

## The ethics of our future business leaders: an analysis of the perceptions of cheating in higher education<sup>1</sup>

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This paper aims at exploring the main causes and effects of cheating through a literature review and to compare them with the causes and effects of cheating perceived by students and lecturers at a Business School and a University in Hungary. Cheating is particularly relevant in Hungary and other CEE countries where student cheating seems to be more rampant compared to Scandinavian countries (Orosz–Farkas 2011) and people are more likely to believe that it is hard to get wealthy from ‘honest’ work (Csepeli–Prazsák 2011). The business world is plagued with unethical behaviour (Pitesa 2015); therefore, it is particularly relevant how future members of the business world see and justify unethical practices in achieving their goals. We collected data through semi-structured interviews with business students and lecturers and our results show that both groups agree on the fact that cheating in the academic field is widespread. We used causal loop diagrams to visualize the findings on the perceived causes and effects of cheating and formulated a number of recommendations that may help reduce this unwanted phenomenon.

**Keywords:** student, cheating, unethical behaviour, causal loop diagrams.

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## Introduction

More and more students think cheating is a business-as-usual method to get through the years of university. Several surveys reveal astonishing statistics about cheating in the academic field. In a survey with more than 3600 respondents Wangaard and Stephens (2011) found that 95% of the students admitted to cheating in the previous year, while 57% of them agreed or strongly agreed that it is a morally wrong thing to cheat. Furthermore, 38% out of 63 700 polled undergraduate students admitted to paraphrasing or copying a few sentences from a written source without footnoting it (McCabe 2005). Only 12% of the students in the first-mentioned poll reported seeing others being caught cheating, which is a considerable distorting factor in the evaluating system. These stats show that cheating is not necessarily perceived as a blameworthy method, but rather a natural act, as students compete in the higher education system. But what is the case when we are raising future business leaders? Is cheating an acceptable way of reaching the higher levels of business jobs or is it connected only to academic work? In our study we examine and compare how business students and lecturers perceive cheating. Furthermore, by analysing the responses from these two samples, we seek to ascertain the primary features and key causes of cheating and what universities can or should do to reduce it.

In order to answer these questions, in July 2017 we collected data through semi-structured interviews with both students and lecturers from the Faculty of Economics at a university in Budapest, who were contacted through a purposive sampling strategy. We also compared these results with our previous interviews on the same topic conducted at a business school in December 2016. We use causal loop diagrams to visualize the findings on the perceived causes and effects of cheating.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First of all, the literature section addresses the topic of cheating and gives a summary of the most important studies dealing with this issue. Secondly, we provide a closer look at the methodology of our research. Then, the main findings section briefly sums up the key issues and tendencies identified by the interviewees related to the topic of academic cheating with the aid of causal loop diagrams as a means of illustrating the correlation between the found variables. In the following section we descriptively present the most important data and results from our research in the attempt to associate them with the main points of the literature review and fit them into the social context

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of the issue of cheating in the higher levels of education. Finally, the conclusion section consists of key findings and future directions for research.

### **Literature review and theoretical/conceptual framework**

The academic research into the problem of student cheating in higher education started with the studies of Bowers (1964). His surveys aimed to map out the extent of the practice of cheating, as well as the personal and social background of those who cheat. In the following decades, studies closely following his model have been carried out several times (McCabe et al. 2001; McCabe et al. 2003). One outstanding finding from these studies is the fact that the overall level of cheating – that is, the proportion of students who admit having practiced it at least once during their academic career – roughly stays constant throughout the decades. Bowers's finding was 75%, McCabe and his colleagues measured 82% in 1993, and 65% later in 2000-2010 (Bowers 1964; McCabe et al. 2001; McCabe et al. 2012). The proportion of the three-time cheaters was of 19% in the time of Bowers, and measured at 20-40% in the 1990s (Lang 2013). These data suggest that the problem is widespread, but the trends are not necessarily worrying.

In this short review, we will go through the possible causes of cheating behaviour in a fourfold structure. First, we take individual characteristics, mostly related to psychological factors, then take micro-social, organisational-level, and finally macro-social factors. Some of the key causes are situated at the intersection of these spheres, and therefore we will distinguish these elements.

Historically, during the decades of cheating research, great efforts have been made to map out the characteristics of the individual 'cheater'. After reviewing the results, Anderman and Murdock (2007) first discuss demographics. When it comes to gender, the conclusion is that while male students have been shown to cheat more than females, the difference is not as big in actual behaviour as it is in attitudes. Age or seniority (the number of years already spent in higher education) have a negative effect on cheating, although the exact causal mechanism here is problematic to untangle. (Is it simply because of age and lack of maturity? Is it perhaps because the students who spend a greater number of years in higher education are the ones taking their studies seriously?) Furthermore, it has been found that unmarried students (compared to married ones), the ones coming from higher socio-economic backgrounds (compared to lower), and less religious ones (compared to the more religious) tend to cheat more. Also, the number of hours

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worked was found to be negatively correlated with cheating. Although these statistical associations could be shown, none of them constituted an especially big difference (Anderman–Murdock 2007).

Continuing with individual characteristics, ability was also found to be connected to cheating, in a negative way (the more able students cheat less), although this relationship is moderated by other factors as well, for example, at lower ability levels, male students tend to cheat much more than females than they do at higher ability levels. Also, those highly apt students who aim at high levels of success might succumb earlier to cheating in a competitive environment than others of average ability (Anderman–Murdock 2007). This is connected to the next very important factor, motivation, which should be approached as a multifaceted psychological concept. First, the nature of rewards that a student seeks can be intrinsic (whereby newly acquired knowledge and skills, or getting a good grade hold a value in themselves for the individual) or extrinsic (whereby all these serve only to get a degree as a gateway to some career, or to get financial rewards), where extrinsic motivation is being associated with higher levels of cheating (Jordan 2001; Anderman–Murdock 2007; Lang 2013). Another facet of motivation is learning orientation, the ideal-typical manifestations out of which one is oriented towards mastery (the deep, full learning of a skill, for its usefulness) and the other towards performance (being able to pass an exam-like occasion once, but not more), with the latter being positively associated with cheating (Lang 2013). It is also noteworthy that people who view intelligence as something that can be changed are more likely to be mastery oriented than those who view it as fixed (Anderman–Murdock 2007).

The next very important psychological characteristic is self-efficacy, defined as “people’s task-specific beliefs in their ability to execute the actions required to bring about a desired performance accomplishment” (Anderman–Murdock 2007, 18). The stronger this belief, the less likely it is that someone will resort to cheating; the belief can be weakened by the fear of failure, worry and anxiety (Anderman–Murdock 2007). Sometimes simply being unsure about an answer will lead students to ‘double-check’ it with illicit help (Jones 2011; Küçüktepe 2014). Notably, Lang (2013) draws attention to the role that external circumstances can play in the individual’s sense of self-efficacy: besides believing in one’s abilities, they also have to be sure that the circumstances will not hinder them in showing their potential (e.g. not having enough time, not being evaluated fairly) – such

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circumstances are a primary cause of (and excuse for) cheating (Lang 2013). The importance attributed to circumstances, in turn, will depend on the locus of control defining the person. Those who are generally inclined to believe that “their fate is in their hands” (internal locus of control) will tend to resort less often to cheating than those who attribute a great deal of importance to external factors, luck, and others, as external locus of control (Anderman–Murdock 2007).

Finally, we would like to highlight the finding that the ‘morals’ of the individual have been shown to have only a small effect on the cheating behaviour. Attitudes towards cheating (i.e. to what extent does one find it acceptable) are related to how the individual acts, but the measures of ‘moral development’ bear only a small effect. The main finding here is that students with a higher score on Kohlberg’s (1981) moral reasoning scale are more likely to respond to stricter surveillance or reduced incentives, but are still likely to cheat in absence of these factors (Anderman–Murdock 2007).

The second sphere within which we identified causal inputs of cheating is that of ‘micro-social’ life, namely the immediate social relationships in which students are embedded. One such unit is the family, which can act as a source of external motivation, e.g. already in Bowers’s research, it could be shown that those students whose parents find grades important are more likely to cheat than those who find these important themselves (Bowers 1964). The other important social influence comes from peers, upon which the literature is unequivocal: the higher the (perceived) level of cheating among peers, the more likely it is that the students will cheat themselves. This situation results from a twofold influence: one is that high cheating levels create a normative support for such behaviour, and the other is that no one wants to be at a disadvantage compared to others (Lang 2013).

The third important sphere is the organisation. Recently, academic research has moved away from individual factors to studying situational ones (Anderman–Murdock 2007; Lang 2013) – and since these situations take place inside higher education institutions (HEIs), this is the level at which the latter can intervene if they want to fight student cheating. One of the organisational aspects is related to the structure of assessment. Keeping in mind the observation that the type of exam largely determines the way students study (the exam is “the tail that wags the dog”, as Mazur [1997] states), we can see that this factor ties back to the motivational ones discussed earlier. The grade is a form of extrinsic motivation

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(and many times not a very strong one), and exams are high-stakes situations in which the emphasis is on performance, and no reward is given for trying – all the hallmarks of situations where cheating will be very likely (Lang 2013). Moreover, competitive exams (and competitive grading) are among the most 'toxic' contributors to student cheating (Anderman–Murdock 2007), especially if we consider the detrimental effect they can have of self-efficacy (belief in the 'fairness of circumstances'). Palazzo et al. (2010) also found that tight deadlines are a cause of students' engagement on plagiarism in home assignments. Both the exams and the classroom environment, including the style of teaching, should put more emphasis on fostering a mastery orientation in students (Umaru 2013).

Considering rules and policing, the literature offers contradictory results. While Ariely's (2012) experimental studies indicate that the risk of being caught bears no relationship to the proportion of participants cheating, and Anderman and Murdock (2007) also warn us that putting too much emphasis on policing risks creating an atmosphere of mistrust, others assert that an effective communication of ethical behaviour within the organisation can yield positive results (e.g. Gallant–Drinan 2006). Jordan (2001) found that the lack of a strict policy and a permissive system were the strongest predictors of cheating within a HEI. McCabe et al. (2003) also found that having an institutional honour code reduced the likelihood of cheating (as compared to having none).

The final sphere enclosing student cheating behaviour is that of macro-social life: cultural, economic and other settings of a given society. The role of a national culture in conditioning cheating in HE is ambiguous. While some studies found no differences in cheating levels between countries, or the ones they found could be explained by structural differences (e.g. competitive exam setting) (Anderman–Murdock 2007), others suggest that there are indeed some key aspects that can shape attitudes towards 'tricking the system'. One such thing is a general mistrust towards agents holding any kind of power (generally, state officials, but this is transferred to teachers in the HE setting), shown to be a characteristic of Russia (Magnus et al. 2002), and likely many other post-socialist countries as well, including Hungary and Romania (Orosz–Farkas 2011). Additionally, we might mention that uncertainty avoidance, one of the elements of Hofstede's cultural map (Hofstede–Hofstede 2005), might encourage cheating in terms of 'double-checking'. Although no study had so far shown a direct link between uncertainty avoidance and cheating, the former was

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indeed linked to the practice of insider trading (Frijns et al. 2008). To provide an even more complete picture of the Hungarian value system in which the HEIs we studied are situated, it is useful to mention that the proportion of Hungarian people who identify their locus of control as external in work situations is one of the highest in Europe; moreover, Hungary is also the leader when it comes to agreeing with the notion that “one cannot get wealthy from honest work” – post-socialist and some Mediterranean countries show similar patterns, though not as strong (Csepeli–Prazsák 2011).

Based upon our literature review, we seek to find answers to the following research question: what are the differences in perceptions of cheating between business students and lecturers? Having examined the key areas found in the literature i.e. the perceived elements that encourage or discourage cheating in general, we have opted for an explorative approach in this study and the method to achieve this will be described in the following section.

### **Method**

There are two key phases in our study in relation to our method: semi-structured interviews from purposive samples; and the construction of causal loop diagrams. For comparison, our first sample involved lecturers and students from a Hungarian business school. These interviews were conducted in December 2016. We then had a second round of interviews at a Faculty of Economics in July 2017. We applied a purposive sampling strategy to find interviewees for our research as our main aim was to select “information rich cases (...) that provide the greatest insight into the research question” (Devers–Frankel 2000. 264). We chose to focus on the cheating of business students, as Frank, Gilovich and Regan (1993) claim that business students have special perspectives on cheating. Although our sample only involves one faculty in each institution, we plan to extend our study to other similar business faculties within other Hungarian universities. As a final point regarding the sample, we selected lecturers with experience of different types of assessments and teaching forms, as well as a broad range of subjects. This sample of lecturers had no connection to the students involved in the research project.

For students, there were two anticipated problems. Firstly, students might not be comfortable reporting on the topic of cheating to teachers. Secondly, some of our interview questions required students to know about student life and

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cheating in general. Therefore, we selected students who are embedded in the social network and so have many connections with other students. The student interviews were conducted by the student members of our research group, and they contacted student organisations operating within the faculty. Despite many students speaking about cheating practices quite openly in everyday conversations – even with teachers – prior to our study, it became clear after the first round of selecting interviewees that speaking about cheating in a seemingly “official” setting was quite frightening. This resulted in a number of rejections in the first round. In response to this, we started to utilise a diverse set of approaches to find willing participants, such as suggestions from student assistants within departments and selecting with whom we have personal relationships.

The second phase was to use the data from the interviews to map the causal connections identified by the interviewees and draw causal loop diagrams. The interpretations of the data were made by the research group consisting of researchers, lecturers and students. The net result of these interpretations is two causal loop diagrams: one for interviews at the business school in 2016 and one for our interviews at the university in 2017. This type of results’ presentation has allowed us to get a broad view of the perceived causes and effects of cheating and search for similarities and differences between the two samples.

The use of causal loop diagrams (CLDs) originates from system dynamics, a school of systems modelling developed by Jay W. Forrester at MIT in the 1960s (see Forrester 1971). The diagrams show multiple-step causal chains, or, indeed, causal loops in which the chain returns to its point of origin. The properties of systems emerge from the outcome of several causal factors, and the high number of linkages helps us understand the dynamic nature of the systems (Sterman 2000; Sherwood 2002).

Causal loop diagrams create 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 as well (compared to what it would have been in the absence of any change). A negative

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connection (-) means that the cause and the 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 (similar to ‘vicious’ and ‘virtuous’ circles); and balancing ones, where the initial change runs through the system and returns to ‘mitigate’ itself (Sterman 2000).

When drawing up our CLDs on student cheating, we noted comments made by the interviewees concerning factors influencing cheating and 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 like to 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).

From an ethical standpoint, our research was authorised by the appropriate authorities at each higher education institution. The procedures for the interviews were clearly explained to the interviewees beforehand and the researchers asked each participant for permission to record the interviews. Confidentiality was assured, and all the results are presented anonymously.

### **Main findings**

Our first sample included nine lecturers (six female and three male) from finance, entrepreneurship and human resources, language, and economics departments, as well as six students (four female and two male) from the business school. The second sample involved six lecturers (two female and four male) from finance, entrepreneurship and human resources, language, and economics departments, as well as six students (one female and five male) from the Faculty of Economics of a university. From these samples two CLDs were created, one for the lecturers and another for the students. We will examine each in turn and compare the differences and similarities for both samples.

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**Lecturers' map: comparison**

In our first sample, we could identify 38 items connected to the perceived level of cheating by lecturers. In our second sample we found a number of new items. In Figure 1, variables surrounded by solid lines indicate an overlap (mentioned by both samples), and new items (mentioned only by the second sample) are shown in bold typeface, surrounded by dotted lines.

Some elements relate to the working conditions of the given higher educational institution, such as 'harshness of sanctions', 'clarity of the institutional regulations' and 'degree of the lecturer's possibility to control'. Others are more general characteristics of the institution, 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'.

There are some notable differences in the business school-sample, compared to the university-sample. Some lecturers tried to avoid conflict when seeing someone cheating, as it might question their authority and they were insecure in this, which might, in turn, relate to how at least three lecturers felt that the system in place was either unsuitable or would not support them in the long term (e.g. consequences were minimal, punishments should be more constructive, using students' abilities). They saw that the situation of catching a cheater as demeaning. The respondents also echoed views from the first sample about the necessity of a clear institutional regulation – a variable we renamed to 'clarity and cohesion of institutional policies', because such policies, in the view of newly interviewed lecturers, should not only pertain to regulation, but to general expectations towards honest work, and clear procedures of dealing with cheating. Conflict avoidance may be seen as a lack of confrontation, resulting in less control over students and thus fewer consequences for cheating, as in the following:

*"...You asked me earlier about what I would do if I spotted someone cheating and I said that I would just warn them. The reason for this is not just that I'm that kind of person not to make a big deal of it, but also because I am not being backed up by the institution. If cheating happens, the institution will not stand by me. So, there are no clear rules. Some institutions do have ethical codes, but they are not really respected..."*  
(lecturer3).

The above quote appears in the CLD under the category of 'level of willingness to control'. Many respondents agreed that given how things are

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currently happening, students see little risk in cheating, either because the chances of being caught are low, and/or because punishment is insignificant or non-existent – these views, we believe, are well represented in the meaning of the ‘perceived level of lecturers’ control (as seen by students)’ variable.

Another institutional element that was found in the second sample, but not in the first, is that in such a complex institution there is a certain degree of sympathy for students cheating as a survival technique. This understanding or sympathy with the ‘suffering student’ has led to the respective participants admitting that they are less active in attempting to detect cheating than others, i.e. less willing to control. This, in turn, leads to less control over students (during exams) and fewer consequences for cheating. One of the respondents in the second sample put this in the context of the lack of transparency when it came to the operation of the university as an organisation. Finally, it is important to mention that one lecturer mentioned that they believed that cheating was transferable to other areas of life, and this realization has made them more willing to control cheating by students at the university in the future.

Interestingly, the same lecturers in sample two that admitted a reduced vigilance during exams in trying to detect cheating, also had a respect for the more active lecturers, who were seen as ‘hunters’ that were courageous and clever at devising new techniques and methods for uncovering cheating. In one particular case, the lecturer claimed that there is a periodical award (or at least recognition) for the lecturer most successful or inventive in discovering cheating. This respect for their peers was coupled with the acknowledgement that this approach was ‘not for them’.

Both samples of lecturers considered the social context as a cause of student cheating. The ‘degree of cheating’s social acceptance’ is an illustrative example. The ‘strength of external pressures for the continuation of studies’ was seen as a social norm or practice to get a degree. In the first sample:

*“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 in the future because they do not want to work in this field” (lecturer5).*

*“...I really don’t want to generalise here, because this does not apply to all of them, but with many of the regular [i.e. ‘daytime’, as opposed*

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*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 this school [i.e. the university]" (lecturer8).*

In the second sample, there was a common opinion amongst lecturers that the university had a good and strong reputation in Hungary and beyond. Lecturers saw this as a form of pressure on students to get a diploma from this institution; this being perceived as the key to a successful career. Thus, the high prestige of the degree given by the particular institution increased the fear of failure. This aspect was not held in the first sample amongst lecturers. The fear of failure was connected to the degree of students' self-efficacy (related to learning) as a negative input.

In both samples, lecturers perceived students as consumers, therefore, we categorised 'the strength of the student-as-consumer mind-set' variable as an external effect, because it reflects a changing attitude in the higher educational sector in Hungary in general. There is another overlap for the 'massification of higher education'. Although the general topic of massification is beyond the scope of this study, it affects the institutions from both samples. This particular variable was found as some kind of 'contextual' item that exerts its influence through other intermediate variables.

Both samples highlighted aspects of the assessment and teaching practices. As Figure 2 shows, all 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 would be higher in the overall assessment system, then, according to the lecturers, the level of cheating would be lower. One teacher in the first sample saw the utilisation of multiple-choice questions as something which leads to higher levels of cheating – especially if the questions can be accessed:

*"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" (lecturer8).*

In contrast, a lecturer from the second sample saw this dilemma from the students' point of view and reflected on the different techniques used for memorising the answers to tests in secondary school. This respondent also saw this activity

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as provoking the need for fresh new tests for every examination regardless of the level of the HEI. Furthermore, many of the participants in our second sample rejected the notion of multiple-choice tests and expressed that courses were designed to involve assignments and essays, not to reduce cheating per se, but to equip the student with the necessary skills and abilities for their future careers, as well as to increase interest through practical work and encourage teamwork. However, one particular aspect of the assessment system stood out in the second sample as different from the first, and that was the need for transparency of the marking system, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

*“[I want] to make the whole grading and other essays quite transparent. Of course, this requires a lot of effort from the teacher as well because if I publicize all the answers and the grading system then my grading should be very transparent and my written feedback should be very clear. ...[By] having a very transparent grading technique and they can read each other’s essays, then they might be more aware of what they are doing. And that might raise questions as to why I mark one way or the other. I think if the teachers are just providing a mechanical feedback then it might just increase the possibility of cheating. If I give them real or authentic feedback that really evaluates their performance, and they feel that I actually do read all their essays and I do it for them, then they are more likely to pay attention to their own work than just borrow from others” (lecturer4).*

This aspect of assessment also relates to the level of ‘practicality’, both in the case of exams and of teaching. In both samples, 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)’, as we can see in the previous excerpt. In contrast with this, 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: the ‘number of people taking the exam’ and the ‘number of people participating in the course’. Both were mentioned by the lecturers among the dominant causes of the high level of student cheating. The reason for this is that the intake of a high number of students result from

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the decisions and the strategy of the given institution, yet at the same time, this practice has the potential to negatively affect teaching and assessment practices.

Certain variables were grouped together as personal and group characteristics of students, such as in the example of greater 'strength of individual disposition towards cheating' and higher 'students' familiarity with institutional/learning environment' being perceived as leading to a higher level of cheating. In contrast with this, raising the variable 'degree of students' self-efficacy', or 'degree of students' intrinsic motivation' is perceived to cause 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). The 'level of solidarity between students' was classified as a group characteristic, and has a positive effect on the level of cheating, as seen in the following excerpt:

*"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).*

The personal characteristics of the lecturers themselves revealed in the first sample the emotional effects of students' cheating ('degree of lecturers' disappointment' and 'degree of trust towards students'). Earlier in this section, we found that the second sample expressed some insecurity in confronting cheating. Another emotional effect that was mentioned by most of the interviewees in both samples, was that of disappointment in cheating when it occurs, regardless of the perpetrator. One of the interviewees in the first sample puts 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, namely to see that the student prepares and understands [the material], and not that s/he attempts to gain advantage by cheating" (lecturer2).*

In stark contrast with the majority of the participants from both samples, two participants from the second sample saw some of the cheating students as simply

too clever, or bored with the course, or both. The participants felt a certain degree of understanding that some courses simply provoked cheating – in a similar way to the first sample, where the perceived usefulness of the course related inversely to the level of cheating. Although it is a tall order to satisfy all students with all courses all of the time, we can see again the sympathy and siding with the students in the second sample, as we saw earlier when referring to the complexity of the institution and the notion of the ‘suffering student’. Thus, the student is seen more as a victim than a malicious perpetrator that has breached the trust relationship between lecturer and student.

The role of the family was emphasised in new ways in the second sample. Lecturers in sample two agreed that the family might strengthen the external pressure for the continuation of studies, but additionally, more than one of them voiced the opinion that upbringing played a part in how ‘morally strong’ a student ended up being. We indicated this opinion by adding a new input variable (strength of moral development within the family) to the one concerning the strength of individual dispositions towards cheating.

As for the micro-social causes of cheating, lecturers in sample 2 agreed that the higher the degree of cheating’s social acceptance, the more likely it was that a student ended up cheating. They fleshed out this causal mechanism with new elements, though. Some of them explicitly referred to the (perceived) number of peers around a student who cheat (a variable that had existed in the first sample student CLD, and was now added to the lecturer map as well), which stands in a mutually reinforcing relationship with the degree of acceptance, and acts as an exacerbating factor on the level of cheating in itself. One lecturer also talked about a certain ‘Robin Hood attitude’, that is, the view that disobeying the authority is in fact a morally virtuous thing to do.

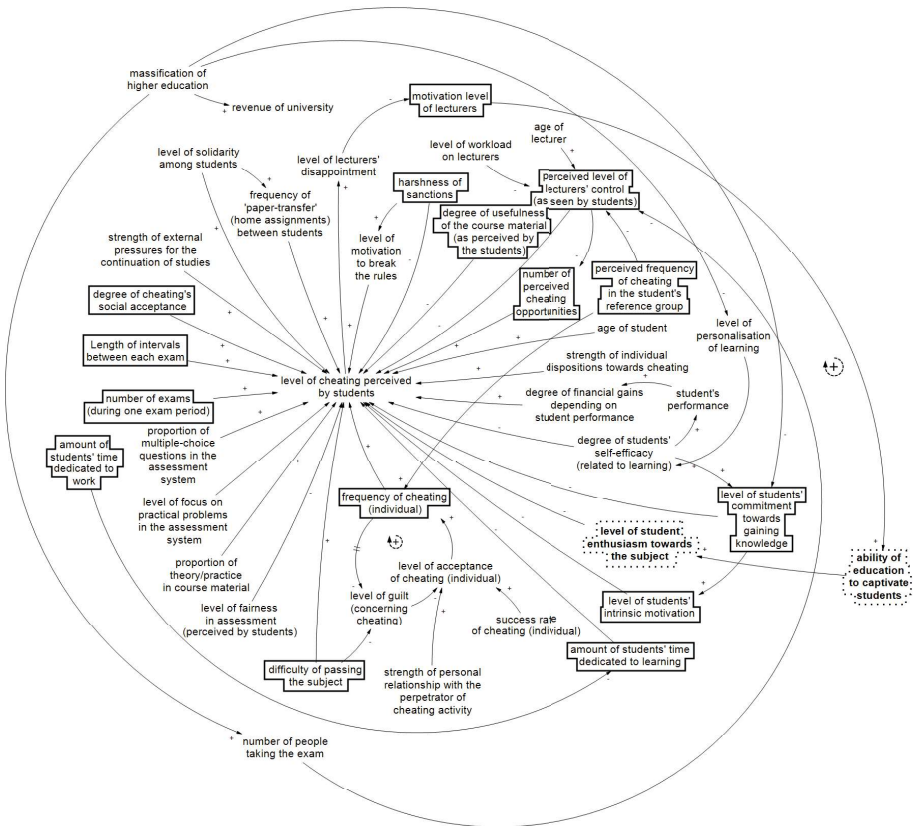
Many of the factors discovered before were echoed by respondents in sample 2, although sometimes with new wording. A focus on practical problems (mentioned earlier), the need for students to see the usefulness of learning material, and the need for education to captivate students all received support as important determinants. The importance of personal relationships in education also recurred (with references to its difficulties in the face of mass student bodies). The ‘difficulty of passing the subject’ was also echoed as a cheating cause, notably not as something that is only perceived by students, but as something that seemingly the lecturers viewed as objectively measurable (i.e. ‘the material is

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too much’, ‘the subject is too hard’). Following their suggestions, we made new connections from this variable to the ‘level of fairness in assessment (perceived by students)’, and to the ‘degree of students’ self-efficacy (related to learning)’. More respondents mentioned ‘laziness’ as a cause of cheating, but we did not include this as a new variable, since we believe that it is represented in the CLD by intrinsic motivation and commitment towards gaining knowledge.

A new variable named ‘level of student awareness concerning academic integrity’ was added to the diagram, since more than one sample 2 respondent voiced the opinion that plagiarism sometimes occurred because students (and even officials) were unsure about its boundaries. This awareness, they



Source: authors' own design

Figure 2. Causal loop diagram based on student interviews

said, could be raised via open discussions about university values (involving students).

As mentioned in the methodology section, the use of CLDs may lead to the emergence of feedback loops. It was found that an increased ‘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). Another self-restraining loop was found: 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’.

### ***Students’ map: comparison***

Student interviewees from sample 2, if investigated alone, would have produced a less rich causal map than the students from sample 1. However, their opinions overlapped on many important areas. As in the previous figure, the variables boxed by solid lines are overlaps (mentioned by both samples), and the variables shown in bold, surrounded by dotted lines, are new additions (mentioned only by members of the second sample).

Similar to the teachers, students from sample 2 did not concern themselves as seriously with exam details (e.g. theory/practice, essay/multiple-choice) as those from sample 1; instead, they focused on the workload level. Many of them mentioned the high ‘number of exams (during one exam period)’ as an exacerbating factor, which, along with the ‘difficulty of passing the subject’, also cited frequently, was a primary perceived cause of student cheating.

While not being too concerned with exams, students from sample 2 voiced expectations towards the style of education. They thought that boring and uninteresting subjects, which they simply did not like, will induce a higher level of cheating. The importance of seeing the usefulness of learning material was also echoed from sample 1 responses. Clearly, sample 2 respondents expected their teachers to provide them a good learning experience, which we represented with the variable that had previously existed on the lecturers’ map (‘ability of education to captivate students’). One respondent also linked this to the motivation level of lecturers (which needed to increase in order to cater for the aforementioned expectations).

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Interestingly, work as a causal factor was again mentioned by only one respondent, as was the role that individual disposition could play. As with teachers, we again considered 'laziness' to be incorporated in the level of intrinsic motivation, and therefore did not include it as a new variable.

In turn, cheating simply being "easy" was a cause that all sample 2 respondents mentioned. We believed that this was sufficiently represented on the chart by the variable 'perceived level of lecturers' control (as seen by students)'. Many of the sample 2 interviewees also explicitly mentioned that sanctions were negligible, and that they expected cheating to decline if these became harsher.

Social factors also received support from sample 2 students. Many of them agreed that the perceived frequency of cheating in the student's reference group will increase the likelihood of the individual cheating. The variable 'degree of cheating's social acceptance' received support in the form of references to the macro-social environment and Hungarian culture. Some students said that cheating's social acceptance was in fact high, and some referred to corruption in politics.

## **Discussion**

As one could read in the literature review section, it is undecided whether rules and policing could help to deal with student cheating at an organisational level. Ariely's experimental studies demonstrated that the possibility of getting caught has no clear connection to the cheating behaviour (Ariely 2012), while an effective communication of ethical behaviour might lead to positive outcomes (e.g. Gallant–Drinan 2006). Nevertheless, in our research, interviewees emphasised the issue of control and supervision. On the students' causal loop diagram, we could see that there is a perceived connection between lecturers' control and the cheating opportunities. In a similar fashion, students assumed that there is a causal connection between the number of people taking the exam and the incidents of cheating since invigilating is more difficult under these circumstances, which again leads to opportunities for cheating.

Another important aspect was the element of trust. As it was mentioned in the literature review section of this paper, too much emphasis on control and policing might create an atmosphere of mistrust. On the diagram based on teacher interviews, this connection is actually reversed, that is, the teachers' willingness to control is connected to the degree of trust towards students.

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However, there are two other factors on the diagram related to cheating: the actual level of (lecturers') control as a consequence of the willingness to control and the students' perceived level of lecturers' control. This distinction provides an interesting twist to the whole situation since, according to the lecturers, it is not the actual level of control which urges students to cheat but the level of control perceived by the students. This means that lecturers have to keep a precarious balance between playing the role of the bad cop while maintaining good relationships with the students. That is why aversion to conflict in policing situations might have a mitigation effect on the willingness to control. Apart from these aspects and attributions, it is worth mentioning that while according to our literature review the rules and policing aspects are relatively under-researched and the related findings are inconclusive, it seems that the issue of control is highly important for Hungarian lecturers.

Studies such as Gallant and Drinan (2006) and Jordan (2001) 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. It seems that it is not enough to have strict rules, policies and sanctions alone, as this also puts the burden on the lecturer to prove that the student is guilty of cheating. Our findings indicate that this burden may push lecturers to shy away from detecting cheating in exams. Furthermore, the lecturers' perception of support by the institution when cheating is detected affects their willingness to detect cheating (willingness to control). On an institutional level, this indicates a need not only for communication of policies, but also that full support must be clearly communicated to the lecturers.

The literature found that there were two controversial characteristics for students who engaged in cheating behaviour: age and gender. In our first sample we found that lecturers did not mention age as affecting the level of cheating, whereas the students did. In the second sample, no mention of age was made. This may be due to our sample being based upon accessibility and likely openness rather than a pure cross-sectional sample of students. Had we targeted a wide range of younger and older students then the differences in cheating at different ages might have been more apparent. Gender in relation to cheating was not raised as an issue in either groups (students and lecturers) from the two samples.

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Our literature review found three categories behind the reasons for cheating: personal, situational and cultural. The latter indicates differences across cultures in the literature. This begs the question of whether our findings merely confirm the norms, values and beliefs that are characteristic of Hungarian culture and, for lecturers, there may be aspects of both organisational and national culture at play. In our second sample, the students specifically referred to aspects of Hungarian life that relate to cheating. They seemed to have a greater awareness of the goings-on relating to scandals involving dishonesty in various forms. We could not attribute this as a causal factor for cheating, but it certainly indicated a distinction between the two institutions in our samples, as well as potentially affecting the respondents' perception of the 'social acceptability of cheating'.

The papers of Orosz and Farkas (2011) and of Orosz, Farkas and Roland-Lévy (2013) emphasise that the perceived level of corruption of a given country and the level of collaboration in cheating are strongly related. This connection is even more worrying if we consider that norm-breaking behaviours seem to be tolerated among Hungarians, at least at attitude level. According to the survey results, an overwhelming majority agree with statements such as "honest work cannot lead to material wealth" (82%) or that "if one wants to thrive s/he has to break certain rules" (75%) (Tóth 2009). International data also support this grim outlook. Both active and passive forms of corruption are more widely accepted as part of life in Hungary (and in other CEE states) than in the rest of Europe (Tóth 2009). Moreover, in an international comparison (World Value Survey) Hungarians are especially prone to seeing economic life as a zero-sum game and being sceptical that economic cooperation can lead to mutual benefits (Tóth 2009). In line with these phenomena, one striking aspect in the interviews was the students' underdeveloped sense of responsibility towards their actions. It was a dominant theme that they depicted themselves as 'victims of circumstances' shifting the blame on situational and organisational aspects (see situational factors on the students' CLD) and refusing to see cheating as serious offence.

It might be argued that this is an attribute of a particular generation, as for example Black et al. (2013) emphasise that millennials can be characterised by a lack of personal accountability. In a similar fashion, Ságvári (2010) pointed to the fact that youth in Hungary accepts norm-breaking behaviour more readily than other parts of the society in general. Simultaneously, they also perceive Hungarian life more immoral than the rest of the society does. Nevertheless,

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Csepeli and Prazsák (2011) do not relate this inability to take responsibility to one segment of the Hungarian society. According to them, the proportion of those who only passively suffer what happens to them and feel unable to shape their lives (hence their label ‘passives’ in contrast to ‘actives’ or ‘rebels’) is one of the highest in Europe. So, it is still inconclusive whether the lack of responsibility can be attributed to a cohort effect or to cultural and historical factors, or maybe to their interaction.

One particular aspect of our CLDs that came across in both samples, but to differing extents, was the willingness to control. From an organisational cultural perspective, control and stability relate to the hierarchical culture type (Cameron–Quinn 2011), which is characteristic of higher education institutions in general (Trivellas–Dargenidou 2009), and the organisation of the first sample in particular was found to have a hierarchical culture (Heidrich–Chandler 2015). 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 by the students and a correspondingly perceived lack of sufficient support by the lecturers.

From a national cultural perspective, Varga (2008) highlights Hungary’s uncertainty avoidance. This need for a sense of security may be the cause behind the sympathy shown by lecturers in the second sample for ‘the suffering student’, lost in a complex network of rules and requirements that may vary from one department to another. Thus, lecturers empathise with the lack of security felt by students and are thereby less willing to control cheating. From a students’ perspective, cheating may be seen as satisfying a need for a sense of security or a crutch when feeling the pressure of potentially losing the diploma and all the consequences that follow that failure. Some recent studies have already started to examine the link between aspects of national culture and cheating (Frijns et al. 2008).

### **Conclusions, limitations and future research directions**

By comparing the perceived causes and effects of cheating in two higher education institutions in Hungary, we have found a number of common causal factors. However, despite having similar samples from similar organisations, differences were found. It could be argued that each sample from each institution may uncover a range of differing variables and therefore, a case study approach is the best option here, in the same way that many studies of organisational culture are also undertaken. Certainly, the commonalities will be considered for the

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development of a quantitative instrument by which our study can be undertaken on a much larger scale.

If HEIs sincerely wish to reduce cheating, then we have found a number of recommendations that may help in fulfilling this desire, based upon our two samples. Firstly, support for lecturers in cases of cheating should be clearly communicated and credible. Otherwise a HEI may have all the rules and policies it wishes, but the lecturers seem unlikely to act without clear and substantial support. Secondly, many business students reported the difficulties with imposed deadlines that may have provoked the need to cheat. This does not concern one particular course, but rather several courses from different departments which have deadlines that coincide. Liaising between departments or even a shared online system for setting deadlines for assignments might be a means to reducing the lack of coordination between courses and thereby reducing the pressure upon students. In relation to this, further co-ordination between departments to have general rules for students rather than each department having its own set of rules may reduce the likelihood of the student 'getting lost in the big institution' as well as reduce the lecturer's perceptions of the 'suffering student'. This, in turn, may lead to students feeling less insecure (lower uncertainty) and lecturers feeling more willing to control for cheating in exams. Thus, from both the lecturers' and teachers' perspectives, there is a potential reduction in cheating.

For our samples, we did not specifically target a certain age range of students, but since age was a controversial factor in previous studies regarding whether it had an impact upon the level of cheating or not, a possible future direction may be to compare the perceptions of first and final year students. Furthermore, bearing in mind the national cultural characteristics, and the emergence of studies relating dishonesty to national culture, there is the potential for a cross cultural comparison on cheating habits involving students and lecturers from other countries.

Our use of the CLDs acts as a visual aid for seeing all the causal factors relating to cheating and their apparent relations to one another. The method could be embellished with weightings for each factor in relation to others, based upon the number of responses received for each variable, and this may be a future direction for our study once a quantitative instrument is developed.

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