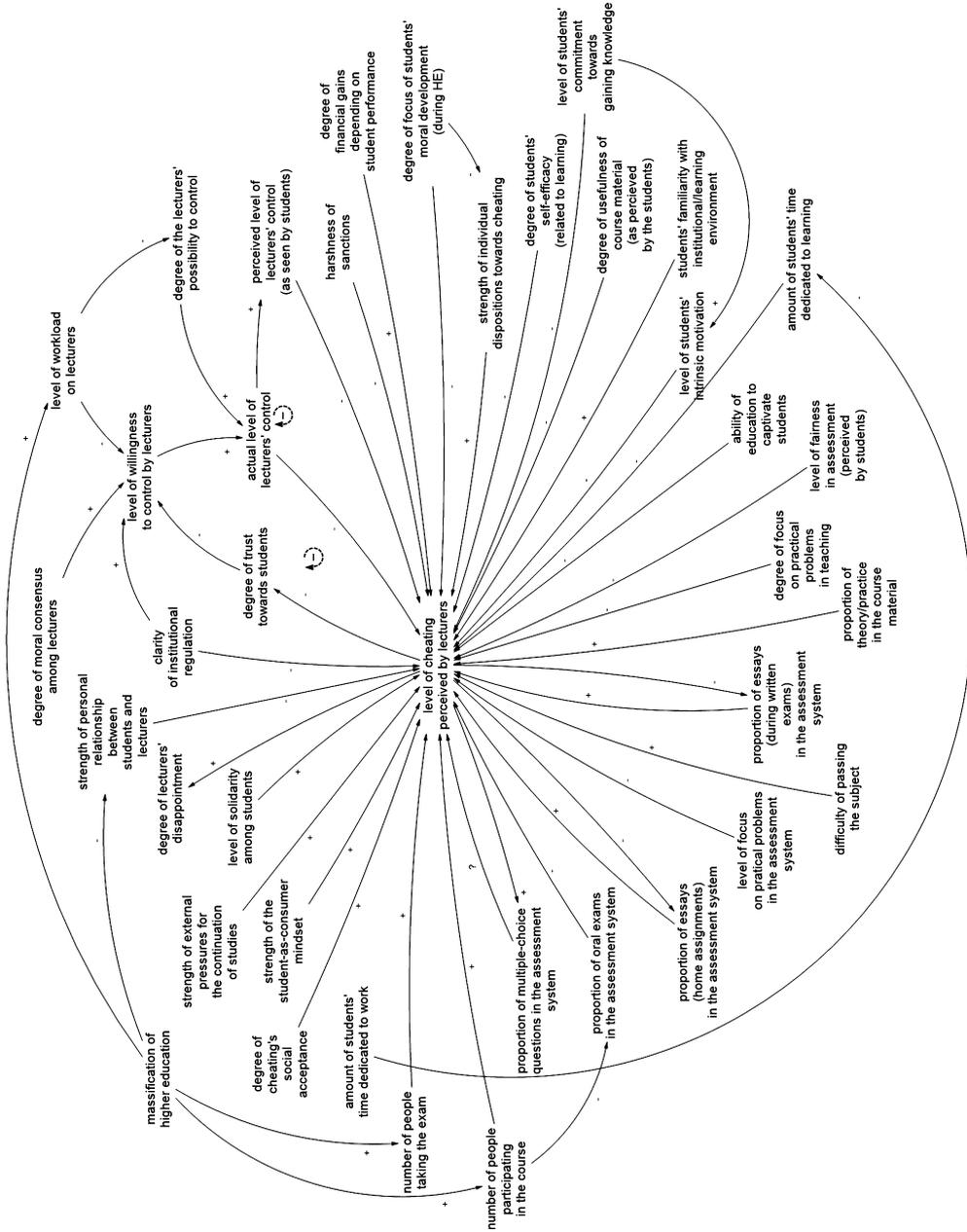


Figure 2. Causal loop diagram based on lecturer interviews

which nonetheless affect the (perceived) level of cheating, like ‘degree of financial gains depending on student performances’, ‘level of workload on lecturers’ and ‘degree of focus on students’ moral development (during HE)’. Two of these variables have only an indirect effect on the level of cheating through other variables. That is, the ‘level of workload on lecturers’ affects the ‘level of willingness to control’ and the ‘degree of the lecturers’ possibility to control’. Moreover, these affected variables are also connected to the level of cheating by other variables, like the ‘actual level of lecturers’ control’ and the ‘perceived level of lecturers’ control (as seen by students)’. Because the latter variables also belong to other fields, these connections designate interactions between different fields as well.

Regarding **the external effects** mentioned by the interviewees, we could see that lecturers addressed the social context as part of the causes of student cheating. ‘Degree of cheating’s social acceptance’ is an illustrative example. The ‘strength of external pressures for the continuation of studies’ was mentioned in the sense of some kind of social norm or practice to get a degree, as well as the pressure stemming from the high expectations from the parents.

“There are too many students here who are not interested in what they are studying. They are studying because their parents asked them to do [it], and so they don’t feel motivated to learn. They do not feel that they need what they learn here later because they do not want to work in this field” (Lecturer5, woman).

Another teacher also emphasised that students come to the university because they feel that this is what they have to do, this is the expected behaviour:

“...I really don’t want to generalise here, because this is not true for all of them, but with many of the regular [i.e. ‘daytime’, as opposed to distance learning] students I see that this is just how it goes. So they finished high school and then either because this is what they saw at home or because this is what the parents expect or anything, they have to come and graduate in this school [i.e. the university]” (Lecturer8, woman).

We categorised ‘the strength of the student-as-consumer mind-set’ variable as an external effect, because it reflects a changing attitude concerning the higher educational sector, not just the given institution. The variable ‘amount of students’ time dedicated to work’ could be regarded in the intersection of the external effects and the personal characteristics of students, because in some cases the students need to work due to financial difficulties based on their social background, while in other cases it is only to gain more practice and possibilities to move forward in the labour market, or just to earn some ‘pocket money’. There is another overlap that should be mentioned, namely the point where the social and the institutional frames meet. In our case, it is the item called the ‘massification of higher education’. This massification is a global phenomenon (dealing with it falls beyond the scope of our study), and reflects the strategy of the given institution regarding the number of students. We found in our study that this particular variable appears only as some kind of ‘contextual’ item, which does not have a direct effect on cheating, but exerts its influence through other intermediate variables.

The third field contains items connected to **the assessment and teaching practices**. Although these could be regarded as institutional characteristics, they were

so explicitly mentioned and connected to the perceived level of student cheating by the lecturers that we grouped them into a separate field of its own. As Figure 2 shows, all of the different assessment types (multiple-choice questions, oral exams, home assignments, and essays) were addressed by the lecturers, but with different and sometimes ambiguous effects. Only the oral exams have a clear role: if their proportion is higher in the overall assessment system, then, according to the lecturers, the level of cheating would be lower. Some of the lecturers said that using more multiple-choice questions in the assessment system brings down the level of cheating, while others were of the opinion that it leads to higher levels of cheating (this kind of ambiguity is indicated with a question mark on the map). This ambiguity is demonstrated by the words of two interviewees who have different viewpoints:

“Of course, every exam period and every exam situation can be regarded as a kind of feedback; and how I do the exams, yes [I have changed my approach]. For example, in the past, I have mostly used essay questions and smaller definitions. . . , that is, I asked shorter essay type of questions which tried to grasp the thinking of the students. (. . .) In this situation, I have met with much more intense cheat sheet usage, which is also frustrating for me. So this is not a good experience and based on this, I have changed to the utilisation of multiple-choice questions in exams” (Lecturer2, woman).

Contrary to this, another teacher saw the utilisation of multiple-choice questions as something which leads to higher levels of cheating:

“Actually, an all-multiple-choice too, while we are at examinations, I think the type with only multiple choice questions leads rather to how you can cheat, that is . . . in that case, the thinking goes, how could we obtain the questions. . . [laughs] complete with answers. [laughs] And in these cases, I’m smiling at . . . it happened to me also at the beginning of my career, that some students got hold of the test sheet. . . I actually saw that they had them, and I told my colleague that it was out there, this test. There was nothing to do at that time because it had already been photocopied, everything was set, the exam was due the next day, or maybe even on that day, I don’t know exactly how I found this thing. . . or saw this thing from afar. And . . . they learned the answers by heart but [they learnt them] wrong. So actually. . . [laughs] even in this case, they learn them, but they do not learn the actual answers to the questions, but only A-B-C, which code comes after which, but then you shake up the order and . . . then that’s trouble” (Lecturer8, woman).

As for the role of essays (either as home assignments or during written exams), our interviewees voiced starkly different opinions. There is an explicit feedback effect. According to some of our interviewees’ experiences, utilising essays in assessment and grading resulted in a higher level of cheating (plagiarism in the case of home assignments). Therefore, they changed their assessment approach to other forms, like instead of giving home assignments to students, they have to take exams and/or in the case of exams, they replaced the essay questions with multiple-choice questions.

Another aspect of this field is the level of ‘practicality’, both in the case of exams and of teaching. In both cases the higher ‘the level of focus on practical problems’, the lower the level of cheating will be, according to the lecturers. It is the same with the ‘ability of education to captivate students’ and the ‘level of fairness in assessment (perceived by students)’. On the other hand, the ‘difficulty of passing the subject’ and ‘the proportion of theory/practice in the course material’ raise the level of cheating.

It should be mentioned that there are two variables which have a direct (and positive) effect on cheating: 'number of people taking the exam' and 'number of people participating in the course'. Both of them (the high number of them) were mentioned by the lecturers as one of the dominant causes of high level of student cheating, but we placed them at the intersection of the institutional field and the assessment and teaching field. The reason for this is that the (high) number of students is a result of decisions and the strategy of the given institution, yet at the same time, it is also affected by teaching and assessment practices.

Our interviewees addressed causes which could be classified as **personal and group characteristics of students**. As they said, greater 'strength of individual disposition towards cheating' and higher 'students' familiarity with institutional/learning environment' could lead to a higher level of cheating. One of the lecturers talked about the tendency to cheat as a stable personality trait:

"Yes, simply somebody is like that because of his/her personal character, that is, it is not basically that I simply have not prepared for this exam and I use a cheat sheet. Instead, it seems that s/he attempts to cut corners in every life domain. ...that it is a general character trait in many cases" (Lecturer3, man).

On the contrary, the raising of 'degree of students' self-efficacy', or 'degree of students' intrinsic motivation' bring a lower level of cheating, just as a higher 'amount of students' time dedicated to learning' or the 'degree of students' commitment towards gaining knowledge' (these two are connected, too). There are two variables which belong to this field, although they are somewhat different. Both the 'perceived level of lecturers' control' and the 'degree of usefulness of course material' are attributes connected to the students, but refer to their perceived picture of the institutional features. Another interesting variable is the 'level of solidarity between students', which can be regarded more as a group characteristic than an individual one, and has a positive effect on the level of cheating.

"I notice that some people don't cheat themselves but they feel awkward if they don't help others. Perhaps it is a good student and I can see how they arrange themselves for a ZH [midterm written exam] that this person should sit in the middle. (...) This person is a kind of disseminator of information. A nice person and when they ask them I am sure that they could not say no. Because then they are a bad sport. And nobody can afford to be a bad sport" (Lecturer6, woman).

Last but not least, the fifth identifiable field is about **the personal characteristics of the lecturers** themselves. One part of the related items addresses the question of control ('level of willingness to control' and 'actual level of lecturers' control'), the other part refers to the emotional effects of students' cheating ('degree of lecturers' disappointment' and 'degree of trust towards students'). We should emphasise that this emotional effect was mentioned by most of the interviewees, as the consequence of student cheating. One of the interviewees put it this way:

"I find [cheating] outrageous at an emotional level that is for sure. The emotional involvement is more intense in this case. And it is also a bit of a disappointment that (...) the student did not understand why it would be better for her/him if s/he didn't do it that way and would invest some energy instead. Evidently, I also prepare for my

classes and I would like to see the result of my investment in that I see that the student prepares and understands [the material], and not that s/he attempts to gain advantage by cheating” (Lecturer2, woman).

Furthermore, this is the only field where feedback loops emerged, and they are connected to this emotional effect. Namely, raising the ‘level of cheating’ leads to a lower ‘degree of trust towards students’. This moves the ‘level of willingness to control by lecturers’ in the reverse direction, i.e. it will rise (further). This, in turn, leads to a higher ‘actual level of lecturers’ control’, with the consequence of a lower ‘level of cheating’. Hence, this is a self-restraining loop, which will mitigate the effect of the starting variable (here, the level of cheating).

Additionally, another feedback loop could be detected, because the ‘actual level of lecturers’ control’ has a positive effect on the ‘perceived level of lecturers control’ (as seen by students), which will decrease the ‘level of cheating’. This means that this feedback loop is a self-restraining loop as well.

4.2 *Students’ map*

The causal loop diagram based on the interviews with students can be seen in Figure 3. It has a large number of variables; the students mentioned 38 different items in connection with the level of cheating perceived by them. The structure of the map is very similar to the lecturers’ CLD; the five main fields can be also detected in this picture, although with slightly different content and proportions (based on the variable number). Therefore, in the following section we will outline the basic characteristics of the institutional elements, external effects, assessment and teaching practice, the personal characteristics of lecturers and personal and group characteristics of students. (The comparison of the two maps is discussed in the next subsection.)

The identified **institutional elements** in the students’ interviews on the one hand referred to the rules and sanctions of cheating (‘harshness of sanctions’), on the other hand to the financial aspects of learning (‘degree of financial gains depending on student performance’, ‘revenue of university’) and lastly, to the lecturers’ workload (‘level of workload on lecturers’).

The **external effects** include the ‘strength of external pressure for the continuation of studies’, the ‘degree of cheating’s social acceptance’ and the ‘amount of students’ time dedicated to work’. This last variable partly belongs to the personal characteristics of students, but in some cases it has external reasons behind it (namely, financial difficulties of students and/or the pressure of the student loan can be regarded as social issues not individual ones). At the intersection of the institutional and external (here social) fields connected to cheating lies the ‘massification of higher education’ phenomenon. This link was explicitly stated by some of the interviewees, highlighting the inevitability of massification since the ‘revenue of the university’ is dependent on the number of students.

“But it is not cheating that should be changed first and foremost, because till they let so many uninterested students enter. . . In my opinion, that should be changed, not to admit so many of them since this also hinders those who really want to learn. So, for example, they register to the courses, which would really be better. . . , and the teacher

is better, and then they do not participate in classes no matter what, and they fail the classes anyway. That was very annoying for me in the first [few] years. (...) But then, the possibility of admitting less students. . . that they will not do anyway since there is not enough money” (Student₁, woman).

In the case of the **assessment and teaching practice**, student interviewees’ mostly ignored the possible effects of the different types of exams (only the ‘proportion of multiple-choice questions in the assessment system’ was mentioned), and emphasised the characteristics of the exam period instead, that is, the ‘length of intervals between each exam’ and the ‘number of exams during one exam period’.

“We have to keep a lot of things in mind and we only have exams in general. And this means that it is possible that we have, let’s say, three of them on one day because at the department they put all their exams on one day. And you cannot learn for three exams, in my opinion, in a way that you memorise all the tiny details. Especially, if it is not a practice-oriented but a theoretical course. And then they are based on each other and it is very easy to get confused. So, I think they cheat—because of that, this can be the reason, that you have to know a lot of different things and then there is a lot of stuff which is useless. And, so, these things together. . .” (Student₃, woman).

The higher level of practicality—both in terms of assessment practices and course material—arose in the interviews as an item which could mitigate cheating. Similarly, ‘fairness in assessment (perceived by students)’ is also in a negative relationship with cheating. They also mentioned the ‘difficulty of passing the subject’ as an important aspect. This not only raises the perceived level of cheating, but is also connected to the ‘level of guilt’ (more details about this connection later). The ‘number of people taking the exam’ is at the intersection of institutional elements and assessment practice, because it depends on the lecturer’s choice regarding different assessment forms as well as on the available institutional setting (e.g. group sizes, computer rooms, rooms available for exams etc.).

As for the **personal characteristics of lecturers**, the students talked about the perceived emotional effects of cheating on the teachers, what they named as a growing ‘level of lecturers’ disappointment’ owing to an increased cheating level. Furthermore, they take one more step in connecting this disappointment to the lowering ‘motivation level of lecturers’. One of the students also sees this at home:

“I think they are emotionally affected by it. My father, mother are university teachers, or lecturers. . . I usually talk with my mother and my mother is very much affected by it in a negative way. They always think. . . They believe that it has something to do with them: I did not teach the class material well enough, I am a piece of s**t and they look into themselves. . .” (Student₃, woman).

The ‘age of lecturers’ was introduced as another personal trait of lecturers, which is linked only indirectly to the level of cheating through the variable of the ‘perceived level of lecturers’ control’ (which belongs to the next field, details below). The ‘level of personalisation of learning’ is based partly on the given teacher’s own viewpoint and personality, and partly on the institutional settings, like the number of courses. Therefore, it is at the intersection of these two fields.

Almost half of the variables identified in student interviews could be labelled as the **personal and group characteristics of students**. According to our interviewees, the

higher the 'age of student', the higher the level of cheating is, similarly the 'strength of individual dispositions towards cheating' also affects cheating in a positive manner. The 'amount of students' time dedicated to learning', and the 'level of students' intrinsic motivation' mitigates the level of cheating. The same effect can be seen with a growing 'level of students' commitment towards gaining knowledge'. Furthermore, it is connected to the previously mentioned 'level of students' intrinsic motivation' variable. Therefore, it also has an indirect moderating influence on cheating level (increasing commitment means growing intrinsic motivation, which leads to a lower level of cheating).

As our interviewees reported, the 'degree of students' self-efficacy (related to learning)' has controversial effects. Some of the students mentioned that lower self-confidence leads to a higher level of cheating, even if the given student learnt for the given exam. However, some of the interviewees said that a higher level of self-efficacy means higher performance, which is connected to the degree of financial gains. However, financial incentive, namely, the higher degree of financial gains leads to higher levels of cheating. That is, a higher degree of self-efficacy could mitigate the level of cheating, as well as possibly lead to a higher level of cheating through interaction with financial incentives depending on student performance. This suggests that cheating is present at both ends of the student performance spectrum. In other words, high achievers also cheat in certain circumstances as the following excerpt demonstrates:

"This really annoys me: when somebody got scholarships because of this. For example, it happened last year that it only depended on one subject that I reach 4 [grade point average²] and my performance was also quite good the previous semester. So, I would have been able to apply for the 'republican' [Fellowship granted by the Republic], in my opinion, with a fair chance, but I was not able to apply because of one subject. And one of my friends was just there who receives the 'republican' every year; she has got it every time so far. . . So, she told me that this was her last subject and this must be a 5 but she would use a cheat sheet no matter what. In the end, she cheated, she got a 5 and she won [the fellowship], and this a bit annoying in this case. . . But, at the end of the day, I also could cheat. . . So it does not bother me that much. . ." (Student5, woman).

According to the students, the 'perceived level of lecturers' control' is determined by the 'age of lecturer' and the 'level of workload on lecturers'. It is not connected directly to the level of cheating, but through the 'number of perceived cheating opportunities', which is in a negative relationship with the perceived level of control. Another factor that is in a negative relationship with cheating is the higher 'degree of usefulness of the course material (as perceived by the students)'.

There are group characteristics which affect the level of cheating, such as the 'perceived frequency of cheating in the student's reference group', the 'level of solidarity among students', or the 'frequency of 'paper-transfer' (home assignments between students)'. At an individual level, the stronger the 'personal relationship with the perpetrator of cheating activity', the higher the 'level of acceptance of cheating'. Moreover, the growing individual 'success rate of cheating' has the same result on the acceptability of cheating.

²In Hungary, a grade 1 is a fail, 2 is satisfactory, 3 is average, 4 is good and a 5 grade is outstanding.

Table 1

Number of variables in the main fields and in the intersections mentioned by lecturers and students

LECTURERS	Fields	STUDENTS
number of variables in the field		number of variables in the field
6	institutional elements	4
3	external effects	2
10	assessment and teaching practice	7
4	personal characteristics of lecturers	3
9	personal and group characteristics of students	18
6	intersections	4
38	SUM	38

There is a feedback loop in the map which shows that some of the students are aware of the paradoxical effect that the more one cheats ('frequency of cheating') the less likely it is that s/he will feel any remorse about it ('level of guilt'). This, in turn, raises the level of acceptance, which affects positively the 'frequency of cheating'. Therefore, here we can see a reinforcing mechanism with a delaying effect (between 'frequency of cheating' and 'level of guilt'). It is worth mentioning that some students also mentioned that the level of guilt in relation to cheating depends on the difficulty of the subject: if the subject is easy (so no great effort is needed to pass it), then the level of guilt is higher.

4.3 *Comparison of the maps*

Even these short descriptions of the two stakeholder groups' CLDs might draw attention to some interesting similarities and differences between them. In the following subsection, without aiming for a detailed analysis, we would like to highlight some interesting features of the maps.

Although the number of identifiable variables in the interviews was exactly the same in the two groups, and the main thematic fields are similar, the proportions of these fields are quite different (see Table 1).

As shown on the lecturers' map, they mentioned more institutional elements and reflected more on the effects of different assessment and teaching practices. At the same time, the students elaborated on their personal and group characteristics as causes and effects connected to the perceived level of cheating. These are understandable differences, because people in general are more familiar with the special characteristics of their groups and—in case of the lecturers—with their jobs.

Naturally, there are similar phenomena recognised by both the lecturers and the students, like the massification of higher education, and in connection with it, the

number of people at the exams. In addition, both groups identified the time dedicated to work or to gain knowledge as important factors, as well as the effects of some assessment forms and the degree of practicality both in assessments and in courses. Further factors named by both groups were the effect of sanctions and the possible financial gains connected to cheating. It was interesting that both lecturers and students mentioned the emotional toll of cheating on lecturers (disappointment, lost motivation). Another similarity was that both groups emphasised cheating's social acceptance as a variable exacerbating the situation regarding the level of cheating.

Despite these similar thoughts, there are detectable differences between the two groups regarding the causes and effects of cheating. One interesting thing is that the age of the lecturer as an important factor only arose among the students. Furthermore, only they named the level of fairness as an important cause. In line with this, as was mentioned before, students reflected more on the personal characteristics of students, therefore variables like level of guilt, or willingness to cheat, or personal success at cheating came up only in student interviews. Accordingly, the lecturers had more sophisticated and reflective opinions about the level of willingness to control and about the assessment and teaching practices. Even if these opinions were sometimes contradictory, as could be seen in the role of essays in the level of cheating, the importance of these factors in relation to cheating were clear. Contrary to this, regarding the assessment forms, students downplayed the importance of the different assessment types. Instead, they placed more emphasis on the characteristics of the exam period (number of exams, their distributions within the exam period).

Lastly, we would like to mention differences between specific variables, namely the content of external pressure and of personalisation in the two groups. In the case of students, the external pressure stems from the expectations and requirements of the parents, while lecturers rather referred to the social 'norm' of getting a university degree. As for personalisation, its meaning for the lecturers was tied more to the idea of mentor-student relationships, as well as more personal discussions between lecturers and students. However, students mentioned personalisation as a special form of learning, in which course-material, teaching style and assessment are all customised to the needs and skills of the given student.

5 Discussion

Having presented the key results of our study, this section of the paper will reflect on how these results can be connected to previous research findings as well as the wider organisational and socio-cultural environment in which cheating practices are embedded. In order to do so, firstly, we systematically compare our findings with the results discussed in the literature review section of the paper. Secondly, we attempt to delineate those Hungarian organisational and socio-cultural characteristics which shed new light on the attributions revealed by the study. Lastly, we draw some methodological conclusions and propose possible future research avenues.

So, as far as the literature is concerned, research distinguishes between planned and unplanned cheating (Generaux and McCleod 1995). The reasons behind cheating vary according to which of these two is in place. Our findings also detected a certain degree

of opportunism, which the literature relates to unplanned cheating. According to the students' causal loop diagram, the attribution that the number of perceived cheating opportunities was perceived as caused by the level of lecturer's control is indicative of potential unplanned cheating. Both students and lecturers saw the number of people taking the exam as related to the level of perceived cheating. The unplanned elements that we have found confirm the claims in the literature that unplanned cheating by and large depends on situational factors. However, the reasons for planned cheating by far outweighed the unplanned elements, according to our results.

Studies (Gallant and Drinan, 2006; Jordan, 2011) also indicated that permissive systems and a lack of strict rules and sanctions were reasons for student cheating. Our findings confirm this institutional aspect of controlling cheating, but also on the personal level, the level of control is a particularly thought-provoking issue. Our lecturers' CLD indicated a complex attribution relating to lecturers' control. The lecturers' degree of trust towards students affected the level of lecturers' willingness to control, which in turn affected the actual level of lecturers' control. However, the actual level of control was not the final factor in the attribution affecting the level of cheating, as the students' perceived level of lecturers' control, whether realistic or not, also affected the propensity for cheating. This distinction gives us a new understanding of lecturers' control. Whilst a lecturer may appear in control to a majority of students, if for some reason a handful of students perceive the lecturer as not in control, they are perceived to have a higher proclivity to cheat.

We also found in the literature that there were two controversial characteristics for students who engaged in cheating behaviour: age and gender. Our findings were also somewhat inconclusive: the lecturers did not mention age as affecting the level of cheating, whereas the students did. The study referred to in our literature review (Smith, Nolan and Dai, 1998) involved a study of a cross sectional sample of students, with the average age of the respondent group of 23.1 years. Our sample did not specifically target a cross sectional sample or older students, who may be more aware of the differences between the cheating behaviour of older and younger students, and thus the age factor. It certainly would be a possible future direction for our work to compare the differing motivations for cheating in terms of goals, expectations and costs for final year and first year students.

The attribution involving the massification of higher education figured on both our student and lecturer CLDs. The students' CLD indicated that massification led to attributions in two directions. The first relates to unplanned cheating. As mentioned earlier, a higher number of students lead to more opportunities to cheat during the exam. The second relates to planned cheating: massification affects the level of personalisation, which in turn affects self-efficacy; and massification also affects students' commitment to gaining knowledge and level of intrinsic motivation. Thus, massification affects factors in close connection with both planned and unplanned cheating. Compared to this, the lecturers' attribution concerning massification was more complex, but it also affects variables connected to planned and unplanned forms of cheating. From a practical point of view, the fact that massification is perceived to be a key underlying cause of both planned and unplanned cheating indicates a need to

reconsider the effectiveness of such a system or, at the very least, the need for smaller groups in an exam setting.

Our literature review found three categories behind reasons for cheating: personal; situational and cultural. The latter indicates differences across cultures in the literature. This begs the question of whether our findings are exemplifying norms, values and beliefs that are characteristic of Hungarian culture and, for lecturers, organisational culture.

As mentioned earlier, the issue of control came across as an important causal factor in both students' and lecturers' CLDs. If we look at control through cultural lenses, then on an organisational level, control and stability relate to the hierarchical culture type (Cameron and Quinn, 2008). Empirical research has found that this type of organisational culture is characteristic of higher education institutions in general (Trivellas and Gerdenidou, 2009), and the organisation at the focus of this study (Heidrich et al., 2016) in particular has been found to have a hierarchical culture. This seems to indicate a need for tight control, and conversely, the absence thereof may be perceived as a certain degree of weakness, leading to the perceived opportunity to cheat.

If we consider the students' perceived need to cheat, then the values and beliefs instilled in them as a part of Hungarian culture may affect that perception. When Varga (2008) reproduced Hofstede's (2005) results, many of the figures for cultural dimensions significantly changed, with one exception: uncertainty avoidance. Hungary has a high uncertainty avoidance³, whereby security is an important element in individual motivation. Our findings indicated that the difficulty of the topic and quantity of learning material were factors affecting the perceived level of cheating. If we combine these aspects, then students may see cheating as a form of security when facing seemingly insurmountable odds of failure. Although further research would be needed to make the link between high uncertainty avoidance and the tendency to cheat, a study has found a link between uncertainty avoidance and insider trading (Frijns, Gilbert and Tourani-Rad, 2011).

Apart from values which determine organisational culture and behaviour, it is worth mentioning that the social acceptance of cheating was a frequently mentioned factor by both students and teachers. This perceived connection is also backed up by studies. For example, Orosz and Farkas (2011) and Orosz and Roland-Lévy (2013) suggest that there is a strong connection between the perceived level of corruption of a given country and the level of collaboration in cheating. In connection with this, Tóth (2009) highlights that in Hungary a high percentage of people agree with the statement that honest work cannot lead to material wealth (82%), as well as with the statement that if one wants to thrive s/he has to break certain rules (75%) (Tóth, 2009: 48). These pessimistic outlooks are also verified by international data. Hungary and members of some of other CEE countries seem to be more tolerant of both active and passive forms of corruption than the rest of Europe (Tóth, 2009: 33). At the same time, Hungarians, compared to more than 50 countries studied (World Value Survey; 5th wave), are the most sceptical that economic cooperation can lead to mutual benefits,

³See: <https://geert-hofstede.com/hungary.html>

that is, economic life is viewed as a zero-sum-game where one has to trample on others to thrive (Tóth, 2009: 38). Still in relation to social factors, one interesting theme that came up during our interviews was the students' apparent unwillingness to take responsibility for their actions. They seemed to believe that the action of cheating was beyond their control, indicating that they do not see themselves as cheaters but simply as 'victims of circumstance' (see situational factors on the students' CLD). This might be related to a particular generation—Black and colleagues, for example, argue that millennials have been associated with a lack of personal accountability (Black et al., 2013). In line with this, based on Hungarian youth research data, Ságvári demonstrated that Hungarian youth are more tolerant of norm-breaking practices than the rest of society in general, and their parents' generation in particular. At the same time, they also have a more pessimistic view of Hungarian morals than other members of society (Ságvári, 2010). Furthermore, Csepeli and Prazsák (2011) argue that the proportion of those in society who do not take responsibility for their actions and rather passively suffer what happens around them (hence their label 'passives', compared to 'actors' and 'rebels') is one of the highest in Hungary among European countries. Which means it is yet to be seen if this 'lack of responsibility' is a specific trait of a particular generation or not, yet if so, it is certainly exacerbated by cultural factors and reflexes based on historical circumstances.

6 Conclusions

Although our study is exploratory in nature, and in line with its underlying aim, we believe it has raised some important questions, not only about the role of culture in cheating but also about how students' and lecturers' perceptions converge and diverge respectively. We would like to draw two general and one methodological conclusion in relation to our results.

Firstly, comparing the belief system of students and lecturers systematically, it is revealed that Hungarian students in this business school tend to see themselves as 'victims of circumstances' regarding their decisions about cheating. At the same time, lecturers seem to be more optimistic insofar as they mentioned several institutional and pedagogical factors which might affect the level of cheating. So, while students report having low self-efficacy and their locus of control tend to be external, lecturers seem to be more aware of different measures for mitigating cheating. In other words, they do not see themselves as powerless and having no tools to control the situation. Nevertheless, this difference in perspective might come from a hierarchical organisational culture in which students are at the end of the pecking order.

Secondly, both students and lecturers mentioned the emotional toll of cheating. This is interesting because our expectation was that students do not really care about or see the consequences of their actions. According to our results this is not the case, not that in the present circumstance this knowledge would make students hold back their cheating activities. The other side of the coin is that some students also report feelings of guilt in relation to cheating. While this is not a positive emotion and one that one wants to generate in students, Ariely (2009) emphasises that the need of seeing ourselves as nice and honest beings is a strong deterrent for being engaged in immoral

actions. The question is then of justification—what are the characteristics of those situations when students can cheat and still maintain a positive self-image (and vice versa, in what situations do these self-justification strategies not work), which leads us back to the questions of students' perceptions of fairness and self-efficacy. In sum, it seems that emotions play an important role in mitigating both students' and lecturers' actions and decisions, thus, understanding how different situational factors generate different emotional responses in the stakeholders involved is paramount.

As far the methodology of data analysis is concerned, we employed the use of CLDs as a means of facilitating our comprehension of the workings of cheating. The resulting causal chains and causal loops have certainly aided in the visualisation of key areas for our attention. It might be mentioned that turning interview data into CLDs was based on Vennix's (1996) suggestions regarding different forms of involving stakeholders in building a model. This approach allowed us to identify, visualise and thematise a large number of causal attributions based on the interviews. While this way the paper could certainly present a more comprehensive picture, some of the richness of the data is 'lost in translation' and fascinating discursive elements and strategies are flattened out and turned into variables. The results section attempted to balance this loss by also presenting interview excerpts from both students and lecturers. Another aspect where our diagrams can be improved to more fully represent the richness of the data is to distinguish between major and minor causes and effects based on how frequently interviewees' mentioned them. Some form of rating system, similar to that used in Lewin's (1951) forcefield analysis with each cause or effect being rated from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong) would certainly aid in visualising holistically the strength of each cause and its effect on the perceived level of cheating. We see these CLDs as a good starting point in creating models and simulating the knock-on effects of certain actions.

7 Limitations

Our study has some limitations due to biases of sampling both in the literature review and in the data collection stage. Firstly, our literature review was narrowed down to articles where the whole text was available, within two digital libraries. It is conceded that the expansion of these two elements might allow for richer findings, however from a practical standpoint our systematic narrowing down of the sources of literature allowed the study to be completed within the permitted time parameters, and still provide a sufficiently extensive review for our purposes.

Secondly, the number of lecturers and students that participated in this study were low as this is the initial explorative stage of our research. The CLDs are not designed to portray the amount of data received from interviews, so we would add that many of the interviews lasted over an hour and provided some rich data. Furthermore, we intend to extend our study to interviews at other Business schools in Hungary and then move to other institutions than just business schools. We also plan to obtain a greater cross-section of students by selecting our sample of students from a range of courses with varying demographics. Based on these diverse datasets and schools of thought (interviews, previous results on student cheating and dishonesty in general, theories of organisational change), one of our final goals is to build a complex system model

and offer points of intervention which can be presented to leaders of Hungarian higher education institutions and instigate change at an organisational level.

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