

# WHY STUDENTS OF MANAGEMENT OPT FOR NOT FINISHING THEIR DEGREE: STORIES BEHIND A MAJOR DECISION

David Anthony Procházka

---

## Abstract

Students in their early twenties are grown-ups and their own masters that have to balance many more things and life situations than it may seem. Previous studies proved that young adults of Generation Z react in a rash and intermittently the escape from the situation transpires the only heeded solution. This pilot study researches the perceived reasons behind students opting for not finishing their management degrees. Different variety of pressures coming from peers, parents, social networks and their part-time work create conditions that are not favourable for studying. This qualitative study aims to unearth the stories behind this decision. Interviews with seven students leaving a prestigious business university without finishing their degrees uncover several facts that were not known in this particular connection. The study could provide testable questions about the relevance of peculiar ways of presenting the knowledge to students and subsequent testing, and in this way, closing the didactic loop.

**Keywords:** Management Education, Generation Z, Pressure, Closing the Loop

**JEL Code:** A22, I23

---

## Introduction

Reducing attrition is a crucial strategic goal of in the EU for achieving a modern knowledge economy (Vossensteyn et al., 2015) Student's life encompasses peaks and valleys that contain an educational value of its own. Three years of undergraduate degree examine not only the preparedness to learn. Besides that, students are put through the wringer in other areas of maturity often living for the first time away from home and their parents, living with strangers to save on costs of living, not being able to find time to perform tasks to sustain themselves or to relax and find work-life balance. This loss of equilibrium has a perceived impact on their studies, often to such an extent, that they opt for not finishing their degree. This might be viewed as an extreme, from the data, however, this problem is not geographically limited, although the

perceived stress in countries where students pay tuition is higher. This pilot study tries to uncover subjective reasons for students opting for leaving the business university in the second or third year of undergraduate study in The Czech Republic. The reason is not to find the underlining causes, but to look for the subjective understanding of students leaving their studies and stories behind the major decision. The results should not be generalised as this is a qualitative study and as it is a pilot, the theoretical saturation was not reached in this study.

## **Literature review**

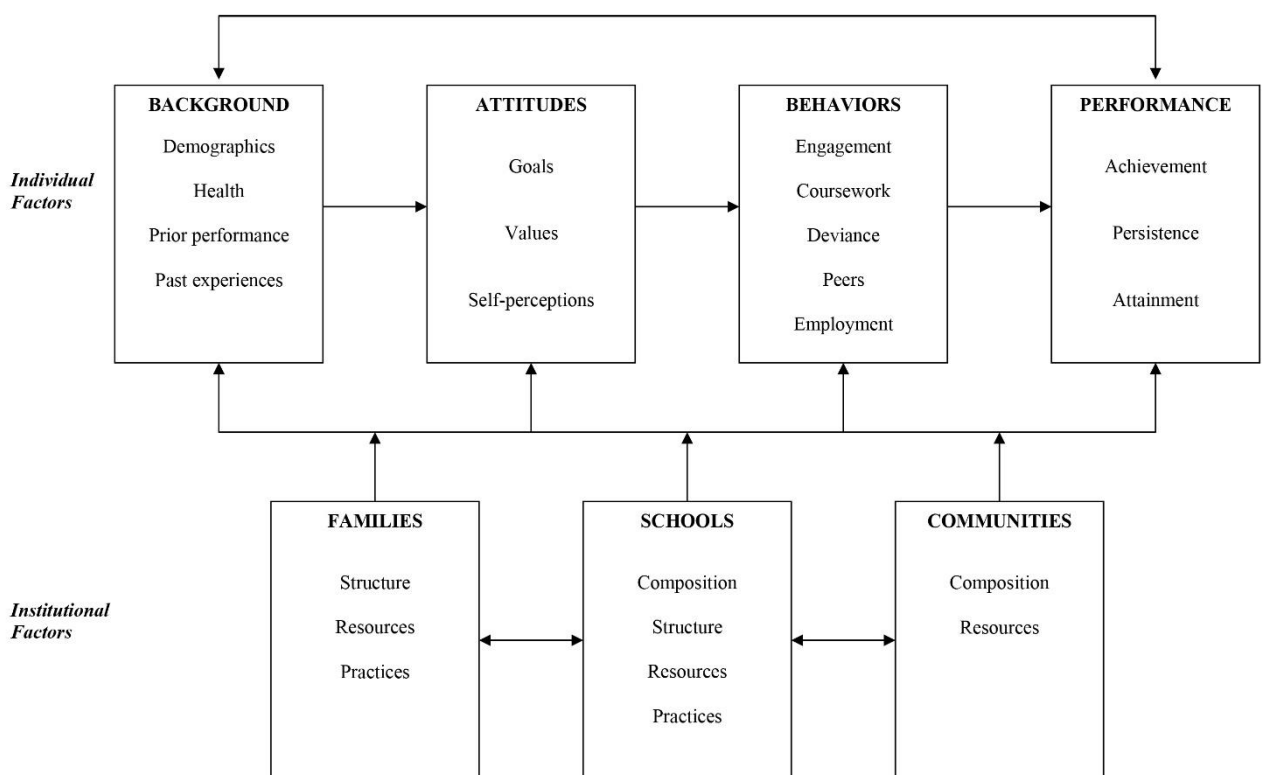
Gargantuan review of 25 years of research on why do students drop out of school revealed the data from 203 published studies on students in the USA where about every fourth student drops out for various reasons. Dropouts report different reasons for leaving school, for example, problems within the family or at work (Bridgeland, DiIulio & Morison, 2006; Rotermund, 2007), leaving for not coming to school, not liking school, it was too hard (Rotermung, 2007). Interestingly, there seems to be a correlation between a sibling dropping out and the subject following shortly (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Teachman, Paasch & Carver, 1996; Jacob, 2001; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997). Another correlation was found between SES (socioeconomic status) and dropping out of school, exactly 95 studies confirmed this relationship, interestingly, some studies found the effect only in the white population (Ekstrom et al., 1986, Fernandez et al., 1989), other studies found a significant effect in Whites, Blacks and Hispanics (Velez, 1989). Longitudinal data for 7000 university students in Spain were observed over an eight-year period between 1997 and 2004 showing that older students tend to drop out because of work or losing touch with the environment (Lassibille, 2008). Additionally, every third student of the University of Málaga changed their program to a completely different one during their studies. Students switching to other universities were not followed. Only 40% of students complete their studies on time, which could be another issue with its own causes and problems for the institution and students themselves as that means about 25000 students that could have/should have graduated but did not. According to Zajac & Komendant-Brodowska (2018), „The overall departure rate from some programmes was as high as 57% in the case of students who started their first-cycle studies in 2010 and 60% among those who did so in 2011. In the Czech Republic, there is a rapid increase in the minimum wage that could be detrimental for low-skilled workers and not beneficial to the state alike (Pavelka, 2012; Pavelka & Pícl, 2019), however, unemployed can also file for a startup subsidy (Dvouletý & Hora, 2020) which might be an unintended catalyst for leaving an undergraduate studies prematurely. About

60% of students who drop out do so within 12 months after enrolling and approximately one-third leave before the end of the first semester. It is worth noting that those numbers may be underestimated.“ According to Procházka (2017) weighing summative assessment against normative assessment might be within the area of the discussed issue.

## Methodology

Accepting the model from the previous studies on the theme, the main focus of the pre-determined codes were as follows in the model 1.

### Model 1. Pre-determined codes derived from previous studies



Source: Bridgeland et al. (2006) categorized

For the purpose of finding more about the stories of the students behind the drop-outs, the qualitative approach was selected, specifically semi-structured interviews with students that have decided to leave and have done all the necessary steps (to avoid influencing their decision in any way). The codes retrieved from the previous studies were coupled with the newly found codes. It is a consistent approach in the qualitative studies in similar situations in the work environment. In this instance the approach tackles the mixed approach of a classical qualitative study that can be found in numerous examples of similar researches, and grounded theory

approach, when the result is to some extent a mystery. For the purpose of this pilot, 6 interviews in the major business university in Prague, the Czech Republic, was selected. All interviews took part in the nearby pub where interviewer reimbursed the costs of non-alcoholic beverages and small treats. Three of the interviewees were females, three other interviewees were males. All of them dropped out in the second or third year of undergraduate studies. The interviews lasted between 40-72 minutes and were coded in MaxQDA Pro qualitative research software. The author is the owner of the licence as the official trainer of MaxQDA in the Czech Republic. The coded data were categorized and the new codes and categories were merged with the pre-determined codes. The pilot should show if there is a possibility of finding new codes with this approach and if so, trigger following research using this approach. In agreement with Bryman & Bell (2007), the corrections for common mistakes when asking questions were made.

## Results

**Tab. 1 Categories, codes and examples of the codes**

Category	Code pre-determined	Example
Background	Demographics Health Prior Performance Past experiences	Psychological issues Studying at CVUT Being a C-student before
Attitudes	Goals Values Self-perception	Making a lot of money Starting a company To have a family soon Seeing herself as unequal to others
Behaviours	Engagement Coursework Deviance Peers Employment	Fully engaged at the beginning, losing drive after three weeks of the semester Peers that do not study but prevail Need/wish to work during lectures
Performance	Achievement Persistence Attainment	I am an A-student, however, it does not mean anything to the teacher of the different subject. That should change.
Families	Structure Resources Practices	We have a complex ties in our family. Especially my parents from

		Vientnam wants us to achieve and to move up in society. It is customary to listen to your parents and pay off your debt to them by studying hard and get the job that is better than theirs to take care of them later.
School	Composition Structure Resources Practices	The structure of the study is ok, I just lost all the available credits on few modules I just could not pass. I have to work to study. And later, it gets you. There is no more time to study.
Communities	Composition Resources	I do not have anyone to turn to. I have to choose carefully what to do. When you are up, you can study. When you are down, you have to work. If it does not work out, tough luck. Survival takes precedence, ofcourse.

Source: author's creation

The main findings were tough conditions that some of the students have to live in to survive. Although they get some funds from the university and there is a possible stipend for A students, it is not as high to become an incentive to the interviewed students. For example, there was a student from Ukraine, that wished to study in the Czech Republic and their story basically was that she had to start working in escort service to fulfil her dreams. However, later on, the lifestyle became addictive and she has dropped out of school as she has found „a faster, less difficult way through life where university education is not needed.“

The community seems to play a more important role in the study life of some student than anyone might expect and there were not so many studies to focus on this particular part of reasons. „I do not have anyone to turn to. I have to choose carefully what to do. When you are up, you can study. When you are down, you have to work. If it does not work out, tough luck.“

Composition of the study seemed surprisingly alright to the interviewees, speaking neutrally of giving praise to the system of credits where they could take the course repeatedly without a need to pay extra. However, this benevolence did not help in the end. Compulsory

50% attendance meant they could not find a suitable job and their peers from work made fun of them. „The structure of the study is ok, I just lost all the available credits on a few modules I just could not pass. I have to work to study. And later, it gets you. When you have to choose, you choose to work.“

Performance/Achievement was an issue in several stories, although never the main one: „I am an A student, however, it does not mean anything to the teacher of the different subject. That should change.“ How? „Well, teachers should see the results of the student during his whole study and when they see that I am superb in all other modules, they should take it into account.“

There were several stories with a strong push/pull from their backgrounds. Families that wished their daughter to study abroad, however, could not afford to pay for the expensive live in Prague, Vietnamese community supporting their children with everything they need, however, not accepting anything but As as a result, asserting unnecessarily high levels of stress and building a feeling of inferiority in the student. Peers also play an important role as two of the members of the Russian community revealed. They give the newcomer „map“ to survive without a need to study hard, for example where to buy a sickness note from the doctor or how to learn about the content of the test. Not all the advice work, however, as the university changes their test content and there are new teachers to several disciplines. Students then do not know how to start really learning in the second or third semester and fail repeatedly. Moreover, when they start studying, the community things lesser of them not being able to follow their advice.

## **Conclusion**

The pilot revealed that no abundance of new codes could be discerned. Nevertheless, that might either mean that the theoretical saturation was found in previous studies and that the codes are to a certain extent similar for high school and university drop-outs, but also that the pilot did find any students with previously unidentified issues and that there are codes that were not found due to the limits of the pilot, principally suggesting the sample size. That could be found with a proper qualitative study on the larger sample, suggesting enlarging the sample to 20-30 participants, not rejecting the focus group approach. New information within the codes was found, however, for example, the problem in a community, where sophomores are given set of rules to cheat during the studies and the issues it causes within the community when it does not work any more for the freshmen. Stories of the female (and male) students finding easier ways

to live their lives and drop out, as a result, is known in the literature. The impact of a community of Vietnamese community on the students is a piece of rather new information and should be followed with either separate study focusing exclusively on the codes in community of Vietnamese students, or, incorporating them into larger study. Notwithstanding the missing codes, the existing codes should be validated by quantitative research study. Unfortunately, the sample is limited at the moment, however, systematic approach to e.g. questionnaires for all prematurely leaving students might be the way to gather larger sample and lower the possibility of the bias. Methodologically, experiments with interventions would be most desirable approach, however, it is rather impossible in aforementioned situation. The biases in this research are self-selection bias, survival bias (only those who somehow perceive themselves as victors in the game agreed to the interviews), and in one case possible acquiescence bias. None of those biases was actively worked with to diminish them as they do not pose a valid threat in the chosen research design. The research should continue with the larger sample, compensating subjects financially to lower the possibility of survival bias and widen the possibility of finding new codes in stories.

## References

- Bridgeland, J. M., DiIulio Jr, J. J., & Morison, K. B. (2006). The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts. *Civic Enterprises*.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2007). *Business research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dvouletý, O. and Hora, O., 2020. Analysis of the Start-up Subsidy for Unemployed in the Czech Republic. *Politická ekonomie*, 68(2), pp.142-167.
- Ekstrom, R. B. (1986). Who drops out of high school and why? Findings from a national study. *Teachers College Record*, 87(3), 356-73.
- Jacob, B. A. (2001). Getting tough? The impact of high school graduation exams. *Educational evaluation and policy analysis*, 23(2), 99-121.
- Lassibille, G., & Navarro Gómez, L. (2008). Why do higher education students drop out? Evidence from Spain. *Education Economics*, 16(1), 89-105.
- Pavelka, T. (2012). The minimum wage in the Czech republic – the instrument for motivation to work? *The 6th International Days of Statistics and Economics*, 903–911. [https://msed.vse.cz/files/2012/Pavelka\\_2012.pdf](https://msed.vse.cz/files/2012/Pavelka_2012.pdf)

Pavelka, T., & Pícl, M. (2019). The effect of a rapid increase in the minimum wage in the Czech Republic. In T. Pavelka (Ed.), *The 13th International Days of Statistics and Economics*. (pp. 1179–1186). [https://msed.vse.cz/msed\\_2019/article/233-Pavelka-Tomas-paper.pdf](https://msed.vse.cz/msed_2019/article/233-Pavelka-Tomas-paper.pdf).

Procházka, D. A., & Konvalinka, M. (2017). Changing the way management is taught. In T. Löster & T. Pavelka (Eds.), *The 11th International Days of Statistics and Economics*. Melandrium.

Rotermund, S. (2007). *Why students drop out of high school: Comparisons from three national surveys*. University of California, Santa Barbara.

Rumberger, R. W., & Thomas, S. L. (2000). The distribution of dropout and turnover rates among urban and suburban high schools. *Sociology of education*, 39-67.

Teachman, J. D., Paasch, K., & Carver, K. (1996). Social capital and dropping out of school early. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 773-783.

Teachman, J. D., Paasch, K., & Carver, K. (1997). Social capital and the generation of human capital. *Social forces*, 75(4), 1343-1359.

Velez, W. (1989). High school attrition among Hispanic and non-Hispanic White youths. *Sociology of Education*, 119-133.

Vossensteyn, H., Kottmann, A., Jongbloed, B. W., Kaiser, F., Cremonini, L., Stensaker, B., ... & Wollscheid, S. (2015). Dropout and completion in higher education in Europe: Main report.

Zajac, T. Z., & Komendant-Brodowska, A. (2019). Premeditated, dismissed and disenchanted: higher education dropouts in Poland. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 25(1), 1-16.

## Contact

David Anthony Procházka  
University of Economics, Prague  
nám. W. Churchilla 1938/4  
130 67 Praha 3 – Žižkov  
David.prochazka.km@vse.cz