

From orientation to profound knowledge in Health Care management — experiences from the MBA study in UK

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Od orientačných vedomostí k hlbokým znalostiam manažmentu v zdravotníctve — skúsenosti z MBA štúdia v Anglicku

The recent and profound changes in the health care delivery system have created a need for sufficient professional development of employees. Its integral part becomes the education in up to date health administration. Management is in the list of competencies for health service and public health employees (Lane and Ross, 1998) in an environment, where it is expected, that the health care reform and human resources would lead to increased effectivity and improved performance (Martineau and Martinez, 1997). Thus, comprehensive study of management, MBA (Master of Business Administration) type of education programs becomes attractive for physicians (Smallwood and Wilson, 1992) and students of medicine (Sherill, 2000).

The awareness of an education in management in Slovak health care public has increasing tendency over last ten years. Initially, fragmented initiatives from several educational institutions, including projects of international collaboration TEMPUS, US AID were focussed on an orientation in the management. After an era of mostly short term educational activities the necessity for creation of complex, good quality and internationally comparable education in health care management is imminent.

Project PHARE defined the priority to prepare an arrangement of MBA type of study for Slovak participants in countries of EU. Education program from the Leeds University was selected for eighteen scholars, who were delegated by educational and executive health care institutions. Two Leeds University centres – the Nuffield Institute for Health (NIH) and Leeds University Business School (LUBS) were responsible for selected internationally accredited study program primarily oriented to health care and social area. A condition for student's participation was an adherence to preconditions required from the university, participants abilities and the will to disseminate acquired knowledge and skills into local environment, namely by the future involvement in education and training.

The aim of this paper is firstly to announce series of articles, authored by participants of MBA study in Leeds along with introductory words from British tutors. Additionally, the objective is to provide basic characteristics as well as a brief reflection of provided education. The first information will be supplemented and detailed in forthcoming papers, which will be based on MBA thesis of program participants.

Objectives and content of cap for health care and social services

The above mentioned type of part-time modular program is aimed to public sector managers who can demonstrate the potential for significant career progress, and links organisational needs and career development plans with scholarship. Hence, the program respects needs of maternal-sponsoring institutions, in this case health care organizations, as well as individual career development of participants. The scheme requires passing of ten educational units, fulfilling partial exams and written assignment for every studied module. Assignments are peer reviewed externally. An overview of the study content, basic and optional educational modules is to be found in Table 1.

The study was completed with final project, oriented toward an implementation of gained theoretical knowledge and practical skills in management, applied to work environment of individual participants. In this case the environment was health care in Slovakia. An overview of areas for thesis of Slovak cohort is to be found in the Table 2. It reflects actual problems in health care management in Slovakia.

Experiences from the study

Long term contact with British academic environment is among important factors in the evaluation of study effects, besides high quality in the organizing and provision of the education, typical for British universities. The exposition to democratic and liberal academic culture on one side along with a demand for fulfilling criteria announced in advance, were two of effects of the study with the highest appreciation.

Adequate respect payed to principles of adults education, learning from experiences and forcing immediate confrontation of

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Tab. 1. Overview of educational modules.

1. Basic modules	
Core Management 1,2	NIH*
Foundation Module	LUBS**
Organisational Behaviour	LUBS
Human Resource Planning	NIH
Marketing for Health and Social Services	NIH
Financial Planning	LUBS
Strategic Management	LUBS
2. Optional modules	
Training and Development	LUBS
Management of Decision Making	LUBS
Management of Change	LUBS
Business Excellence	LUBS
Assessing Managerial Performance	NIH
Health Care in International Perspective	NIH
Community Care	NIH
Ethical Issues in Health and Social Services	NIH
3. Work based project	

*NIH – Nuffield Institute for Health, **LUBS – Leeds University Business School

Tab. 2. Areas of the management discussed in MBA thesis.

Area of Management	Occurrence in Slovak Cohort
Strategic management	3
Human resource management	2
Change management	1
Financial management	2
Marketing	2
Quality management	4
Project management	1
EBM approach	1
Personnel development	2

learned with problems from a practice at individual work places is another valued feature of the program.

Throughout solving of problems in the management, the participants were led toward paying a respect to contingency approach. They were warned of understanding and implementation of management as fashion waves (Politt, 1993; Ramsay, 1996). Students were led to systematic study of problems. Attempts to analyse, compare with the literature and seek own ways appropriate for given environment were supported and strengthened. Descriptive approach only, was considered as insufficient. Formal system of students work evaluation served the goal, too.

The training in skills of critical analysis and academic writing was useful for all participants, included those who had previous academic experiences. This was a crucial tool for further personal development obtained. Skills were continuously strengthened within consequent education modules, based on coaching, constructive feedback and empowerment from tutors.

The atmosphere of cooperating team contributed to positive impression of entire study, upgrading of professional identity of health care managers, which were results of common efforts of British tutors as well as Slovak participants.

Among limitations of this type of the study one can attribute unfamiliarity with British contexts and facts, primarily in some specific aspects of management, as for example marketing or financing are. Different levels of management development, determined by historical consequences and some culture diversity for example in the area of quality, was another limiting factor, surfacing mainly during team work and discussions with British students.

Conclusion

Completing internationally recognized academic study by eighteen Slovak participants is certainly a contribution to strengthen health care management capacities in Slovakia. It requires, however confrontation with everyday reality in health care and in the same time continuous fostering and cultivation in academic environment. The series of prepared papers has an ambition to be natural step in this direction.

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