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The Ugly Duckling

A study on what former students at School of Business, Economics and Law
at Gothenburg University are doing today

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Abstract

Bachelor Thesis in Business Administration/Organisational Management

The ugly duckling - A study on what former students at School of Business, Economics and Law at Gothenburg University are doing today

After getting comfortable at Handelshögskolan during their studies, students are faced with the graduation day, having to step into the labour market. Magazines talk about a “challenging labour market” and too many university graduates in Sweden. These reports are increasing insecurity and self-doubt among students.

In this paper we examine what has happened to former Handelshögskolan’s students who graduated in 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2001 and what are they doing today, hoping that they are going to give us a hunch of how our future careers could look like. In order to do that, we conducted a quantitative survey among 66 graduates and took a closer look at three individuals and their careers who might serve as examples for future graduates. We investigated Handelshögskolan’s culture and the socialisation process students come across during their studies. This is a study written by students for students, in order to provide them with some possible alternatives for their future careers.

Our study shows that 66% of graduates from Handelshögskolan get a job before graduation and 84% of them have a job within three months after graduation. They can be found in all kinds of industries and for ambitious graduates there are no limits for how far they can go.

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Gothenburg, June 7th 2006

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Once upon a time...

...there were two senior students at School of Business, Economics and Law at Gothenburg University (Handelshögskolan) who had a panic attack when they, all of a sudden, realised that graduation day was knocking on the door and they had no real ideas on what they could expect from the future. And so they asked each other:

- Do you have a job yet?

This is probably one of the most stressful questions we had to answer when facing graduation, since everybody, more or less, expect us to have at least two or three employers lined up to hire us: “For God’s sake, you studied at Handelshögskolan!” The only problem with this picture is that the employers are missing and we feel as if we have not learned anything at all and all the knowledge everybody is talking about... is gone!

Globalisation, such a trendy word; competition, another one; international experiences.... And the list can continue. Due to increased international cooperation among business schools, it has become increasingly easy for students to go abroad on exchange programs. Socrates, Leonardo and Erasmus, until a few years ago, these words signified the names of some brilliant people; but for us, the students of today, they signify exchange programs during our studies, in another European Union country or elsewhere in the world. Not only that the world seems to have shrunk overnight, but how could you say no to such an experience? It gives you the opportunity to experience another culture, to build an international network of relationships that anybody will envy and to get appreciated international experiences that will contribute to your success in getting the job of your dreams.

At Handelshögskolan, going on an exchange semester is encouraged and promoted to students; 156 partner universities in 39 different countries have signed student exchange agreements with the school and more are signed every year, giving the students plenty to choose from when trying to decide where to go and what to study (annual report for Handelshögskolan, 2005). Another encouragement is the travel scholarship that all exchange students can apply for, increasing the possibilities of going on exchange, even when one is on a tight budget.

The European Union is striving to achieve a uniform educational platform throughout Europe by the so called Bologna process. The purpose of this reform is to simplify comparability of

educational programs throughout Europe and to harmonize the educational structure. This is especially important when it comes to studies in economy since economists today have to consider the globalization even if he or she is working for a company that is only acting on a local market (Ekon no 2, 2006, p 12). Through the Bologna process graduates will be able to be active on the European labour market in a way that is not fully possible today, because of difficulties in comparing and understanding the different educational systems and degrees.

At the same time the process implies new challenges for all universities across Europe. With a uniform system it is not only easier to compare students, the quality of the education at each and every school is more easily scrutinised, thus creating a new level of competition among universities within the European Union. If the situation in the USA can be used as a hint of what is to come due to the changes, it will be increasingly important to have a good reputation and a well-known brand in order to attract the best students. Handelshögskolan is aware of the situation and is continuously working with brand and reputation matters, to find and maintain a desired position in potential students and current and potential stakeholders' minds.

All of this leads to greater mobility of students across the world. Although this trend is very positive in our opinion, it also means greater competition when trying to get a job. People will compete for the same jobs regardless of their country/school of origin. This situation can be very confusing for newly graduates who are trying to kick-start their careers. This got us thinking of our studies and school and of course we looked at the famous people who have graduated from Handelshögskolan: Jan Eliasson, worldwide known diplomat, Leif Pagrotsky, Minister for Education, Research and Culture in Sweden; Hans Olov Olsson, Vice President of Ford; Linda Pettersson, President of the Swedish Trade Council in London; Helena Sångeland, Swedish Ambassador in Malaysia; Anna Nordström, Vice President of the European Central Bank. But is there enough room for all of us on such high positions? If no, what are our other options; if yes, how do we get there?

One way is to set up goals and strategies, another is to "go with the flow" but, then it struck us: it is impossible to predict our future, so we decided to turn to history for answers, to find out what has happened to our "predecessors" from Handelshögskolan. We think this is a good approach to get a feeling for what our future could be like. By taking a closer look at former students' "destinies" we can open our eyes for alternatives other than the obvious ones and better prepare ourselves for our future; especially now, when we are about to enter an ever

changing world of opportunities! Although this is inspiring in a vast number of ways, it is also frightening, what are our options, really? Are there any obstacles for where we can work; are we limited to certain industries because of our degrees?

Every time, when a person is faced with “a new beginning” and has to interact with new groups of people, a socialisation process starts. To be able to examine this process, we chose to look at some of the socialisation and identity theories that we will use as our frame of reference during this study. This is an interesting aspect of our reality and we will take a closer look at this phenomenon at Handelshögskolan, where students are socialised and disciplined in a certain way.

Three years ago, when we were “hatched” and stepped into Handelshögskolan’s corridors, we had the impression that we did not belong here; just like the ugly duckling, in Andersen’s tale (1844) we were “... not at all like the others”. During our studies we got comfortable at Handelshögskolan but now we are becoming, once again, “The Ugly Duckling” when we are about to step into the “real world”: the labour market.

What is our problem?

As visiting Professor Göran Malm mentioned in a very inspirational session, “there is no opportunity without danger” (Handelshögskolan, 24-01-2006) and our situation is no exception from this rule. The labour market in Sweden today is quite a challenge for graduates. Every year there is a surplus of students entering the labour market and types of new jobs do not match their educations, needs and expectations. A study made by the union Jusek (Jusektidning, no 5, 2006) indicates that only 24 % of newly graduated economists work in the field they were educated and 76 % are currently occupying positions that correspond only partially or not at all to their education. Among law students the numbers are brighter but still far from perfect since 39 % work in their field of expertise and 61 % are employed on positions outside their studies area. This might be because students expectations are not updated and they continue to plan and act in a traditional way in a world of continuous and quick changes. Or it might simply mean that the education system in Sweden is outdated and does not provide the labour market with suitable “products”, as mentioned by Louise Adelborg, President of the Jusek Union (Jusektidning, no 5, 2006).

In this paper we will investigate what has happened to Handelshögskolan’s students graduating in 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2001, in the hope that they are going to give us a hunch on how our future careers could look like in five, ten, fifteen and twenty years from now. These years were of interest because we wanted to have a broad spectrum of references and to cover different stages in former students’ careers. We also wanted to see if the situation is different between generations when making career and to investigate different types of degrees within the same education base over the years. Also, Sweden has faced quite a few changes since the 1980’s; passing from a booming economy, to a severe recession in the early 1990’s, followed by the IT crisis in 2000 and now growing strong again. These years were appropriated in order to give us a fair picture of what has happened and how graduates evolved and developed under these circumstances. We also decided that a five year gap between the graduates was a fair time frame for the youngest ones to establish on the labour market and for the more experienced ones to move upwards on the career hierarchy.

Especially, we hope to find destinies that fall outside of “the traditional box” and take a closer look at these by interviewing some of these individuals and find out how they ended up where they are today. Hopefully this paper will be an inspiration for students in the future and a

boost of confidence for graduates to not settle for the first job that crosses their path. With a bit of luck, a few of them will be motivated to follow through on their dreams, take chances, get outside the traditionalists' ways and look for that special thing in life that will make them happy and live a fulfilled life! In order to ensure that, graduates have to take advantage of today's opportunities and make sure they have a strong foundation stone for their future careers.

Will we get a job from our education or do we have to stay in school and get a higher degree to become hireable or, maybe, stay in school for the sole purpose of being able to pay the bills? Sadly, after discussions with fellow students in the school's corridors, the latest is the cruel reality for some students today. Therefore it felt natural to look at former students' situation since they have already overcome this obstacle and try to relate their experiences to our future.

The precise question guiding us throughout the entire process has been: "*What are graduates from Handelshögskolan doing today?*"

Disposition

To answer the question posed above we start out with a brief description of how individuals usually react in unfamiliar surroundings and situations and then moving on to discuss how a person's identity is formed. This discussion is followed by the theoretical background on how discipline and legitimacy affect individuals. To simplify your understanding of our results we discuss at length how we executed our survey and the possible sources of errors; followed by the actual results. In this section we present the cases and then move on to our analysis. At the very end of the thesis you will find answers to our problem.

Vocabulary

In order to facilitate for readers not familiar with the Swedish system, we include a short explanation for some of the names found in the paper.

Civilekonomerna:	A union for economists
CSN:	The governmental organisation that handles loans and grants to students
Ekon:	The official magazine published by the student body at Handelshögskolan
Erasmus:	Exchange programme between European Universities
Folkbokföringsregistret:	The official Swedish population register
Gaius:	A 2-days labour market fair for law students held every year
Handelshögskolan:	School of Business, Economics and Law at Gothenburg University
Jusek:	Association of Graduates in Law, Business Administration and economics, Computer and Systems Science, Personnel Management and Social Science
Jusektidning:	The official, monthly magazine published by the union Jusek
Ladok:	The central register of results by students in Sweden
Leonardo:	Action programme for the implementation of a European Community vocational training policy
Magister:	Master of Science (160 University points, equivalent to 4 years of full time studies in Sweden)
Socrates:	The European Community action programme in the field of education (including the Erasmus programme)
SPSS:	Software for statistical analysis of data

Learn to learn to walk the walk and talk the talk – Theory

We chose to study organizational management thinking that, by “arming” us with the necessary tools, we will be able to become successful managers. Today the career path is much personalised and its development has more and more to do with personal traits. As we mentioned earlier in our study, after carefully researching the labour union’s magazines, we discovered an abundance of sensational stories about graduates who have applied for 200 jobs and not even once been called to an interview (Helena Göransson, *Jusektidning*, no 7, 2005). We have a critical position towards these insinuations; since we believe that getting “the job” depends on many other factors than just the general economical wellbeing of a country. Besides, Sweden is in the middle of an economical boom and it is not realistic to blame the so-called “challenging labour market situation” on the organisations and employers. Nowadays, the career responsibility has become more of an individual responsibility and graduates’ success in finding a job depends a great deal on their strengths and attitudes towards this problem (Bergström, 1998).

Being a manager a hundred years ago was probably quite different; at least this is the way we feel! Back then a manager could focus on direct performance like selling products to specific customers on limited markets with fewer and often well-known competitors. They could even be free riders on the classical protestant work ethics; their employees were brought up in a society where the norm was that everybody worked hard (Alvesson, 1990). The current situation is quite different (Hill, 1992). The modern managers do not have exact duties to take care of; the managerial role of today is more about leading the employees, providing meaning in the day-to-day tasks around the office, a “management of meaning” (Alvesson, 1990). Although subordinates value financial success, the most important thing for them is to get both formal and informal recognition, have career development opportunities and psychological well-being (Hill, 1992; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). They expect that the manager will ask how things are going at home show interest in the person’s private interests, and not only in how they perform on the job. Deetz describes it in a pretty straightforward way (Deetz, 1995, cited in Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, p 87) “the modern business of management is often managing the “insides” – the hopes, fears and aspirations – of workers, rather than their behaviours directly”. They have the need to perceive the manager as a leader and not only as a boss; a person that does not concentrate only on his/her duties but on

managing people and establishing personal relationships with them. They want to be able to go out and have a beer with their boss (Hill, 1992)!

A team needs visibility, contacts, and senior management access; therefore the leader needs to act in a professional way and know how to carry themselves in the community. He/She needs to act in a political way and manage relationships in order to meet expectations and avoid conflicts. The leader needs to have a strong credibility that will give him/her access to resources and rewards and therefore the network of relationships is essential to achieve this (Hill, 1992).

Socialization

The very first day at Handelshögskolan is a strange experience! When opening the doors for the very first time you do not feel that you belong there. Everybody seems so knowledgeable and it is hard to imagine that you will ever fit in. Surrounded by strange, difficult words and phrases and professors known for their expertise worldwide; you struggle to find a way to cope with all these new impressions and feelings at once. You have literally opened up a door to a whole new world. The entire concept is an institution with which you are not familiar at all.

According to Hill these feelings are perfectly natural; it is a part of a transition process especially evident when facing great changes. She describes the first months of the transformation period as a time of many surprises, most negative but some pleasant. When the person starts to feel more comfortable with the changes, after having acquired some specific skills (in our example becoming used to the studying technique and the “academic way”) and regained some self-confidence, individuals start to appreciate the changes and begin to recognize the satisfactions they could derive from becoming an integrated part of the institution. The person is surprised and relieved when discovering the opportunities he/she is exposed to when entering into the world of Handelshögskolan. In time, the individuals grow to appreciate their new role and the new aspects of their world which gives them satisfaction and rewards. By the end of the first year most of them have adapted to the new situation and have started to rebuild their identity in these new surroundings.

Organization culture

There is no perfect definition for the word culture that is able to express completely the meaning of “culture” which is accepted by everybody. Even in the field of organization culture research, this word is used differently: some of the researchers underline the emotional part and common feelings; others see culture in terms of “how everybody is doing things” in the organization and others choose to see culture from the symbolic point of view (Ortner, 1984; Borowsky, 1994). None of these ways is excluding the other one, but in our case we are going to use the term organization “culture” as an expression which stands for a way of thinking, acting and conducting ourselves in the society.

A while ago there were a lot of people who thought that each organization had distinctive subcultures and that the main architect behind them was the senior management. However, nowadays the integration perspective dominates management theories. This involves an idealistic approach to organizational culture, where rules, ideas, values and “how” things should be done are communicated by the high management and is the basis of the organization directions and “right” priorities (Alvesson, 2001).

The macro divisions like class, sex, profession and ethnical groups can also be behind these fragmentations within the organization. Different groups have a specific posture of interaction with each other and influence in time the big cultural picture of the organization. In this case the senior management is kept within reasonable bounds when dictating the values and ideas the individuals should follow (Alvesson, 2001). These ways of analyzing are not necessarily opposites, but they work hand in hand and none of them necessarily excludes the other one.

Identity

Since most students at Handelshögskolan are being disciplined in the same way it is natural to expect a development of some sort of collective we-feeling, a shared value base and, probably, a joint identity. Just as any company, Handelshögskolan wants its students (employees in an ordinary company) to not only act in the ways the teachers discipline them, but wants them to “personally subscribe to the messages” (Hatch and Schultz, 2004, p 2). This makes one wonder, what is an identity? According to Encyclopaedia Britannica Online it is “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual” and “the relation established by

psychological identification”. But these short explanations did not really tell us much so we decided to read up on the subject.

“The thinkers” on identity

Identity is a paradox, at least according to the psychologists and sociologists that theorised the subject from the very beginning (Hatch and Schultz, 2004). It is a paradox because identity is both a source of steadiness and an ever evolving process at the same time. Albert and Whetten (1985) proposes that identity, at least in part, functions as a means of identification; that identity is the classification of yourself to make it possible to recognise differences between the individual and others. Besides making differences apparent, it also shows similarities to members of the same “class”.

A lot of the research on identity shares the basic idea that an identity is formed in interaction with others (Hatch and Schultz, 2004). Albert and Whetten (1985, p 273) cites Erickson (1968) on the process of forming an identity: “... in terms of a series of comparisons: (1) outsiders compare the target individual with themselves; (2) information regarding this evaluation is conveyed through conversations between the parties (‘polite boy’, ‘messy boy’) and the individual takes this feedback into account by making personal comparisons with outsiders, which then; (3) affects how they define themselves.”

Another perspective on the same topic comes from Tajfel and Turner (1979) who advocates that the social comparison process in which an individual differentiate him- or herself, by choosing which groups to join, forms positive and negative images of groups to enhance self-esteem and thereby form an identity (especially social identity, but we apply their ideas analogically to personal identity).

Mead (1934) describes the identity as two parts of the self, interacting over time. The “I” stands for the present identity and the “me”, which is the historical identity, is the base for the present one. The “I” of today will act and absorb reactions from others towards the self, thus forming the “me” from the actions and reactions from these others. The result is the “I” of tomorrow, which is the “I” of today with attitudes from the community incorporated. On the other hand, Ashfort and Mael (1989) claim that individuals have multiple identities, although loosely coupled, and that the tensions between the different identities are not resolved by integration but by “... ordering, separating, or buffering them.”

“I” and “me” versus “we”

Besides their idea on multiple identities, Ashfort and Meal (1989) proposes that an individual does not have to put any effort into a group's goals to identify with the group. As long as the person perceives he or she is affected by the fate of the group, it is part of the person's identity. An example of this is a sports fan that feels with the favoured team and enjoys successes and grieves failures even though the team is not affected by the single fan in any way. The person might even get better self-esteem from successes and be equally effected by failures. This agrees with Turner's (1984, p 530 as cited in Ashfort and Mael, 1989) idea of a psychological group, defined as “a collection of people who share the same social identification or define themselves in terms of the same social category membership”; if we see the team the fan is supporting as a social group. But in collective identities such as this one do not need any personal relationships among the fans (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). This is seconded by Ashfort and Meal (1989, p 37) “Identification with a collectivity can arise even in the absence of interpersonal cohesion, similarity, or interaction and yet have a powerful impact on affect and behaviour.” Compare the statement to how a big crowd at a sports event act and you will see how true it is.

Discipline

Two of the means/tools our teachers use in the disciplining process are the exams and assignments. In “Övervakning och straff” (1975), Foucault has an interesting way of pointing this out, he states that exams works as a mechanism that connects how a person is educated to a certain source of power exercised in the educational process. The result of each and every exam and assignment is registered and will follow the student forever; this incentive not to fail is probably the most “hands-on” tool we face while being disciplined and can be seen as a Panopticon surveillance system as described by Foucault (1975). We can be held accountable for these results our entire lives and who wants to show a failure? By this mean, the teachers make us embrace new knowledge and by the content of the assignments they “force” us to see certain phenomena as problems and others as being a desired state.

Legitimacy

At the end of their studies, students who follow the educational process, get, together with their diploma, a certain legitimacy in society, which entitles them to apply for specific qualified jobs. Legitimacy is a word that reoccurs in our interviews and also in a lot of management literature. The meaning of this word is multifaceted and there is probably a

definition specific for each and every science. However, in this paper we are focusing on the sociological aspect of legitimacy. Therefore we use a sociological definition by Scott and Marshall (2005) where legitimacy...

“... may be claimed by those with power on the basis of either traditional, charismatic, or rational-legal grounds. Likewise, legitimacy—and therefore authority—may be accorded to a distribution of power on the basis of tradition, on affectual or emotional grounds usually associated with revelation (charisma), on the basis of value-rational faith or belief in an absolute, or finally on grounds of belief in the legality of the order. The content of the justification for continued domination—its legitimation—constitutes the basis for the differences in such empirical structures of domination as bureaucracies.”

Universities around the world have a long tradition; the first universities were founded more than 1000 years ago and they have historically been centres of knowledge and education. They have been recognized as institutions with knowledge and people taught at universities have been perceived as informed. This tradition has not been broken and it is still an advantage to have a university degree, especially when it comes to jobs considered as being more strategic such as management and law. Even today the tradition is maintained and in order to access authority and power, it is imperative to have a university degree.

By this time it is quite clear that each organisation has its own specific culture. The way individuals act and behave is typical to the organisation they are part of, but this is not the case from the very first beginning. The culture is formed by its individuals who gradually are socialised and disciplined to match the organisation identity.

Mastering the chaos – Method

Since we were interested in what former students actually are doing today we somehow had to get in touch with them and ask. There were a couple of methods available to complete this task such as: personal interviews, telephone interviews, fax questionnaire and a mail or e-mail questionnaire (Aaker, Kumar and Day, 2004; Mullins et al, 2005). Due to time and economic factors personal interviews were not an option for the survey and the time factor also ruled out a mail questionnaire, leaving us with: e-mail, fax and telephone. Since most people do not own a fax machine and we did not know where they worked (meaning we could not send the fax there) this option was also ruled out and because we did not have their e-mail addresses, this was again not an option, leaving a telephone interview as the only realistic way of solving the problem.

Who are we going to talk to?

We printed lists of all students from Handelshögskolan who graduated in 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2001, to get a fair picture of how a former student makes a career after studying at the university. Initially we wanted to examine the classes of 1976, 1986 and 1996 to cover all segments of a career up to the retirement but it would have taken too much time to find the class of 1976 since they were not available in the university database. We then decided that two classes would probably not be a large enough sample to draw any valid conclusions, so we decided to use the classes mentioned above. It would have been interesting to examine every major available at Handelshögskolan, but due to time and economic constraints we chose to focus on economy and law students. This was a fair compromise we had to do, because we were interested in getting conclusive results that were representative for as many students as possible. And in order to ensure that, we included the two main areas of studies at Handelshögskolan: economy and law.

After getting the lists we used the websites hitta.se and eniro.se to find their current telephone numbers. We soon realised that some of them had changed names and were hard to find. We then used a service from the Swedish tax authority to get their current addresses from Folkbokföringsregistret.

Random selection

Because of our time limit we did not have time to carry out a census survey thus forcing us to rely on a sample. Since we expected the population to consist of about 500 former students each year we were investigating, we felt that a sample size of about 50 people for each year would enable us to draw general conclusions with statistic significance (Lee, Lee and Lee, 2000).

We did this by randomly drawing a number between 1 and 10 and then, starting with this number on the list, used every tenth person in the population as our sample. We used this method since the lists of former students were sorted by degree and by name. This method ensured that our sample was representative for the population since the sample and the population was distributed equally when it comes to type of degree.

On the phone

We decided to conduct the survey over the phone but what are the pros and cons of this method? We have to understand the advantages and disadvantages of our method to be able to draw realistic and truthful conclusions from the collected data, or the results would not have been reliable.

The advantages

Telephone interviews are efficient, at least when considering time and money; time since we do not have to waste time travelling from respondent to respondent as we would have to if conducting personal interviews and money for the same reason (Mullins et al, 2005). It is also convenient to be able to conduct the survey from the comfort of your own home or wherever you can get hold of a telephone. There is also something irresistible about a ringing telephone, curiosity makes it hard not to answer (Aaker, Kumar and Day, 2004). It is easy to call back to non-responses which minimises non-response bias. Since the telephone interview is very anonymous, interviewer bias is minimised and it is more likely to get responses to sensitive questions for the same reason.

The disadvantages

A telephone number is not eternal and this proved to be a problem. Since the contact information of our population was not updated we encountered numbers that were not in use, busy lines, the call was not answered and the person currently holding the number was not the

person we looked for (Mullins et al, 2005). There was no really good or efficient way to avoid these problems so we had to make the best of the situation. Luckily we had access to at least 2 ways of finding a current number to the person we were searching: www.eniro.se and www.hitta.se. These websites in combination with the help of Folkbokföringsregistret enabled us to find at least a home telephone number to most of the sample. We did not substitute any of the non-responses since we believe that this group is deviating from the people we got in touch with; if we had substituted we would probably have gotten biased results (Aaker, Kumar, Day, 2004).

Phone calls also have the disadvantage of being intrusive, especially when calling a person at home. According to Aaker, Kumar and Day (2004), about 40 percent of respondents will participate in a survey if contacted at home, something we had to consider when deciding on our sample size. We also had to consider the fact that people were not available at home during office hours (in general and especially in our population of highly educated persons who were likely to be working long hours) leaving only short “windows” of time for us to get in touch with the respondents. Our calling times were from 8.00 until 21.00 weekdays and from 13.00 to 19.00 weekends.

The questions

We designed the questionnaire to see if we could find common traits in the sample, primarily to find out if there is an “average career” for them. We divided the questions into three areas of interest: “background information”, “the situation today” and “about your time at Handelshögskolan”. The main reason for this division was that we wanted to examine if we could find correlations between the background information and the situation today. In the third part we hoped to find explanations to the correlations we found and also get a general idea of how Handelshögskolan has influenced the students in their careers.

In this section we will explain the reasons for the questions. We will use question 1.1 to 1.4 to categorize the sample according to gender, age, and type of degree.

1.1 – Gender

1.2 – Age

1.3 – Type of degree

1.4 – Major subject

1.5 to 1.8.2 helped us understand the chosen career path based on foreign experience and how long it took them to get their first job. Also, if they had different jobs, we investigated why a graduate from Handelshögskolan got a new job.

1.5 – Did you study abroad?

1.6 – How long after graduation before you got your first job?

1.7 – Did your tasks at the first job meet your qualifications?

1.8.1 – How many jobs have you had?

1.8.2 – What has been the primary reason for getting a new job?

Questions 1.9 to 1.12.2 are also a part of the background information but while designing the questionnaire we felt that asking the questions in this order made the interviews “smoother”. We believed that marital status, native tongue and number of children (if any) were important factors to be taken into consideration when trying explaining why a person’s career looks the way it does. These questions also affect a person’s development since the people closest to you play a big part in the identity creating process.

1.9 – Do any of your parents have an academic degree?

1.10 – What is your native tongue?

1.11 – What is your marital status?

1.12.1 – Number of children?

1.12.2 – Did you go on parental leave? For how long?

Under “the situation today” we got information on what the person is currently doing. This was the main part of our survey providing us with the information we used to show what former students are doing today. Questions 2.1 to 2.5 gave us information on the company the graduate is working for, 2.6 to 2.7.3 told us what the job boils down to in terms of tasks; 2.8 told us if we needed to consider career paths in other cultures and 2.9 provided information on how well (in terms of salary) the person is doing. We wanted to investigate if being a manager, having economic responsibility and international experience affects the salary and if so, to what extent. Another interesting question was whether the salaries were different based on industry or if the task was the main deciding factor. These questions are also an influence on how a person develops since the workplace and co-workers usually are a big part of a person’s life.

2.1 – Are you currently holding a job?

2.2 – Where do you work today?

- 2.3 – In which town?
- 2.4 – Type of company?
- 2.5 – In which industry does the company primarily act?
- 2.7.1 – What is your primary work task?
- 2.7.2 – Do you have any subordinates?
- 2.7.3 – Do you have any economic/budget responsibilities?
- 2.8 – Have you ever worked abroad?
- 2.9 – How much do you earn a month (in thousands SEK)?

The third section provided us with qualitative information on how important Handelshögskolan has been for the former students' careers and personal development; this information helped us identify a couple of key factors that had been important. We were able to determine if the persons were pleased with their time at Handelshögskolan from their responses to question 3.5 and 3.6; and also explain the reason of their dissatisfaction, if that was the case.

- 3.1 – How has your time at Handelshögskolan affected your career?
- 3.2 – How many of your friends from Handelshögskolan are you still in touch with through work?
- 3.3 – How many of your friends from Handelshögskolan are you still in touch with privately?
- 3.4 – What would you say were the three most important lessons learnt during your time at Handelshögskolan?
- 3.5 – If you had the opportunity to start over, would you choose the same education and major again?
- 3.6 – If you had the opportunity to start over, would you choose to study at Handelshögskolan again?

What can go wrong?

The non-responses

Of our sample of 158 people we managed to get in touch with 71 (which represented 45 % and about as many as we realistically could expect to get answers from according to Aaker, Kumar and Day, 2004). How the respondents were divided between the different years of graduation can be seen appendix A. As seen in the tables in the appendix, the division of non-responses is quite equally divided between gender and year of graduation. The only factor

standing out is the type of degree; “Magister” graduates are obviously harder to get in touch with for some reason. Although this variable stands out, the deviation is not big enough to force us to take action. Yes, some of our results might be a little bit biased by the under representation of Magister-graduates but we deem the bias as being so small that we do not have to take it into consideration in our analysis.

In the survey

There are three major categories of sources we had considered: population, respondent and interviewer errors (Aaker, Kumar and Day, 2004). The population itself can be wrongly defined, although we did not face this problem since our defined population consisted of the people on our list.

A source of error that influenced our survey was the non-response error (a respondent error), since we did not get a hold of everybody in our sample due to the short amount of time at our disposal. Non-responses had three explanations: “not registered in Sweden” (13 people), “not-at-home” (74) and “refusal” (5). People “not registered in Sweden” were either living abroad or were dead and there was no way for us to know the exact reason for a specific person (SKV 717, 3rd edition, 2004).

There was not much we could do about “not registered in Sweden” and the “not-at-home” respondents and our only plan for the refusals was to ask them why they did not want to participate; this way, their responses gave us a clue of whether they have something in common or if they just did not want to participate for different reasons.

Interviewer error can be: fraud and deceit, improving interviewer quality, respondent’s impression of the interviewer and questioning, probing and recording (Aaker, Kumar and Day, 2004). In our case fraud and deceit was ruled out since we were conducting our own interviews and questioning, probing and recording did not differ much between the two of us. Improving interviewer quality was not an issue for us either since we did not interview that many people, leaving respondent’s impression of the interviewer as a potential source of error. It is hard to know if this caused any errors at all since it was virtually impossible for us to know how the respondent reacted to us as interviewers. We are aware of the risk but do not know how to control if it results in any bias.

How we put the pieces together

After three weeks of trying to get in touch with as many graduates as possible, we decided that it was time to start analysing the material we had collected. Due to the time frame we had for writing this paper, we had to take the decision of stopping the calls if we wanted to have enough time for the analysis.

We inserted all the information in the software SPSS which we considered a good tool for finding eventual correlations between different variables. The analysis started by making the compilation of the specific variables for each question we had in the questionnaire. Variables like gender, year of graduation, major and type of degree were of a special interest during this process, because we wanted to discover possible connections between background and their careers. In the first two parts of the questionnaire (Background and Situation today) we had fixed answer alternatives which helped us to manage the great flow of information in the survey. However, in the third part (About your time at Handelshögskolan), respondents had more freedom in their answers, since we used open-ended questions. By doing this, we made sure the respondents could have more personalised opinions on their time at Handelshögskolan and what kind of impact the school had on their future. For the last mentioned part, we had to make a manual compilation of the material, trying to find common opinions respondents had. We also kept our eyes opened for different aspects of Handelshögskolan's identity and culture.

Once we put together the general lines of the survey, we tried to analyse them in correlation with the case studies we had made. We used case studies examples in order to emphasise specific aspects of the survey and vice versa. In the analysis, we examined one question at the time and tried to find similarities between the variables mentioned above. In the case studies we used the same questions as in the survey; the difference was that respondents got the chance to elaborate on each aspect, in order to give us a deeper understanding of their career development.

While we gathered material for our study, we stumbled across different kinds of surveys carried out by different unions, like Jusek and Civilekonomerna. We decided to try our material using the same variables to see if we get similar results and if not, to see what kind of deviations there are and why do they exist.

The predecessors have spoken!

In this section we will present the outcome of our survey and the case studies. We chose to put most of the tables and diagrams in an appendix because we want to concentrate on the most relevant information, but at the same time to make all information available (appendix A). We had the pleasure of doing three case studies with three graduates from Handelshögskolan (Pia, Annika and Nicklas). The second section of this part is a résumé of our discussions; for more detailed descriptions of the interviews, see appendices B, C and D.

Getting to know them

The average graduate in 1986...

...has 61 % chance of being a man, was 27,1 years old, got a bachelor degree (100 %) in business administration (75 %), has not studied abroad (100 %), has been offered a qualified first job (57 %) before graduation (100 %), none of the parents have an academic education (71 %) and is originally from Sweden (100 %).

The average graduate in 1991...

...has 53 % chance of being a man, was 26 years old, got a bachelor degree (91 %) in business administration (80 %), has not studied abroad (74 %), has been offered a qualified first job (56 %) before graduation (74 %), none of the parents have an academic education (70 %) and is originally from Sweden (100 %).

The average graduate in 1996...

...has 45 % chance of being a man, was 27,3 years old, got a bachelor degree (55 %) in business administration (67 %), has not studied abroad (71 %), has been offered a qualified first job (64 %) before graduation (50 %), none of the parents have an academic education (50 %) and is originally from Sweden (100 %).

The average graduate in 2001...

...has 47 % chance of being a man, was 26,4 years old, got a bachelor degree (53 %) in business administration (69 %), has not studied abroad (63 %), has been offered a qualified first job (63 %) before graduation (53 %), none of the parents have an academic education (37 %) and is originally from Sweden (84 %).

Where do they come from?

In the years we chose to study, 1551 people graduated from Handelshögskolan in either economy or law. The degree system has changed over the years and therefore in 1986 and 1991 we could not separate “bachelors” from “Magisters” among economy students since these degrees did not exist in the same way back then.

As seen in Table 1, the number of graduates has increased over the years and the representation of male and female graduates has developed from 55,5 % men in 1986, to 49,1 % in 2001. The biggest difference is remarked among law students where the percentage was equal in 1986 and 1991 but has increased to 63,5 % women in 2001.

Year	Degree	Men	Women	Total
1986	Bachelor of Economy	131	100	231
	Bachelor of Law	15	17	32
Total		146	117	263
1991	Bachelor of Economy	173	202	375
	Bachelor of Law	15	16	31
Total		188	218	406
1996	Bachelor of Economy	77	78	155
	Magister of Economy	115	70	185
	Bachelor of Law	31	53	84
Total		223	201	424
2001	Bachelor of Economy	67	78	145
	Magister of Economy	120	89	209
	Bachelor of Law	38	66	104
Total		225	233	458
Total		782	769	1551

Table 1- Economy and Law graduates from Handelshögskolan

The sample consisted of 158 respondents (see Table 2) of which we managed to contact 71, out of which 5 people decided not to participate. We were unable to get in touch with 87 former students due to “no contact” (74) and “not registered in Sweden” (13). Out of the 66 people we interviewed, 35 were women and 31 men. 7 were graduates of 1986, 27 of 1991, 14 of 1996 and 18 of 2001 (see the tables in appendix A for details). We interviewed 53 economy and 13 law graduates. Of the economy graduates, 49 had studied business administration and 4 had studied economics. Law graduates tend to have a bachelor degree. Six of the 13 interviewed law graduates had studied Business Law as their major while the others chose not to major in a specific subject.

		Year of graduation				Total
		1986	1991	1996	2001	
Gender	Man	17	23	19	21	80
	Woman	11	20	23	24	78
Total		28	43	42	45	158

Table 2 – Respondents per gender and year of graduation

Business Administration (BA) is the most popular area of studies and within BA accounting and marketing are the top two majors. In the table under question 1.4 in appendix A we have 35 graduates with a degree in BA and 29 with “other economics” degree; the reason for this is that we did not get in touch with all of our sample so we could not ask which major they had. We chose to use the information we got from Ladok to get a more complete picture of the sample, even though it makes some discrepancy in that table.

In the business programmes, exchange semesters are more accessible than for law students since law is very country specific. In our sample, none of the law students had studied abroad while 18 of the economy students went on an exchange programme.

In Jusek’s survey only 24 % of the economists and 39 % of the law graduates say that their work tasks match their education but in our survey, 79 % (11 out of 14 respondents) of the law students and 55 % (29 of 54) of the economists say their education and tasks match, why is this so? Part of the answer can be found in the wording of the questions; Jusek had more alternatives including “work tasks correspond partially to education” and our alternatives were “yes” or “no”. We must keep in mind that Jusek has members originating from all schools in Sweden, some of them having better reputations than others; but Handelshögskolan is a well-known and well-renowned school and this might be the reason for these differences.

Count		Year of graduation				Total
		1986	1991	1996	2001	
Number of jobs	1	0	4	2	3	9
	2	0	3	2	6	11
	3	1	3	3	7	14
	4	0	1	4	3	8
	5	0	8	2	0	10
	6	1	1	1	0	3
	7	1	2	0	0	3
	8	2	1	0	0	3
	9	0	1	0	0	1
	10	2	1	0	0	3
	12	0	1	0	0	1
	15	0	1	0	0	1
Total		7	27	14	19	67

Table 3- Number of jobs per graduation year

When it comes to getting a job, graduates from Handelshögskolan do not have any real problems since 66 % got employed before graduation and another 18 % within the first three months after graduation. By the end of the first year after graduation, 97 % were employed. 60 % of the graduates started their careers by working with tasks they perceived met their qualifications and education. During their careers our respondents have had from one to fifteen different jobs but 78 % of the sample have had 5 different positions or less.

If we compare today's situation with the most recent recession periods, Handelshögskolan's students still managed to build up quite impressive careers. For example during the recession in the beginning of the 90's, graduates from 1991 managed to obtain a job before graduation in proportion of 74 % and in less than 3 months after graduation 88 % of them were already working. According to our research, today, 30 % of graduates of 1991 have reached senior management positions in their organisations. The IT crisis from 2000 does not either seem to have had a great impact on Handelshögskolan's graduates; 53 % had a job before graduation and in less than six months after the end of their studies, 84 % were working. After five years of work experience, 10 % of them occupy management positions.

A frequent reason for the students of 1986 (7 respondents in total) to change jobs was that they were promoted (5) and the only other reason mentioned was "new challenges" (2). This

is very similar to the class of 1996 (14 respondents in total) where being promoted (3) and “new challenges” (3) were the two main reasons for changing jobs, although a couple mentioned that they changed positions because they were not pleased with their employer (2).

For the class of 1991 (27 respondents in total) the most frequent reason was “new challenges” (8), followed by promotion (5), “better offer elsewhere” (5) and “temporary employment” (4). Other reasons mentioned were: “family related matters” (2), starting own business, bankruptcy and due to moving (one each). The most recent graduates in our sample (18 in total) talked about “temporary employment” (5) and promotion (3); other reasons were: “better offer elsewhere” (2), due to moving (2) and “not pleased with the employer” (2).

81 % are either married or co-habitants and 76 % are parents of at least one child. 5 % of the respondents originate from a country other than Sweden and a minority of the graduates (43 %) has at least one parent with an academic degree. As expected, more women than men have been on parental leave as seen in Diagram 1.

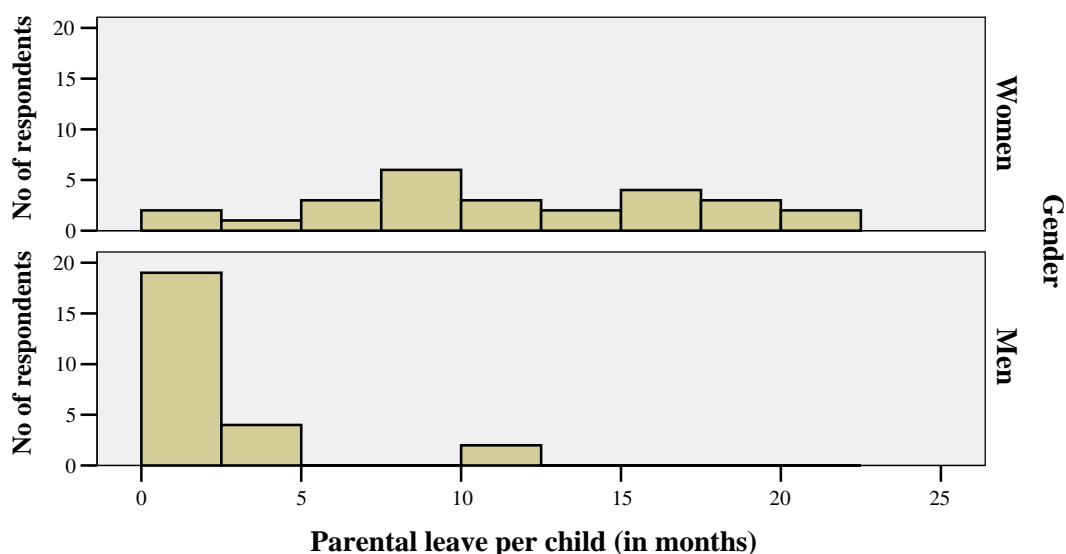


Diagram 1 – Parental leave per child in months

What are they doing today?

One of the respondents we talked to is retired because of health problems and four of the women are currently on maternity leave; all the others (92 %) are employed today. 65 % work for private companies, 22 % for governmental organisations and 11 % run their own businesses. The most frequent industries where graduates from Handelshögskolan are active

today are manufacturing companies (23 %), company services (23 %), public services and defence (14 %) and 8 % chose a career within the educational system.

The most common work tasks are budgeting and economic planning (23 %), management (20 %) and 14 % perform investigations of various types. 53 % do not have a precise economic responsibility nor direct subordinates. Most of the graduates have built their career in Sweden, only 24 % have worked abroad and the average time spent outside of Sweden is about 10 months for those who chose to get international work experience.

There is no big difference between which industries the graduates work in, at least not in our sample. The biggest industries are “company services”, “producing companies” and “public services and defence”; 39 out of the 64 respondents who answered this question worked in these industries and are quite evenly distributed between the different years.

The geographic dispersion is not very dispersed. Only 3 of our respondents live outside of Sweden, but we must keep in mind that it is likely that the majority of the non-responses due to “not registered in Sweden” are probably living abroad so this figure is probably lower than the actual number. 21 persons in the sample live outside of the Gothenburg region and mostly in Stockholm (11 people), the other 42 respondents live in or nearby Gothenburg. This might be due to that a lot of them originate from the region, like Nicklas who had the choice to work in either Stockholm or Gothenburg and decided to stay here because of his origins and the closeness to people dear to him. The same is the case of Annika, who, originally from Stockholm, came to Gothenburg to study and then returned to work. Pia is from Uppsala, but she decided to study in Gothenburg because she liked the town and the ambiance. She started to work here after graduation, but because of the more advantageous situation of Stockholm’s labour market, she moved where the job was.

The average monthly salary does not vary very much. Since we did not get in touch with more than 7 graduates of 1986, we cannot draw any valid, statistical conclusions based on our data. However, we chose to include them in our table (all salaries are in thousands SEK) because the information might be of interest for the reader as a reference. One graduate of 2001 has the highest monthly salary among all of our respondents. His compensation deviates so much from the average that this number alone disrupts the comparison, therefore we had to take it out of the calculation in order to enable comparable figures.

Monthly Salary				
Gender	Year of graduation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Man	1986	68,00	3	40,706
	1991	46,68	11	19,612
	1996	47,60	5	21,314
	2001	29,25	6	7,640
	Total	45,24	25	22,738
Woman	1986	65,00	3	47,697
	1991	38,56	8	10,041
	1996	34,92	6	7,242
	2001	32,55	11	4,299
	Total	38,25	28	17,506
Total	1986	66,50	6	39,693
	1991	43,26	19	16,427
	1996	40,68	11	15,869
	2001	31,38	17	5,695
	Total	41,55	53	20,252

Table 4 - Monthly salary (in thousands SEK) per gender and graduation year

Their time at Handelshögskolan

The three most frequent answers to the question “How has your time at Handelshögskolan affected your career?” were “entrance ticket into the labour market” (52 % of the respondents), “positively” (26 %) and “gave me knowledge” (23 %); respondents from all graduation years mentioned these. 6 respondents said “not much”, 4 said “nothing at all” and 8 answered “very much”; it is however hard to interpret what the respondents meant by these statements. Other comments were “built confidence” and “good reputation”; none of the respondents graduating in 1986 mentioned confidence and only one respondent from 1996 and 2001 mentioned “reputation”, compared to three in 1991 and one in 1986.

When asked which were the three most important lessons learnt during their time at Handelshögskolan, graduates from the different years answered very similarly. Four “lessons” were mentioned more often than others: “knowledge” (58 %), “how to solve problems” (42 %), “personal development (42 %) and “network of relations” (30 %); examples of other answers were: “legitimacy” (20 %), “ability to cooperate” (12 %), “international experience” (11 %) and (surprisingly) 4 respondents said: “nothing” (6 %).

Almost 78 % of the respondents are still in touch with at least one of the friends they got during their studies at Handelshögskolan on a regular basis; only 27 % meet with former classmates professionally, regularly.

Voices from the past – Case studies

The main variable when choosing the people we interviewed in this section was their availability and interest in participating. At the same time we wanted them to be representative for as many students as possible, since they had different goals and interests during their studies at Handelshögskolan. They have different ways of perceiving success and represent three different approaches towards building a career after Handelshögskolan. The gender aspect was also taken into consideration, as well as their different backgrounds. Both economy students and jurists are represented. The three of them are part of two different “generations” at Handelshögskolan: 1991 and 2001, helping us to see, on a more practical level, what a career could look like five or fifteen years after graduation.

Annika

Annika took her Magister degree in Business Administration in 2001, with a major in Accounting. Immediately after graduation, she achieved the goal she had set up during her studies and got a job at a famous consultancy company. Due to personnel redundancy, Annika was forced to take another path in her career after working less than one year as a consultant. She decided to get some more experience in the field of her major and managed to work her way up from accountant assistant to senior accountant and project manager during four years of work experience, in Sweden and abroad, at Deloitte. When we interviewed her, Annika was ready for the next step in her career, looking for a new challenge at SAS (Scandinavian Airline System) where she was offered a controller position.

The lessons she learned at Handelshögskolan were very beneficial for Annika’s career. Not only did she get the knowledge she needed in order to perform well at her jobs, but she also learned how to be alert and quickly absorb new information. During our discussion, Annika mentioned a change of status after graduating from a prestigious school like Handelshögskolan. She thinks that the school gave her a “quality stamp” and together with her very good grades “opened companies’ doors” when applying for different positions.

Annika does not feel her fundamental values have changed during her studies, but she is very aware that she has changed as a person. She “grew up” and she learned “how to socialise”, because she was forced to interact with different people, teachers and students during her studies. This is a very important part of her life today, because she managed to develop great social competencies from which she will always benefit.

After graduation, she found it hard to identify with economists in general, because although they studied in the same field, people have “different backgrounds”. However, by having the legitimacy of calling herself an economist, Annika thinks that she automatically gets a special status which makes her very attractive for potential employers and entitles her to apply for qualified jobs. She is especially grateful for the wonderful education she got and also for the very dedicated and qualified teachers who shaped her both personally and professionally during her studies.

Nicklas

Nicklas is a 28 years old manager, running his own information and training company on the Forex Trading Market. He developed an entrepreneurial spirit at a young age and has had a clearly defined professional goal since he was 13: he wanted to become a jurist and “always double what he had”, in terms of money. He studied at double speed at Handelshögskolan and got his degree in law in 2001 after only three years; the normal duration of law studies being five years.

He was a very active person in the student union and used every opportunity he had to build a strong network of relations worthy of being envied. He did not have the best grades in school, but he worked all the time during his studies and was remarked by his forward attitude and his social skills. This gave him a “good name” among students, school’s stakeholders and the law community which has helped him to reach his goal of working for a well-known law firm.

Despite his friend’s discouragements, Nicklas chose, in 2002, a different professional path. He started to collaborate with international sales companies and one year ago he started his own company. Financially, he is by far the most successful graduate we interviewed, after only five years of experience. His social skills, competencies and the long contact list he put together, during his entrepreneurial and school time, ensured the success he is enjoying today. He was excited and happy to share his experiences with other students, since he is very proud

of Handelshögskolan and the “wonderful education” he got there. Nicklas believes that during his studies he discovered who he is as a person and developed his own identity. The school prestige was very appreciated by the employers. This, together with his degree, gave him the “good image” associated with Handelshögskolan’s brand. Some of the most important lessons he learned in school were: how to find the answers he needed, how to logically sort information and analyse deeper society, its rules and values. However, the most important quality he developed was self discipline.

Nicklas is aware of the fact that he and his story are quite “non-conventional”, but he is also the living proof of that hard work pays back. At the same time, being such a busy and active person on both local and international markets does not leave him much time for hobbies and healthcare. He learned early in his career what his priorities were and always puts his family’s needs and relationship with people dear to him before business. He managed to find the balance between the two worlds and even finds time for “pro bono” and charity work.

Pia

Pia is a 40 years old economist that graduated from Handelshögskolan in 1991 with a major in Marketing. Despite her major, Pia has worked most of her time in sales departments at different companies, especially in the hotel industry. She never refused the opportunity of learning new things and challenging her world view, a very healthy live philosophy, which brought her to Spain, where she became the president of a hotel.

For her, working with something she enjoyed and made her happy was the most important thing; and to be able to do that, Pia gathered as much experiences and skills she could. The first years of her career, Pia was not afraid of taking jobs that might seem less interesting for an economist; instead, she was eager to get a “foot” in the organization in order to be able to show her skills and abilities. Her strategy proved to be very efficient because, after a while, she was headhunted for different hotels in Stockholm which trusted her with key positions in the organization.

She enjoyed her time at Handelshögskolan very much and sees her education as a platform that does not have any restrains in terms of industries or jobs. In fact she deliberated chose marketing as her major, because she knew it was a broad subject that would give her a lot of freedom when choosing her field of work. She also appreciates the fact that the education

consists of such a general spectra of subjects (e.g. commercial law, accounting, management etc.), knowledge that came in handy over the years.

The most important lesson she learned at Handelshögskolan was where and how to seek the knowledge, when she needed it. The friends she got during her studies are still a very prominent part of her life and she identifies herself with them and other people working in the same profession and industry.

Putting the pieces together - Analysis

Before we started hunting down our respondents we felt confident that we would get a hold of at least 80 percent of our sample! It did not take long before we realised that former students of Handelshögskolan are busy people and some of them were very hard to find. They also have families to take care of after office hours, so it has not been easy to “steal” five minutes of their time, even when we finally got in touch with them. We must admit that a few were very enthusiastic to hear from their old school but, sadly, we also encountered people that found the TV to be more important than contributing to our academic future. Analyzing the outcome of our study, we can state that, generally, former students have a very positive reaction when they hear from their old school.

Cultures

There are different approaches to organisational culture, but especially one of them is of interest in our example. Handelshögskolan is a complex institution with different educational fields and we identified some important cultural variations. Although Handelshögskolan lines up the most important cultural aspects of the education environment, the specific of each area of studies (e.g. law, economics, environment etc.) and the assignments, draw the fine line between each group’s performance and ideas. In consequence, smaller sub-cultures within the “big Handelshögskolan’s family” are formed. The different groups are focused on the processes that are specific for their social identification and overlap the area of studies and professional belonging. The fact that students interact more with other students studying in the same field, and maybe less with fellows interested in other areas of education at Handelshögskolan, is of great importance when identifying the different sub-cultures (Alvesson, 2001).

After one week of interviewing former students, it became obvious that most of the respondents were talking about the same things although with slightly different personal perspectives, such as experiences, legitimacy and status. At the same time, the way they answered the questions varied. Economy students had a tendency to answer immediately, very short and concise, straight to the point; almost trying to be very “efficient” even after office hours. Law students, every now and then, asked us to elaborate and clarify the questions we were posing; they chose carefully their words, just like in a court of law. It was as if they were used to act and think a little bit differently. These slightly different approaches to our

questions can be explained by the content of their area of studies and their work experiences and routines. They mark two of Handelshögskolan's sub-cultures, linked to the area of studies.

Socialization

We do not wish to insinuate in any way that the personality undergoes a drastic change during studies at Handelshögskolan, but students start to identify with new groups of people and their way of thinking and analysing are revised in this process. The time in school most probably is a journey of self discovery, which by the end of the studies have turned into a platform for launching their future career (Hill, 1992). The three interviewed graduates shared the same feelings. They did not believe their personality changed, nor the fundamental values they had before studying at Handelshögskolan, but their opinions are very similar when they talk about how the way they analyse, solve and overcome problems has changed.

After some time of confusion you start getting used to the system and adapt to it; the socialisation process has started. Before you even know it, you will become one of the people that frightened you on the very first day at school - a "Handel's person"! (Hill, 1992) This was evident when interviewing the respondents; they used a familiar language and answered in a way that they were taught to answer questions at Handelshögskolan. This involves that all of them have crossed an integration period and once they embraced the school's culture, they followed the rules, ideas and learned the way of "how" to do things and to communicate them (Alvesson, 2001).

An identity?

According to Tajfel (1979) identities are formed from joining social comparison groups. Each and every educational programme at Handelshögskolan can be seen as such a group since the students share a belonging. As described by Ashforth and Mael (1989) a person does not have to put any effort into a group, but only feel that he/she shares the faith of the group to start identifying with it; and that is what is happening in this case. Economy and business students hold together against other groups at school; students at Handelshögskolan form a unit in comparison to the rest of Gothenburg University and all students at the University share a common identity towards other universities. Our three cases have some interesting opinions in this matter. 16 years after graduation, Pia identifies with other people in the same industry rather than economists in general. This can be seen as a typical identity development. Annika

believes that although she has a lot in common with other graduates, everybody has a different background which plays an important role when she associates with other people. Nicklas is convinced he developed his identity at Handelshögskolan which helped him to better understand who he was as a person but he does not believe that he has much in common with other people from the law community. One thing is certain; they all take pride in being graduates from Handelshögskolan at Gothenburg University. Simultaneously, they still keep in touch with dear friends they met at school, who studied in the same units and shared the same lifestyles.

Erickson (1968) sustains that identities are formed in socialisation with others; if these others are similar to you, one would expect that differences would gradually lessen and that similarities are enhanced. When starting studying at a school in a “new” town odds are that you will socialise with other students and probably the students who are in the same programme as you are; which leads to a uniformity of identities within the group. This was especially evident in Annika’s case, who moved to Gothenburg with her family and was obliged, under these circumstances, to develop her social skills in order to rebuild her network of relationships and gain new friends in the new town.

Identity can also be used as a form of identification (Turner, 1984); people assign themselves to different “classes” in society to enable visibility of differences between oneself and others and also to see similarities with members of the same “class”. This situation is reflected by Pia, who sustains that after working for a while in the same field, you start identifying with people in the hotel industry rather than economists in general. They have a certain status within the industry, which is quite different from other economist in other industries.

Discipline?

A lot of our respondents mentioned that an important lesson they learned at Handelshögskolan is how to solve problems and how to use the language, clearly showing how this process is still influencing their lives. The process is not a formal part of the education but its power is not to be underestimated; we are silently being transformed until graduation. Nicklas pointed out how important it was for him to learn and be disciplined at Handelshögskolan. He thinks that the most important qualities he developed during his time at Handelshögskolan were discipline and how to overcome and solve problems. He learned how to find the answers he needed, how to logically sort information and to deeper analyse society, its rules and values.

These skills played an important role in the success of his professional work. Even our survey shows comparable figures. Although “knowledge” is the most mentioned lesson learned by our respondents, 28 of them (48%) acknowledge the fact that they were disciplined at Handelshögskolan to solve problems in certain ways.

Legitimacy!

The definition of legitimacy proposed by Scott and Marshall (2005) matches the perception our respondents have of the word when answering the questions. After a couple of years of university studies graduates are rewarded with a degree, symbolising, according to our respondents, an “entrance ticket” into the area of qualified jobs.

But the tradition of getting access to authority and power is not the only advantage a degree brings; it also gives the graduate a certain status in other people’s minds. Highly educated people are usually perceived differently by the society and its individuals and the difference is usually positive. 13 of our respondents talked about a change of status after graduating from Handelshögskolan, meaning that they felt a legitimacy to apply for certain jobs in their field of expertise. Their applications were taken into consideration due to the fact that they have been awarded with the status of economist/jurists.

Examination

All the testing and all the assignments eventually lead to a degree which is the official proof of passing all the obstacles put in your way by the teachers, to single out who is “good enough” and who is not. It also symbolises your entrance into the world of graduates, meaning yet another distinction between you and “them”. This brings with it a certain status and legitimacy to gain access to employment opportunities and recognition by new groups of people. The status aspect of a degree was mentioned by a relatively big number of our respondents; they talk about the degree as being the entrance ticket to the labour market and the reputation of the school as being part of what gave them a job.

The fact that school results are subject to the principle of freedom of information in Sweden, makes students aware that anybody can get a hold of their grades at any time, creating a kind of Panoptical-system of surveillance (Foucault, 1975). In this case even if no company will ever look up the student’s grades (like in Nicklas case), he/she will always live with the “possibility” that someone, someday, might do it. Having the best grades is a sort of

“insurance” for some of the students, making sure that their future will not be influenced in a negative way (like in Annika’s case).

Same, same, but different

The days when you could start out at the check-out counter and work your way up to President of the company have passed. Today, you need an education to access managerial positions. But having an education, also involves a certain social position and privileges, although there are so many voices trying to convince us of the contrary and make us compromise in the beginning of our career.

As we showed earlier, in times of recession, the numbers of Handelshögskolan’s graduates who managed to get a job in the end of their studies are positive. Therefore we believe that magazines have the tendency of making a lot of “noise” and by doing this, increasing insecurity and self-doubt among graduates. Students are being influenced by the discouraging statistics and some of them lose their motivation of looking and fighting for their “dream job” after graduation. One of our respondents is convinced that “when you feel too comfortable in your safety zone, no miracles will happen; you do not have the drive and motivation to come out from your hiding place and discover your full potential” (anonymous 1991 economy graduate). In fact this is one of the advices Nicklas also gives to graduates. He thinks that graduates should start believing in themselves and realise that they can do much more than they think they can. A good plan for the future is nothing without the afferent action in order to transform it from a dream into reality.

It is up to you!

The three people interviewed have very interesting and exciting stories to tell. They gave us some perspectives on what has happened to ambitious graduates from Handelshögskolan. Analysing them, we got insights on the key success factors that helped these individuals pursuing their dreams and being very content with their careers and lives in general. None of them felt any anxiety before graduation. They all share a strong self confidence, choosing to look at the opportunities on the labour market instead of the deficiencies and have assumed their responsibilities during their entire career. The three of them are very forward individuals who actively look for personal development and advancement opportunities. International experience and not being scared of challenging themselves are other things they have in common. All of them emphasised the importance of not being afraid of changing environment

nor of moving where the jobs are, in this way acquiring valuable personal and professional experience.

Each and every one of them had their own critical success factor which has helped them during their professional life. Pia chose to keep an open mind and gathered as much experiences and skills as possible before “attacking” the positions she had prepared herself for. Annika reached her goal of working for renowned companies like Accenture and Deloitte by studying hard and becoming a top student. Her high grades have not only opened the companies’ doors easier when recruiting new talents, but also ensured a positive development of her career. Nicklas’ story is definitely not a common one. He was brought up in an entrepreneurial environment which helped him decide what he wanted to do in life at a young age. His passion and hard work has paid back. For him, the network of relationships, as well as his involvement in student unions’ activities helped him to become a well-known person among other graduates and stakeholders, which finally became the entrance ticket into the working world and later on ensured the success of his business. A funny thing is that two of our respondents said that one of the three most important things they got from their time at Handelshögskolan was the network of contacts and at the same time stated that they are not in touch with any of their former classmates today, neither personally nor professionally. Maybe we are witnessing a case of “say what you think the interviewer wants to hear”, but clearly Nicklas is proof that a good network can come in handy during the entire career.

By using these three examples, we do not want to insinuate that there is a special receipt for having “the perfect” career. In our cases, all three graduates have reached their career related short term goals and worked in the field or organisation they wished for in the beginning of their studies. We are only seeking to analyse some possible outcomes for future graduates from Handelshögskolan. It is up to each individual to decide what a successful career means and to pick up the information they think is needed in the future; in other words, learn from past experiences.

We also talked to graduates that were completely disappointed with their education at Handelshögskolan. Four of the respondents actually said that they did not get anything out of their time at school. In our discussions on this subject we could not understand how it is possible to study for three to five years at a university and not learn a single thing and if a person feels that he/she does not get anything out of an education, why stay in school?; it is incomprehensible to us. Since the rest of the respondents had mostly positive things to say on

the subject, it is likely that even these respondents learned a few things but are affected by other matters which make them have such a negative attitude towards their school and education. Unfortunately they were reserved towards the idea of taking part in our case studies; therefore it would be presumptuous of us to speculate in the reasons for their reactions.

Personal interest versus strategic choices

Students are faced with the situation of having to choose a major at the end of their studies and usually they have to deal with the dilemma of deciding their priorities between personal interests or making a strategic choice that will hopefully give them a better chance to get their first job. For most students this is a very important and crucial decision. Everybody has felt the fear of making a bad decision that might steer their future in the wrong direction. We could not find any evidence that can be the foundation for these fears. The respondents in our case studies have only partially worked in the field of their major subject and they have had at least one job totally unrelated to it. For example, Pia has mostly worked in sales departments, although she has marketing as her major. Annika studied accounting, but her first job was in consultancy. And Nicklas, he still works with law, but his primary job is in investment information and training.

We have heard two different opinions on the issue of choosing a major. One states that students should think strategically and educated themselves in what is demanded on the labour market in order to find a job as quickly as possible, because at the end of the day, they have to consider the study loans they have to pay back. According to these voices, it is very nice to have hobbies and personal interests, but students should understand the practicality of having a job and being able to pay bills and feed their families at the end of their studies. Contrarily, the other opinion emphasises the idea that graduates should follow their instincts and interests, because “that’s what will keep you going and give you satisfaction in life” (anonymous graduate of 1991); they should pursue that crazy thought that crosses their minds, invest their energy in this and avoid the “safety feeling” that only will give them momentarily satisfaction.

Of the degrees available at Handelshögskolan, two are more oriented at professional implementation than the rest: Accounting and Law. We got the feeling during the interviews that the respondents with these degrees said that one of the most important things they got

from their time in school was the knowledge; 12 of the 18 accounting graduates mentioned knowledge as one of the most important lessons learned and 10 of the 13 law graduates stated the same. Out of the 35 respondents remaining, 10 mentioned knowledge; this group was more frequent on “problem solving” and “analytical thinking”. We believe this difference exists because the accountants and law students get an education more similar to the actual tasks they perform in their profession. Other tasks are harder to prepare for, so students are trained to think and analyse in certain ways in order to be able to cope with the complex realities they will face.

The bottom line

The average graduate from Handelshögskolan...

...has 50,6% chance of being a man, is 26,6 years old, has a bachelor degree (72 %) in business administration (55 %), has not studied abroad (73 %), has been offered a qualified first job (60 %) before graduation (66 %), none of the parents have an academic education (57 %) and is originally from Sweden (95 %). These are quite interesting figures, especially since being an economist or a jurist was considered a “male profession” not that long ago. And we had the expectations of seeing some important differences between the genders of graduates, especially in 1986. But over the years, Handelshögskolan has managed to have a very even gender representation among their students (50, 6% male and 49, 4% female; at least in our sample).

There are not remarkable differences between the “average” graduate and the people that we chose to study to a deeper level. We therefore believe Bergström’s theory about students who get their first job due to personal traits and not to their specific speciality field. A majority of students get a good general education during their studies at Handelshögskolan, but the real difference for having a successful career is made by personal traits and finding that individual niche that works for you, your personality and interests.

Even if we talked to some graduates who chose to work abroad, most of the graduates are still living and working in Sweden (68). They are quite evenly distributed among industries and organizations of different sizes. The three most frequent industries of employment are: industrial production (23 %), professional services (23 %) and public services and military (14 %). The distribution between large and other companies is even, 30 people work for large companies, 27 for other companies and 6 within the educational and research system (four of them stayed at Handelshögskolan). After studying at Handelshögskolan, the only limit graduates have is the horizon, the limit they see is an optical illusion, because the more they walk towards the limit, it moves forward constantly and makes it impossible to reach. Years after graduation, Handelshögskolan former students can be found in all possible industries, being employed, managers, running their own company, researching in different fields etc.

Heading for the future

So what happened with the two senior students who 10 weeks ago were overwhelmed by tomorrow's insecurity? Well, they followed the classic way of searching for answers by talking to people who once encountered the same challenges. One week before graduation they realised: the answers have always lied within themselves. Maybe the Bologna process will increase competition among graduates, but they knew that it was up to them to make the best out of each opportunity and they had their "predecessors" as proof of that everything was possible. Suddenly they were not afraid anymore! They knew what they will do: one of them was ready for facing the "other world" and obtained a job before graduation and the other decided that he was not quite done with Handelshögskolan, not just yet!

And they lived happily ever after...

Future research

Since a language is developed at Handelshögskolan that is not shared by the different groups of students we conclude that each dialect is the outcome of different socialisation processes undertaken in different ways at the different institutions. It would have been interesting to examine whether the languages are shared within the different areas of studies and between generations. To compare students from other universities to the students at Handelshögskolan and investigate if they share a language within the subjects or if it is the school itself that develop a unique language.

Having a strong culture at Handelshögskolan, it would be interesting to make some researches and analyse what are the biggest streams shaping Handelshögskolan's culture and if the examination, assignments etc would be changed would the culture then also change?

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Appendix A – The results from the Questionnaire

Question 1.1 – Gender

Count		Answered			Total
		Answered	No contact	Did not participate	
Gender	Man	31	47	2	80
	Woman	35	40	3	78
Total		66	87	5	158

Question 1.2 – Age

The answers to this question do not influence the outcome of the paper in any way and we therefore chose not to print the answers.

Question 1.3 – Type of degree

Count		Answered			Total
		Answered	No contact	Did not participate	
Type of degree	Bachelor	52	59	3	114
	Magister	14	28	2	44
Total		66	87	5	158

Count		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Type of degree	Bachelor	62	52	114
	Magister	18	26	44
Total		80	78	158

Question 1.4 – Major subject

Count		Answered			Total
		Answered	No contact	Did not participate	
Major	Business Administration	1	35	3	39
	BA Accounting	18	0	0	18
	BA Analysis	3	0	0	3
	BA Marketing	13	0	0	13
	BA Finance	1	0	0	1
	BA Financial Control	3	0	0	3
	BA Organizational Mgmt	5	0	0	5
	BA Other	5	0	0	5
	Economics	1	6	0	7
	International Economics	1	0	0	1
	Financial Economics	0	2	0	2
	Other Economics	2	29	1	32
	Law Degree	13	15	1	29
Total		66	87	5	158

Count		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Major	Business Administration	18	21	39
	BA Accounting	5	13	18
	BA Analysis	3	0	3
	BA Marketing	9	4	13
	BA Finance	1	0	1
	BA Financial Control	2	1	3
	BA Organizational Mgmt	2	3	5
	BA Other	3	2	5
	Economics	4	3	7
	International Economics	0	1	1
	Financial Economics	1	1	2
	Other Economics	16	16	32
	Law Degree	16	13	29
Total		80	78	158

Question 1.5 – Did you study abroad?

		Study abroad		Total
		No	Yes	
Major	Business Administration	0	1	1
	BA Accounting	16	2	18
	BA Analysis	2	1	3
	BA Marketing	8	5	13
	BA Finance	0	1	1
	BA Financial Control	3	0	3
	BA Organizational Mgmt	2	3	5
	BA Other	2	3	5
	Economics	1	0	1
	International Economics	0	1	1
	Other Economics	1	1	2
	Law Degree	14	0	14
Total		49	18	67

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Study abroad	No	22	27	49
	Yes	10	8	18
Total		32	35	67

Question 1.6 – How long after graduation before you got your first job?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Before Graduation	44	27,8	65,7	65,7
	0-3 months	12	7,6	17,9	83,6
	4-6 months	4	2,5	6,0	89,6
	7-12 months	5	3,2	7,5	97,0
	> 12 months	2	1,3	3,0	100,0
	Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing	System	91	57,6		
Total		158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Time to first job	Before Graduation	20	24	44
	0-3 months	7	5	12
	4-6 months	3	1	4
	7-12 months	1	4	5
	> 12 months	1	1	2
Total		32	35	67

Question 1.7 – Did your tasks at the first job meet your qualifications?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	25,3	59,7	59,7
	No	27	17,1	40,3	100,0
	Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing	System	91	57,6		
Total		158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
First job tasks	Yes	19	21	40
	No	13	14	27
Total		32	35	67

Question 1.8.1 – How many jobs have you had?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Number of jobs	1	9	5,7	13,4	13,4
	2	11	7,0	16,4	29,9
	3	14	8,9	20,9	50,7
	4	8	5,1	11,9	62,7
	5	10	6,3	14,9	77,6
	6	3	1,9	4,5	82,1
	7	3	1,9	4,5	86,6
	8	3	1,9	4,5	91,0
	9	1	,6	1,5	92,5
	10	3	1,9	4,5	97,0
	12	1	,6	1,5	98,5
	15	1	,6	1,5	100,0
	Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing	System	91	57,6		
Total		158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Number of jobs	1	6	3	9
	2	3	8	11
	3	5	9	14
	4	1	7	8
	5	7	3	10
	6	3	0	3
	7	1	2	3
	8	1	2	3
	9	1	0	1
	10	2	1	3
	12	1	0	1
	15	1	0	1
Total		32	35	67

Question 1.8.2 – What has been the primary reason for getting a new job?

The most frequent reason for the students of 1986 to change jobs was being promoted (5) and the only other reason they mentioned was “new challenges” (3). This is very similar to the class of 1996 where being promoted (3) and “new challenges” (3) were the biggest reasons for changing although a couple mentioned that they changed because they were not pleased with the employer (2).

For the class of 1991 the most frequent reason was “new challenges” (8), followed by promotion (5), “better offer elsewhere (5) and “temporary position” (4); other reasons mentioned were “family reasons” (2), starting own business, bankruptcy and due to moving (one each). The most recent graduates in our sample talked about “temporary position” (5) and promotion (3); other reasons were “better offer elsewhere” (2), due to moving (2) and “not pleased with employer” (2).

Question 1.9 – Do any of your parents have an academic degree?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None	38	24,1	56,7	56,7
	One	11	7,0	16,4	73,1
	Both	18	11,4	26,9	100,0
	Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing	System	91	57,6		
Total		158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Parents academic	None	18	20	38
	One	6	5	11
	Both	8	10	18
Total		32	35	67

Question 1.10 – What is your native tongue?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Swedish	64	40,5	95,5	95,5
	Other	3	1,9	4,5	100,0
	Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing	System	91	57,6		
Total		158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Native tongue	Swedish	31	33	64
	Other	1	2	3
Total		32	35	67

Question 1.11 – What is your marital status?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	10	6,3	14,9	14,9
	Living apart	2	1,3	3,0	17,9
	Living together	20	12,7	29,9	47,8
	Married	34	21,5	50,7	98,5
	Divorced	1	,6	1,5	100,0
	Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing	System	91	57,6		
Total		158	100,0		

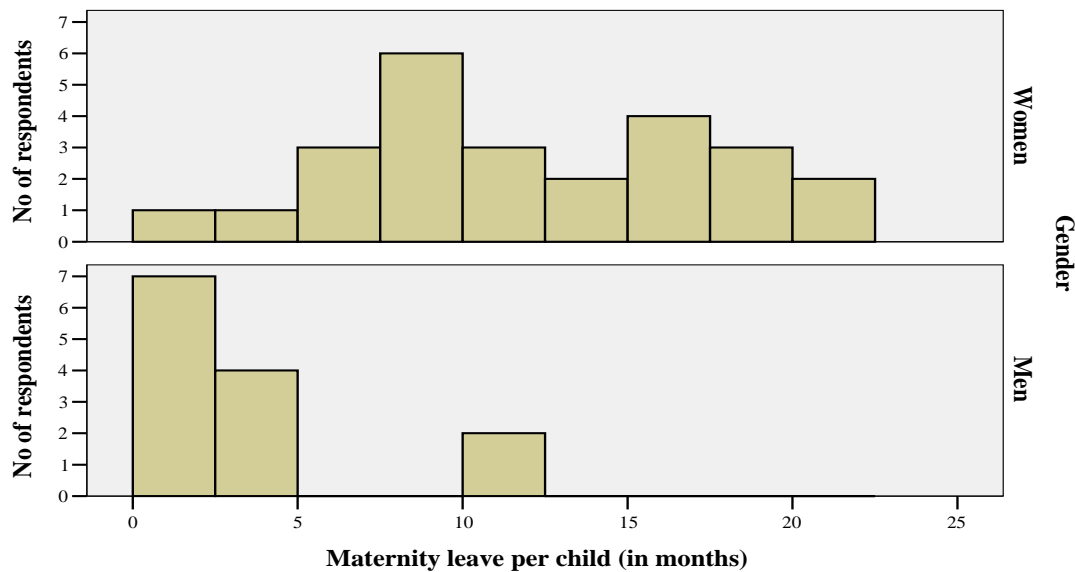
		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Marrital Status	Single	5	5	10
	Living apart	1	1	2
	Living together	10	10	20
	Married	15	19	34
	Divorced	1	0	1
Total		32	35	67

Question 1.12.1 – Number of children?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	16	10,1	23,9	23,9
	1	16	10,1	23,9	47,8
	2	26	16,5	38,8	86,6
	3	8	5,1	11,9	98,5
	4	1	,6	1,5	100,0
	Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing	System	91	57,6		
Total		158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Number of Children	0	7	9	16
	1	7	9	16
	2	12	14	26
	3	6	2	8
	4	0	1	1
Total		32	35	67

Question 1.12.2 – Did you go on parental leave? For how long?



Question 2.1 – Are you currently employed?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	62	39,2	92,5	92,5
	No	5	3,2	7,5	100,0
	Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing	System	91	57,6		
Total		158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Employed today	Yes	31	31	62
	No	1	4	5
Total		32	35	67

Question 2.2 – For which company do you work today?

The answers to this question do not influence the outcome of the paper in any way and we therefore chose not to print the answers.

Question 2.3 – In what city do you work today?

- Gothenburg 36 respondents
- Västra Götaland 12 respondents
- Sweden 15 respondents
- Abroad 3 respondents

Question 2.4 – Type of company

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Governmental	14	8,9	21,5	21,5
	Private	42	26,6	64,6	86,2
	Own Business	7	4,4	10,8	96,9
	Other	2	1,3	3,1	100,0
	Total	65	41,1	100,0	
Missing	System	93	58,9		
Total		158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Company type	Governmental	9	5	14
	Private	18	24	42
	Own Business	4	3	7
	Other	1	1	2
Total		32	33	65

Question 2.5 – In which industry does the company primarily act?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Industry Agriculture, Fishing	1	,6	1,6	1,6
Production	15	9,5	23,4	25,0
Company services	15	9,5	23,4	48,4
Pulic services and Defence	9	5,7	14,1	62,5
Healthcare	1	,6	1,6	64,1
Unions and Religious groups	1	,6	1,6	65,6
Wholesale and retail	1	,6	1,6	67,2
Hotel and restaurants	2	1,3	3,1	70,3
Finance	5	3,2	7,8	78,1
Transports and communication	2	1,3	3,1	81,3
Consulting	4	2,5	6,3	87,5
Education	5	3,2	7,8	95,3
Other	3	1,9	4,7	100,0
Total	64	40,5	100,0	
Missing System	94	59,5		
Total	158	100,0		

Question 2.6 – What is your work title?

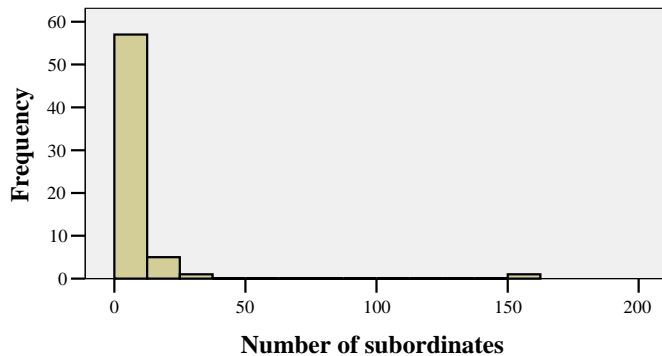
The answers to this question do not influence the outcome of the paper in any way and we therefore chose not to print the answers.

Question 2.7.1 – What is your primary work task?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Tasks Administrative	5	3,2	7,8	7,8
Distribution	1	,6	1,6	9,4
Economy, budget, planning	15	9,5	23,4	32,8
Management	13	8,2	20,3	53,1
Sales	3	1,9	4,7	57,8
Purchasing	1	,6	1,6	59,4
Marketing	1	,6	1,6	60,9
Production managemet	1	,6	1,6	62,5
Accounting	4	2,5	6,3	68,8
Education	2	1,3	3,1	71,9
Investigation	9	5,7	14,1	85,9
Research	3	1,9	4,7	90,6
Other	6	3,8	9,4	100,0
Total	64	40,5	100,0	
Missing System	94	59,5		
Total	158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Tasks today	Administrative	2	3	5
	Distribution	1	0	1
	Economy, budget, planning	7	8	15
	Management	8	5	13
	Sales	2	1	3
	Purchasing	0	1	1
	Marketing	1	0	1
	Production managemet	1	0	1
	Accounting	2	2	4
	Education	1	1	2
	Investigation	4	5	9
	Research	2	1	3
	Other	1	5	6
Total		32	32	64

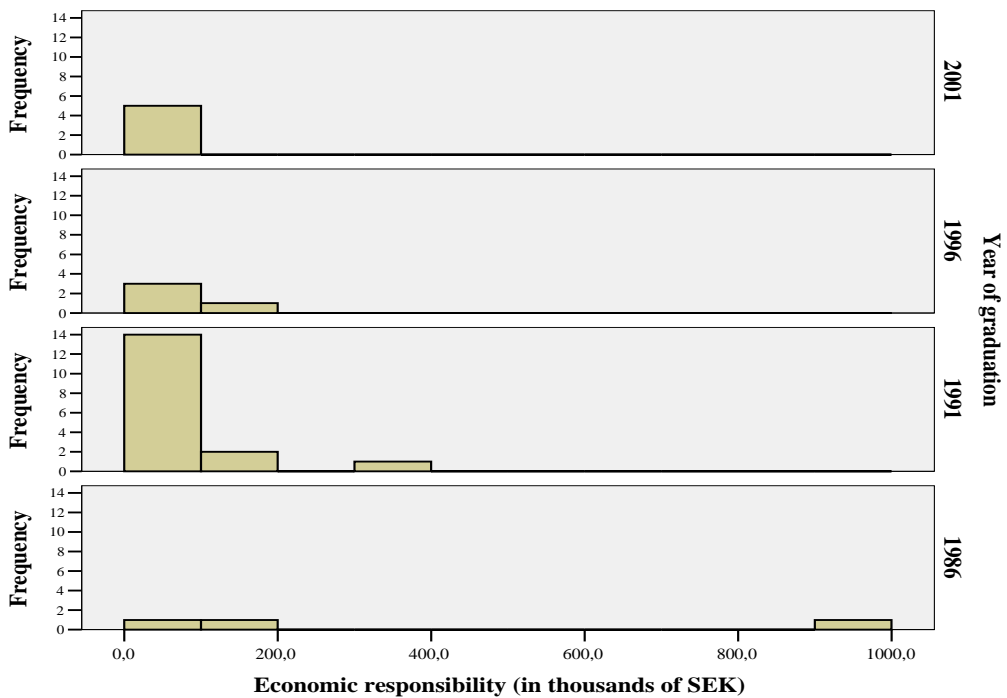
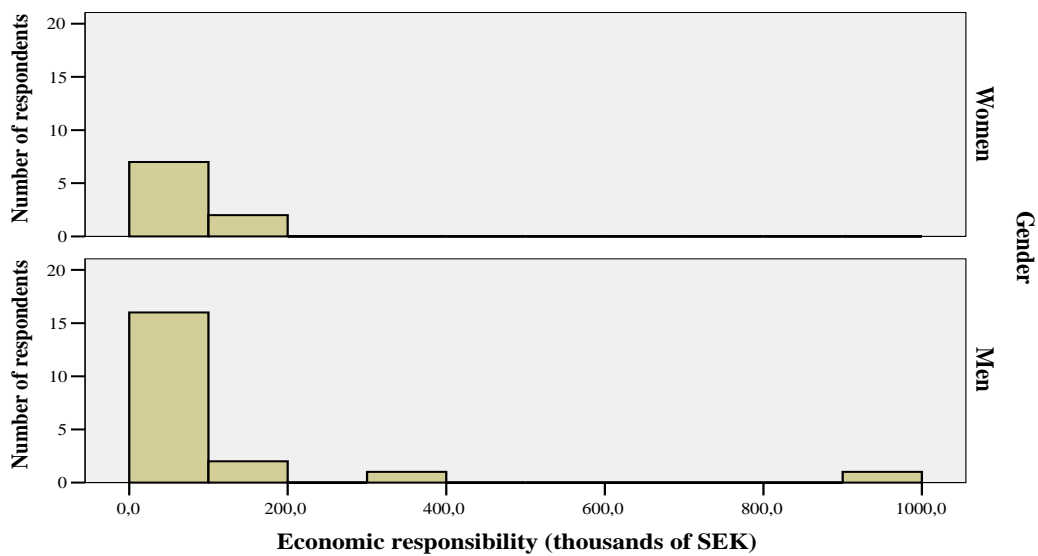
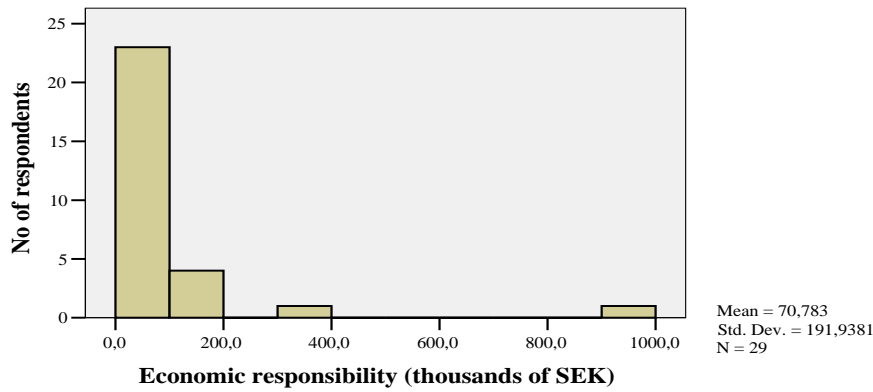
Question 2.7.2 – Do you have any subordinates?



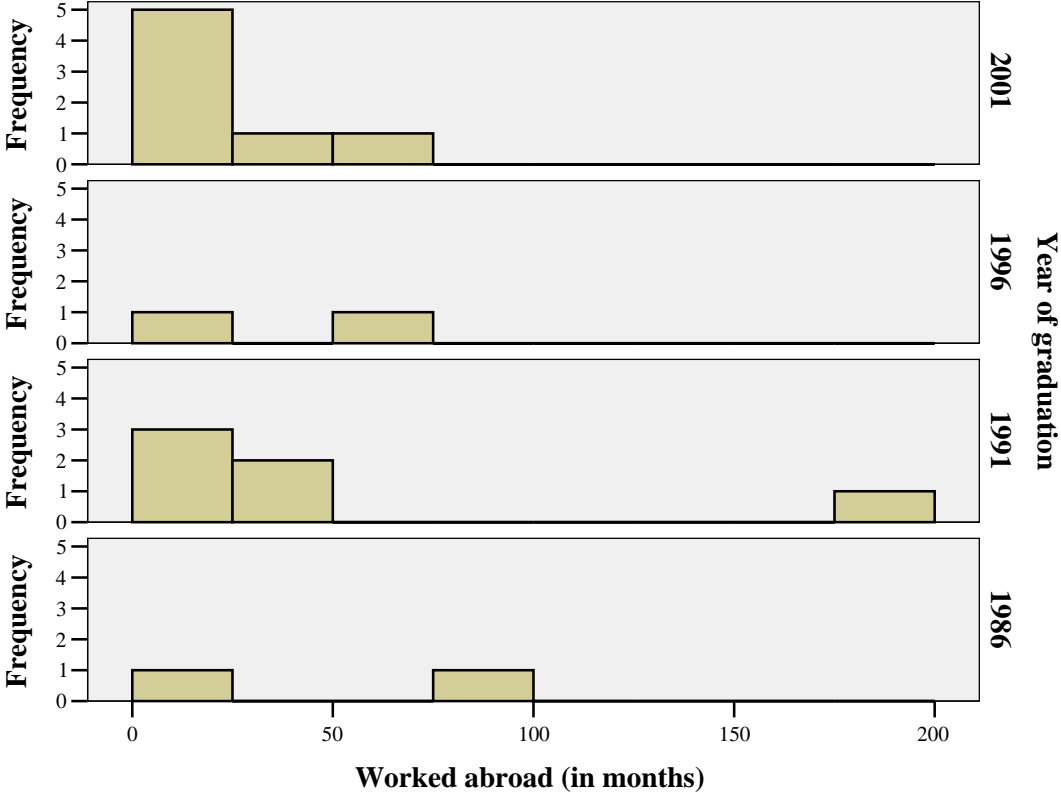
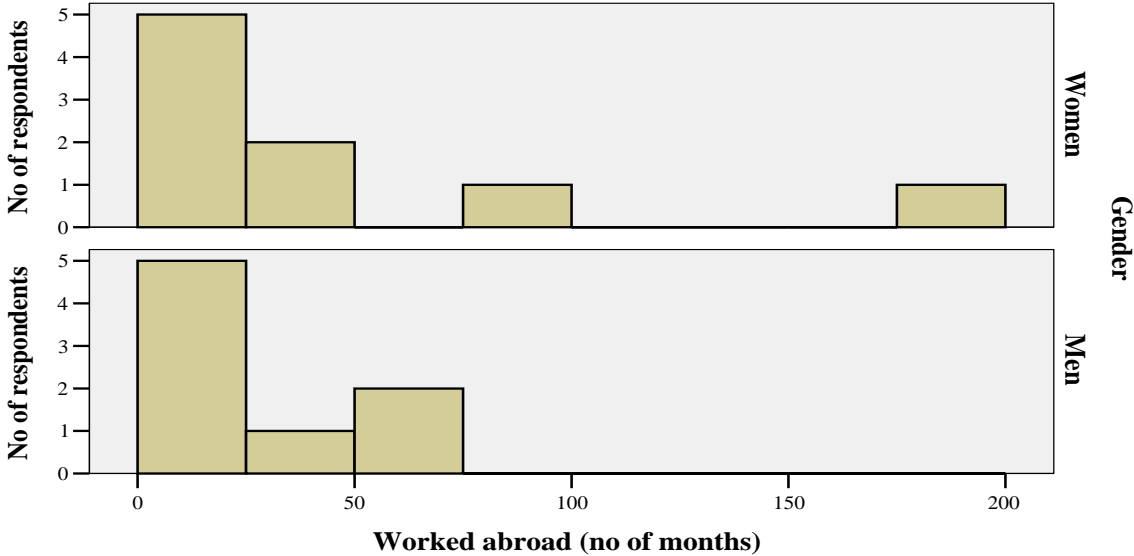
Mean = 6,52
Std. Dev. = 20,574
N = 64

Question 2.7.3 – Do you have any economic/budget responsibilities?

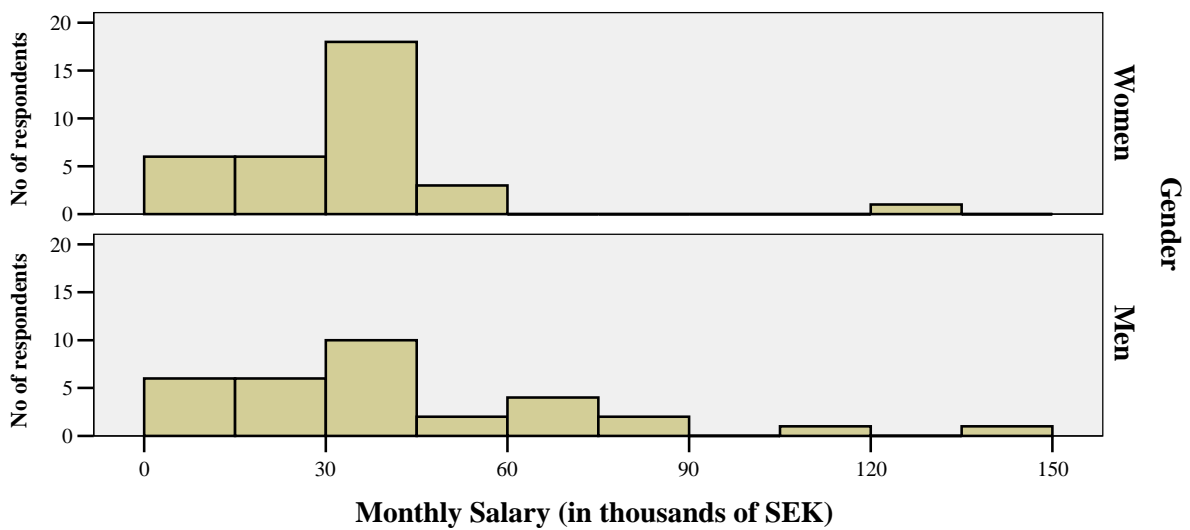
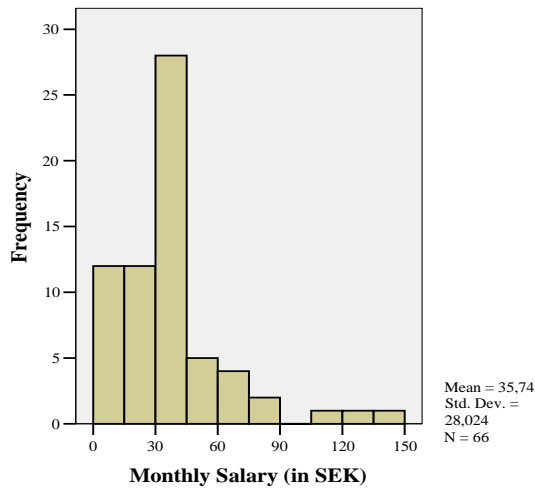
(only the persons who actually has economic responsibility are included in the diagram; one respondent taken out since the economic responsibility is 5 billion SEK and thus so high so it was not possible to show the outcome in a graph one could read)



Question 2.8 – Have you ever worked abroad?



Question 2.9 – How much do you earn a month (in thousands SEK)?



Question 3.1 – How has your time at Handelshögskolan affected your career?

The three most frequent answers were “entrance ticket to labour market”, “positively” and “gave me knowledge”; respondents from all graduation years mentioned these. Some said “not much or nothing at all” (10 in total) and about just as many said “very much” (8 in total) but it is hard to understand what the respondents meant by these statements. Other comments were “built confidence” and “good reputation”; Non of the respondents graduating in 1986 mentioned confidence and only one respondent from 1996 and 2001 mentioned “reputation”, compared to three in 1991 and one in 1986. Maybe this is a sign of a new approach by students on what education stands for?

Question 3.2 – How many of your friends from Handelshögskolan are you still in touch with privately?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	15	9,5	22,4	22,4
1	9	5,7	13,4	35,8
2	10	6,3	14,9	50,7
3	9	5,7	13,4	64,2
4	10	6,3	14,9	79,1
5	10	6,3	14,9	94,0
10	4	2,5	6,0	100,0
Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing System	91	57,6		
Total	158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Private	0	8	7	15
Network	1	2	7	9
	2	4	6	10
	3	3	6	9
	4	3	7	10
	5	8	2	10
	10	4	0	4
Total		32	35	67

Question 3.3 – How many of your friends from Handelshögskolan are you still in touch with through work?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	49	31,0	73,1	73,1
1	7	4,4	10,4	83,6
2	1	,6	1,5	85,1
3	4	2,5	6,0	91,0
5	3	1,9	4,5	95,5
10	1	,6	1,5	97,0
15	1	,6	1,5	98,5
20	1	,6	1,5	100,0
Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing System	91	57,6		
Total	158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Professional	0	22	27	49
Network	1	2	5	7
	2	0	1	1
	3	3	1	4
	5	2	1	3
	10	1	0	1
	15	1	0	1
	20	1	0	1
Total		32	35	67

Question 3.4 – What would you say were the three most important lessons learnt during your time at Handelshögskolan?

The answers to this question are fairly evenly distributed when comparing the different years of graduation. There are four reoccurring lessons: “knowledge” (38 respondents mentioned this), “how to solve problems” (28), “personal development (28) and “network” (20). Examples of other answers were: “legitimacy” (13), “ability to cooperate” (8), “international experience” (7) and (surprisingly) “nothing” (4).

Question 3.5 – If you had the opportunity to start over, would you choose the same education and major again?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Same	39	24,7	58,2	58,2
Other	28	17,7	41,8	100,0
Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing System	91	57,6		
Total	158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Same Education	Same	16	23	39
	Other	16	12	28
Total		32	35	67

Question 3.6 – If you had the opportunity to start over, would you choose to study at Handelshögskolan again?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Same	49	31,0	73,1	73,1
Other	18	11,4	26,9	100,0
Total	67	42,4	100,0	
Missing System	91	57,6		
Total	158	100,0		

		Gender		Total
		Man	Woman	
Same School	Same	21	28	49
	Other	11	7	18
Total		32	35	67

Appendix B – Interview with Annika

Annika is 30 years with a Magister Degree in Business Administration, major in Accounting. She graduated in 2001 and she chose Handelshögskolan in Gothenburg partly because there are not so many alternatives in Sweden for business studies, but mostly because her parents moved to Gothenburg and she wanted to be close to her family during her studies.

At the end of her studies, she had a very positive attitude when thinking about her future: “I knew it was possible to get a good job”. Her major was not decisive for getting the first job. Although her specialty was accounting, she managed to get an interesting job at Accenture as a consultant and she moved to Stockholm. Annika describes her first job as a very positive experience because she had a variety of tasks and she managed to learn a lot. During her studies at Handelshögskolan she developed a huge interest for this company because they were present on campus and the image they promoted matched Annika’s career plans. Therefore she set up a goal, while she was still studying, to work for Accenture after graduation. Her goal became a reality when she, quite easily, got a job at the end of her studies. Unfortunately, due to the recession in Sweden, the company had to let 100 of their employees go and Annika was one of them.

That was the moment Annika decided that she would like to work more with accounting and she applied for a job at Deloitte which she got without any difficulties. She has been working there for more than four years and has changed jobs internally; starting on an accounting assistant position, continuing by becoming a senior accountant and finally working as a project leader. Annika kept her eyes open at Deloitte and when an opportunity of working abroad aroused, she did not hesitate to apply. She worked abroad for four months which proved to be a very enriching experience because she got international experience, she challenged herself by completely changing her routines and environment and she was able to practice English on a daily basis.

Although she was very content with her work at Deloitte, Annika felt that the work tasks had become one-sided and she decided to take the next step in her career. When we interviewed her, she has already gotten the confirmation on being welcomed by SAS (Scandinavian Airline Systems) to start working there as a controller. Annika was full of positive expectations when we talked about her future at the new company.

When she thinks back on her time at Handelshögskolan, Annika has a very positive approach. She believes that her education corresponded very well to the jobs she performed, especially because she learned how to quickly absorb knowledge and to put it into practice. Being alert and quickly adapt to new information and working realities was the most important lesson she learned at Handelshögskolan.

But Handelshögskolan had a more important, indirect impact on Annika’s future. She believes that once she got her degree from Handelshögskolan, her status changed and she got a “quality stamp”, meaning that to a certain extent, her degree guaranteed her a good job. As a matter of fact, she feels that she did not need to make huge efforts in getting the jobs she applied for, because her very good grades were talking for themselves and offered her the “entrance ticket” in each company she has worked for. Her example is very curious, because she has had to show her degree and grades transcript every time she applied for a new job, even five years after graduation. So in Annika’s case, having great study results and studying at a school with “prestige” in Sweden were the main factors for her career development.

Annika did not feel that her fundamental values changed during her studies, but she was very aware that she did change personally. She “grow up” and she learned “how to socialize”, because she was forced to interact with different people, teachers and students during her studies. This is a very important part of her life today, because she managed to develop a great social competence which has helped her in her career.

She thinks that now, after graduation; it is very hard to identify with economists in general because, although they studied in the same field, people have “different backgrounds”. However, by having the legitimacy of calling herself an economist, she automatically gets a special status which makes her very attractive for potential employers and entitles her to apply for qualified jobs. But status is not the only important thing Annika got from studying at Handelshögskolan, she is especially grateful for the wonderful education she got and also for the dedicated and qualified teachers she had.

Annika feels that she has made very good decisions in her life and she has no regrets so far. She does not feel she has paid any price for her life style except that, maybe, she does not have as much time to herself and her hobbies as she would wish. She has a life partner, but she does not think her social status should play any major role in career choices. Generally, Annika struck us as a very positive and helpful person, with a lot of consideration for her jobs and people in general.

Appendix C – Interview with Nicklas

Ever since he was a little boy, Nicklas never was your “average Joe”. Originally from Borås, Nicklas was raised in a family where the spirit of justice was omnipresent. His mother is a lawyer and she used to put Nicklas to bed when he was a child, and told him bedtime stories about these strong people dressed in suits, who fought for justice. This is how, by the time he was 13 years old, Nicklas knew that he was going to become a jurist and since he wanted to get one of the best educations, Handelshögskolan in Gothenburg was his first choice.

Interviewing Nicklas was an experience. He is very eager to tell his story and he radiates so much positive energy that, after just a few minutes of conversation, it becomes contagious and you suddenly feel that you have found the courage to pursue your dreams, aim for the stars and have no regrets when it is time to retire. He struck us as being a very pleasant and kind person, willing to share his knowledge with all youngsters who can learn something from his story.

When the graduation arrived, Nicklas had no fears: “I just wanted to get out there”. In fact he was in quite a rush, because he studied at double the normal speed and he managed to get his degree in only three years instead of the normal five. In 2001 he was a law graduate at the age of 23 and the law firms were expecting him. He was engaged in student union activities, being the president of the law association and his reputation was well known among important names in the law community. At Gaius (the law students’ work exhibition, organised by Handelshögskolan), he was approached by a lawyer who worked at Manheimer & Svartling (a law firm) who asked him where he would prefer to work: in Gothenburg or Stockholm? Nicklas did not hesitate to accept this offer because he had made it his goal to work for Manheimer & Svartling from the beginning of his studies at Handelshögskolan. The natural choice was Gothenburg and he managed to get employed before even writing his bachelor thesis, which he wrote at this law firm.

But the luxury of working for such a renowned law firm had its price. He worked long days and had no time for anything else; by the end of his first professional year, he had managed to lose contact with all his friends and family. Then he shocked everybody: He quiet!!! The number of people telling him how crazy and bad his decision to give up his work was, were not few, but Nicklas was determined: he was not about to sacrifice his relationships with the people he loved for the sake of his career. He knew he could do both, without choosing one in the detriment of the other one. But not everybody was so convinced. Some laughed at him, calling him a dreamer but, today, Nicklas gets his “revenge”; every time he travels somewhere in business, he sends them a nice post card, telling them: “I am here, where are you?”

Although Nicklas gave up working for Manheimer & Svartling, he was still passionate about law in general; therefore he started his own little law firm, just for the fun of it. He is still going to court even today and charges only the prime cost from his clients: “The money is not my focus when I do law; the clients have to get the best service; I am earning my living from my other job”. In parallel, Nicklas contacted some sales organisations which he had helped to build sales policies. During this time he gained a lot of experience and one year ago, he decided to start his own company on the Forex Trading Market, a market that has a huge influence on countries, companies etc. mostly because it has a daily turnover of 1500 billion US dollars. FXclub (Forex Trading and investment opportunities), as the company is called,

has as its main business focus to inform and train “normal people” about the investment opportunities on this market and implicitly improve their private economy.

During our entire conversation, Nicklas mentioned several times the importance of his network of relationships. He developed a strong sense of business from an early age, having as personal goal to “always double what he had”. For example when he was ten years old, he imported, with his parents’ help, Nintendo games from Japan, before they were released in Sweden and he sold them to his friends’ parents, earning this way his own pocket money. Later, during his studies, he worked as an ambulant salesman. He invested his study grant (CSN) in a bucket of hot dogs, potato chips and ice cream, selling it to people gathered at different sport related events and again, doubling his money. When he got the job at Manheimer & Svartling, he immediately looked for investment opportunities and, by that time, earning money had become a reflex for Nicklas.

He mentioned that one of the key factors for his career was that, during all his “entrepreneurial time”, he always spent some time talking to the people he was selling to, and after a while he did not only have developed his own “clientele”, but he has managed to put together an impressive collection of business cards, knowing that “one day he will use those contact details”. And he could not have been more right, because having such an impressive contact list ensured the success of his company. The goal in the very beginning was to have 2000 members in the first two months and he travelled a lot and had a lot of meetings with “important leaders” around Europe. After only four days, with not one penny invested in marketing, they had 100 000 unique visitors on their website, becoming the world’s most rapidly growing company in this industry. Nicklas is a very confident person who knows when to take credit for his work; but in this case he wanted to make sure we understood that although he is the president of this company, the results are the fruit of the hard work of a team of professionals. In less than one year, Nicklas has travelled and worked in ten different European countries and he managed to sign deals with a lot of people simply by using his network: “When we developed an interest for a specific business in a country, I always ask my friends: Who knows whom? And this way we extend our network of relationships”.

When he thinks back on his days in school he gets very excited: “my education was absolutely wonderful”. He is extremely proud of Handelshögskolan and his studies, because he believes he developed his identity and discovered who he is. He also got “the best” education and a “good image” because of the school’s prestige. But, Nicklas does not believe that he identifies with other jurists at all, “they can be boring sometimes and I was always a non-conventional”, wearing colourful clothes and refusing to become this “grey old man”.

He thinks that the most important qualities he developed during his time at Handelshögskolan were discipline and how to overcome and solve problems. He learned how to find the answers he needed, how to logically sort information and analyse deeper society, its rules and values. He also learned that although the laws are important, they are not rigid and you can always try to see “the picture outside the box”. Concerning discipline, Nicklas amazed us with his life philosophy: “My habits steer my decisions! If I stay in bed longer in the morning because it is nice and it feels good at that moment, later on, during the day, I will make a bad decision”. Nicklas means that the habits give you a certain character which steers your values as a person; so bad habits involve implicit bad character, which leads to bad decisions and therefore bad business.

In our opinion, Nicklas has a beautiful and exciting story. But he still feels that he pays a price for his life style, though this time the price is acceptable: he does not have as much time as he would like for training and health. Also he is trying to balance his family life (Nicklas cohabits with his girlfriend) by taking her with him on as many business trips as possible; he makes it very clear that his family comes first and he will always try to adapt his career to his personal needs, these including his family's needs.

As for future plans, Nicklas intends to build the biggest company in his industry, which will benefit from the best reputation. His company has already taken its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by giving part of their profit to charity, especially to underprivileged children: "I believe in the boomerang effect; what you give, you get ten times back!"

Nicklas advice for students/graduates:

- Start believing in yourself and realise that you can do much more than you think you can
- Have a goal for what you want to achieve
- Set up a time plan for achieving your goal
- And do not forget: Take actions, no goals or plans mean anything without action!

Appendix D – Interview with Pia

Pia is a 40 years old economist who graduated from Handelshögskolan in 1991 with a major in Marketing. Originally from Uppsala, she chose to study in Gothenburg because “it was a good combination”: she wanted to take the chance to move away from home and start “fresh” in another town and since she was interested in economy, Handelshögskolan was the natural choice. She also preferred Gothenburg over Stockholm, because, in her opinion, Gothenburg is a very agreeable and friendly town.

When she approached graduation day, she did not feel she would have any trouble finding a job, as the matter effect, she did not even consider this possibility during her study time. Sweden crossed a booming economical period and a possible recession was out of the questions in her opinion during her studies. Therefore she was not prepared for the hard times the beginning of the 1990’s prepared for her. She remembers that she and her colleagues did not think that it will be problematic to find a job. But they were wrong! Now, years after the graduation she remembers how tough it was to start a career in those conditions. “Nothing was for free” and she needed to take “the long way” in order to give herself a fair chance of building the career she wanted.

She is a very pleasant woman with a healthy life philosophy: “better to have a job than being unemployed”. She was very aware that she was in the beginning of her career and that she had a lot to learn from any work experience. Therefore she kept an opened mind when looking for jobs and at the same time she thought very strategically: she knew that Marketing was “a lot about selling competences” and although she was by far overqualified for the jobs she was performing in the beginning, she learned as many selling techniques as she could in this period of time.

Pia is a very sensitive person, too; she tries to be passionate and dedicated to her work, therefore having a career in a field that she finds interesting and “close to her heart” is very important to her. She needs to enjoy her work and to feel that is fun to go to work every day; in fact, this was her goal from the beginning of her studies: “to work with something that is fun”.

Because of the harsh situation on the labour market, she decided to move to Stockholm, where the situation was a little bit brighter when looking for a job. She managed to get a job at a hotel which she was happy about, because she has already developed a vast interest in this industry from the time she was working as a tourist guide. She was not afraid of taking jobs that might seem less interesting for an economist; instead, she was eager to get a “foot” in the organization in order to be able to show her skills and abilities and maybe later get a higher position. Her strategy proved to be very efficient, because, after a while she was headhunted for different hotels in Stockholm that trusted her with key positions in the organization.

Finally, she was proposed a President position; to run a design hotel in Palma de Mallorca, Spain. She describes this opportunity as “a dream come true”. She studied abroad during her time at Handelshögskolan and speaks Spanish, so she had a huge interest in living and working abroad, therefore she had no hesitations when she packed her bags and moved to Spain from where she just returned a few weeks before we interviewed her. Besides, this job was all about working in an industry “close to the heart”: the hotel industry where she would be able to use her language skills, challenge her world views and put in practice all her knowledge and competences that she has developed over the years.

When she talks about her time at Handelshögskolan, Pia has a very positive attitude. She thinks that studying economy is very positive. She sees her education as a platform that does not have any restraints in terms of industries or jobs that you will work with or perform. In fact she deliberately chose marketing as her major because she knew it was a broad subject that would give her a lot of freedom to choose her field of work. She also appreciates the fact that our education consists of such a broad spectra of subjects (e.g. commercial law, accounting, management etc.), because that knowledge has come in handy over the years. The only thing she felt she missed at Handelshögskolan was an internship opportunity during her studies. "It would have been extremely good to try on the reality, that way; the step from Handelshögskolan to the real life would have been much easier". She also would have appreciated a mentor from outside of Handelshögskolan to help and guide her through "hard times".

When we asked her about the way a Handelshögskolan's degree is seen out there by employers, Pia answered by saying that in general, employers did not really care about her grades, major or specific courses that she took in school. In fact she told us that nobody ever asked her for this kind of information. Of course having a degree is a "must have" in order to be able to apply for qualified jobs, but the personal chemistry with the employer/organisation combined with her competences were the requirements for getting her on board: "you have to have a good feeling about the job, the organization and the employer".

Mostly, Pia talks very openheartedly and positively about her experiences at Handelshögskolan. She was especially grateful for the fact that she got the "knowledge to seek knowledge", meaning that she might not remember everything her teachers taught her in school, but she definitely knows where and how to find the right information. She also learned how to logically sort and scrutinize information.

Today, Pia is proud of her school and education and, to a certain level; she identifies herself with former and present students of Handelshögskolan. Although she does not feel her personality and fundamental values did change during her studies, she feels that Handelshögskolan has had an important impact on her life, especially her way of thinking was challenged in the studying context. She does not think of herself as an economist in general, but she certainly identifies with other colleagues working in the same industry. However she has a sense of belonging when she meets her old friends from school with whom she still keeps in touch and who are active parts of her life even 15 years after graduation. Unfortunately the alumni association is quite a new phenomenon at Handelshögskolan and although it has grown stronger and stronger from 2001 and she thinks very positively of it, Pia feels that too many years have passed in order for her to start building her network again.

Pia is a woman of "no regrets"; so far she has had a wonderful life, marked by a successful career. But everything has its price and in Pia's case, she feels she has paid a high price for her lifestyle: the family. Pia is a single career woman who admits that sometimes, maybe, her priorities were wrong, but having all the facts today, "it is easy to wonder: what if..."? In our opinion Pia seems to be a happy and content person and she gives this impression especially when she talks about the decisions she made in life: "It always felt good and right when I made a decision; I have no regrets!"

Pia's suggestions:

- Have the guts to move where the job is and do not get passive by staying unemployed and hoping that the job will come to you.
- Learn as much as you can from each experience and keep an opened mind when searching for a job.
- Go on an internship programme during or after your studies.