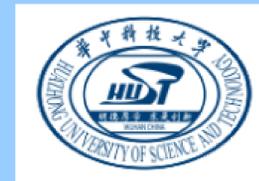


How Does a Program Manager become the “MR Clutch”?

—Based on a College Student Learning Assessment Program

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1 Background

In the 1980s, the accountability for public colleges and universities was given birth because of the financial considerations of state government in the United States (Alexander 2000; Klein et al. 2005; Liu 2011). It facilitated the assessment movement which examined whether the institutions really promoted students' learning outcomes (Douglass et al, 2012; Bao 2014, 49). Several assessment programs of college student learning (CSL) such as the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE), College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ), and the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) were developed rapidly, and they spread to the rest of the world through research paradigms (Coates and McCormick 2014). China has been one of the beneficiaries. Since 2000, the four representative similar programs such as China College Student Survey (CCSS), the Survey of College Teaching and Student (SCTS), National College Student Survey (NCSS) and the SERU have also been developed swiftly. They have run for more or less a decade, and now can attract about 200 institutions each year to participate (Wang and Wang 2018). The present studies explored the internal and external impacts of these programs on the quality of undergraduate education (QUE) (Shi and Wang 2018; Wang and Shi 2019). However, deep explorations of the impact mechanism like route and dynamics also need more emphasis. This study aims to answer the research question: what's the activity model of the program managers in the impact of the CSL assessment programs on the QUE? Based on the Program A, it has long-term interaction with the participating institutions and gradually formed a stable group – the program managers. Some of them are concurrently liaisons, while others are responsible for the distribution and recycling of the questionnaires, and pushing the sharing and use of program results.

2 Methods

The program A, as one of the four major CSL assessment programs in China, was selected as the case study. Over the ten years, a total of 65 institutions in Xin province of Northern China participated in the program A. I interviewed seven program managers from the institutions which are public ones and have continued to participate more than five years. Grounded theory (GT) based on the *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques of Strauss and Corbin (1990)* is used in the data analysis. There are three coding steps in GT, like open coding, axial coding and selective coding. As the first step, open coding has two parts: one is labeling, the other one is seeking categories, properties and dimensions. The second step is utilizing a coding paradigm of A-F steps involving causal conditions, phenomenon, context, Intervening conditions, action/ interaction, strategies and consequences. Then the task of selective coding is seeking the core category, forming pattern and generating the middle-range theory raised by Merton (1990).

3 Results

The "self-game" behavior pattern of the program managers has been generated based on the GT. The pattern has two properties which are the degree of the compliance of the program managers to the administer rule (dull-flexible) and professional degree (weak-strong). The interactions of the dimensions of these properties have formed four combinations in a matrix: Dull compliance- Weak profession, Dull compliance- Strong profession, Flexible compliance- Weak profession, and Flexible compliance- Strong profession. They are respectively corresponding to Yes man, Jonah, *Shi Shi Wu Zhe* (识时务者, bright man who can recognize the facts of the situation) and *Tong Ji Bian Zhe* (通机变者, wise man who can be able to unify problem solving and intrinsic value)(see Figure 1). Yes man is derived from the theory of 'Yes man' of Prendergast, like the program manager A8M1 & A8M2. Jonah is a figure in the religious classics, Maslow describes the 'Jonah complex' as a person who escapes growth, like A6M1, A12M1 & A15M1. The *Shi Shi Wu Zhe* and *Tong Ji Bian Zhe* are all from Chinese Classic, they are respectively A14M1 and A2M1. Under these four behavior patterns, program managers have different self-game when facing the smooth sharing and good use of the program results. For instance, the Yes man has weak professionalism and strictly follows the orders of his leader to manage the program. Although the Jonah has stronger speciality, he still won't do more without the leader's permission. Interestingly, though the professionalism of the *Shi Shi Wu Zhe* is limited as Yes man, he has flexible compliance to the administer rule because he, generally speaking, is the leader of the Office of Student Affairs (OSA). His difficulty is the competitive relationship between his OSA and the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). The next is the *Tong Ji Bian Zhe* with strong professionalism which is the ideal type. He also faces the pressure of the administer rule like Yes man and Jonah, but he regards the communication and use of the program results as his mission. We can find one or more samples to match each type of pattern of the Self-game theory.

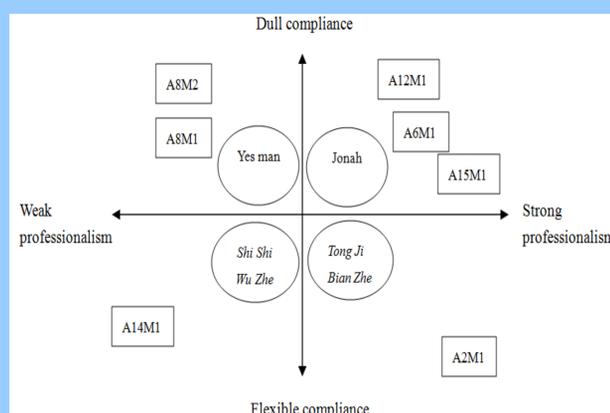


Figure1. The matrix of the "self-game" behavior pattern of program managers

4 Conclusion

Finally, we discussed the reasons of the four classification of the "self-game" behavior pattern of the program managers which are Yes man, Jonah, *Shi Shi Wu Zhe* and *Tong Ji Bian Zhe*. One of the significant reasons behind the classification is possible to be the conflict of roles between academics and administrators, both of which are the program managers. On one extreme, if the program manager almost is a pure administrator with weak professionalism, he is likely to be Yes man or *Shi Shi Wu Zhe* which depends on his power. if the balance turns to the academic, he may be Jonah or *Tong Ji Bian Zhe* which depends on whether he takes the program impact as his mission. The "self-game" behavior pattern, as a substantive theory, has a certain explanatory power for the situation similar to the program A like the program B, but the premise is that the program is the responsibility of the OSA and OAA and the program manager is a member of these departments whose first identity is an administrator.

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