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FUTURE PROGRESSIVE: THE NEED FOR A PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE – AN INTERNATIONAL DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of Higher Education is increasingly under scrutiny as are its previous shortcomings. The last bastion of academic hegemony, the PhD, is being reconstructed, moving from a discipline focused degree intended to extend abstract, universal knowledge through the presentation of a thesis towards an emphasis upon the development of the skills of the researcher. Furthermore, the recognition that knowledge can be generated in realms other than academia has concurrently seen the emergence of Practitioner Doctorates, based upon Action Research, that are designed to develop researching professionals.
The paper poses the question whether it is appropriate to extend the model developed for an International Master of Business Administration into the provision of an International Doctor of Business Administration?

Key words: Action Research, DBA, Dewey, Knowledge, Practitioner Doctorate, Research skills

INTRODUCTION

In the brave new world of 1990 I doubt if any of us could have anticipated the remarkable changes that were about to come about. The core motivation behind them was the expansion of free-market capability in the transition economy countries. But my own interest was in promoting curriculum development processes in the widest sense, and not just for those partners. I was personally motivated by the statement that: "The changing economic situation in a free market economy will enforce the need for rapid responses in the form of appropriate modifications to training programmes. Universities must also pay greater attention to nurturing in students certain personality traits, including the ability to think creatively and to act independently, with initiative and in the spirit of enterprise" [Wieczorek 1992, p. 64].

In an earlier existence, as an ecologist, I used to think in terms of the Red Queen Hypothesis in reference to Lewis Carol's *Through the Looking Glass* – where the queen of hearts had to run as fast as she could in order to stay on the same spot. So having made substantial ground to align curricula for Business Administration it is time to take stock and ask what the future might hold. In response to this I want to be typically provocative.

A suitable point from which to begin a review of imminent prospects is that of purpose. What is the purpose of Higher Education? As Bauman and Donskis [2013, p. 142] noted: "the mission of education, since it was articulated by the Ancients under the name of paidea, was, remains and probably will remain for the duration the

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preparation of newcomers to society to life in the society they are preparing to enter." But in an era of constant change this tautology contains more than a hint of potential stagnation particularly under the caution of The Saber Tooth Curriculum [Benjamin 1939].

Now, as I have argued elsewhere [Kowalski 2014], the Higher Education Sector throughout the world has traditionally viewed itself as an indisputable universal good. The result was the acceptance of a philosophy that valued knowledge for its own sake and gave almost total freedom to academics to define for themselves those aspects of knowledge that were to be pursued as well as promulgated through teaching. This self-serving indulgence drove the Higher Education system into two *cul-de-sac*; discipline based curricula and separation from its constituencies, thereby laying the foundations for its subversion.

This failure to really examine why community resources were being invested in Higher Education came to an end with the economic difficulties of the early 1970s. Criticism mounted, primarily motivated by the concerns of commerce, as Schmitt [1987] lamented the American educational system put little emphasis on the values of the marketplace and focused mostly on academic values which emphasise optimum solutions, and Smith [1990] continued this theme when he averred that our educational systems are permeated by a minimalist outlook which is undemanding and, expecting very little of people, is neither surprised nor disappointed when little is achieved. Undoubtedly curricula have progressed during the last two decades, characterised by high relevance to the world of work, up-to-date content and modern methods of teaching (including web-based learning) and assessment – as evidenced by the results of evaluation. But nevertheless challenges remain.

Indeed, at least in the UK, there has been a radical re-focusing towards a functional curriculum [Warren-Piper 1985], and now some would suggest that we have gone too far in this direction, as Doring [2002, p. 140] noted: "the higher education system is being encouraged to transfer its allegiance from the academic to the operational" such that it primarily serves commercial interests, commodifies students and emphasizes technical knowledge (technē) over phronesis.

Moreover, there is growing concern about a widespread departure from the essential values of education, as Hunter and Geddes [2000, p. 5] noted: "the university seems increasingly the locus of high-level scholarly endeavors, but the structures of university life have led some to wonder whether the academy has rendered 'the life of the mind' irrelevant to the larger American society, by turning broad-minded intellectuals into narrowly specialized 'technicians', with critical faculties so refined that they often can gain no purchase on the pressing issues facing contemporary society."

Furthermore, Geddes [2012, p.2] commenting upon the rise of "the corporate professor" noted that: "professors themselves have bought into or been shaped by the corporate culture of the university and seem strangely inarticulate about the purposes and worth of higher education." Indeed, Lasch [1996, p. 98] commented that the market turns: "scholarship into professional careerism, social work into the scientific management of poverty." Indeed, Mohan [2011, p. 131] lamented that: "temples of knowledge and learning have fallen to corporate ethics," and has led Bauman [2000, p. 56] to observe that: "For a couple of centuries now academia had no other world to catch in its conceptual nets, to reflect upon, to describe and to interpret, than the one sedimented by the capitalist vision and practice." Causing Geddes [2012, p. 2] to comment that: "If professors can't articulate what they do or why it matters in terms not beholden to the market, then who can? What resources are there for re-envisioning and re-articulating the purposes of higher education in a way that responds to the rapid and far-reaching cultural changes taking place in our world today and that resists the commodification of knowledge, scholarship, attention, and reflection?".

Leading Doring [2002] to argue that the role of academics has shifted from being agents of change to being victims of change; from being at the heart of "a centre of learning" to being just a cog in another „business organization".

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

There has been mounting criticism of Higher Education globally in two key areas. The first is the abject failure of leadership the world over to rise to the challenge of environmental sustainability, despite the fact that most of the leaders who attended the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg have a higher education degree from the world's most prestigious universities [Martin and Jucker 2005]. So, we must ask why is it that the people who contribute most to exploiting poor communities and the Earth's ecosystems are holders of higher degrees and doctorates? [Orr 2004]. Why is the seeming ignorance of our politicians about how the world works as a living system so widespread? Why is it that our leaders so rarely demonstrate respect for the biosphere, wisdom and precaution, or the capacity to challenge unethical actions? [Martin and Jucker 2005].

Secondly, as evidenced by the largely unpredicted collapse of financial systems in 2008, it seems that some of the most fundamental issues at the heart of free-market capitalism have been overlooked and are absent from general macro-economics' curricula [Fullbrook 2016]. As Shutt [1999, p. 198] recognized, "*Amid so many signs that the existing world economic and political order is becoming unsustainable, it is remarkable that there is so little overt questioning of its ideological basis,*" and Söderbaum [2012, p. 109] maintained that "*university departments of economics continue to protect neoclassical theory*." Such that we might agree with Rahman [1993, p. 219] that: "*The 'educated' have not proved to be any more 'enlightened' or capable of wise and responsible decisions and conduct than the 'uneducated'*." and conclude that surely Higher Education institutions should be operating as hotbeds of problem setting and problem solving that are fully embedded in their communities, acting as conduits of resources and operating as environments for the growth of the sort of change agents that embattled humanity require. Not just paying passing acknowledgement to the challenge[1] but actually being transformational.

Another aspect over which universities have been criticised is research. Fundamentally we appear fixated upon the question "How?" because of the way that technology has contributed to economic expansion, and neglected those questions that underpin the deployment of that technology and the distribution of the wealth and harm that it creates. At the heart of Higher Education's difficulties is a tradition of organizing knowledge into discreet subject areas[2]. As Mohan [2011, p. 127] argued: "*The knowledge paradox has deepened the crisis by creating silos of disciplines that do not creatively communicate with each other*." Such a structure is entirely artificial, smacking of *Objectivism* rather than *Constructivism* [Laurillard 1993][3], and has encouraged the dislocation of ways of knowing that hinders a multi-disciplinary attack on the problems of the real world. The appropriate view, as Stacey [2001, p. 189] suggested: "*is an evolutionary concept of knowledge as meaning continuously reproduced and potentially transformed in action*."

Six characteristics of knowledge distinguish it from information [McDermott 2000, p. 23]:

- Knowing is a human act;
- Knowledge is the residue of thinking;
- Knowledge is created in the present moment;
- Knowledge belongs to communities;
- Knowledge circulates through communities in many ways;
- New knowledge is created at the boundaries of old.

[1] Another University's mission statement aspires to being: "a truly international university, which is also a major contributor to the economic, social and cultural transformation of [our home] city (…) and (…) region."

[2] For example, a current university mission statement refers to: "offering students the full range of disciplines."

[3] For example, another university claims that: "The mission of our University is the creation, dissemination and curation of knowledge." – begging the question – How could that get past scrutiny by an academic board?

The misrepresentation of knowledge as occurring in discreet disciplines and the behaviours associated with an Objectivist perspective of knowledge have also contributed to the distancing of Higher Education from its community constituents (including commercial interests) that is typified by the epithet "ivory tower" [Levin and Greenwood 2001]. As Rahman [1993, p. 12] expressed it: "we intellectuals have been educated only to form and to join a class of our own, aspiring for recognition by the international brotherhood of intellectuals, but alien from our own society". This is also maintained by the traditional approach to research which, contrary to popular perceptions, is not the only, nor even the most sensible, methodology to apply to problem solving. Indeed, Pieterse [1999, p. 77] lamented that: "Interdisciplinary research is more widely applauded than practiced."

In traditional research the researcher is effectively neutral (not necessarily objective), off the time-line, able to scan the widest span, though not necessarily the detail, of unfolding events – usually enacted by others – and generating propositional knowledge (E-theory) that can be reported and shared [McNiff and Whitehead 2003], as illustrated in Figure 1 below. This may also be captured by the concept of the Technical Rationality model that is "embedded in the institutional context of professional life" and which Schön [1983] characterized as: "research is institutionally separate from practice, connected to it by carefully defined relationships of exchange. Researchers are supposed to provide the basic and applied science from which to derive techniques for diagnosing and solving problems of practice. Practitioners are supposed to furnish researchers with problems for study and with tests of the utility of research results. The researcher's role is distinct from, and usually considered superior to, the role of the practitioner".

The false dichotomy of theory and practice, which had seen the arrogation of research by institutions of Higher Education, has led to a knowledge generating process that had little impact upon everyday practice, especially in professional endeavours such as teaching, management and social work. Dewey was very critical of this divide, as Argyris et al. [1985] noted: "Dewey was eloquent in his criticism of the traditional separation of knowledge and action, and he articulated a theory of inquiry that was a model both for scientific method and for social practice." Indeed, positivist methods and the simple position of the objective observer were clearly perceived to be inappropriate for researching social phenomena.

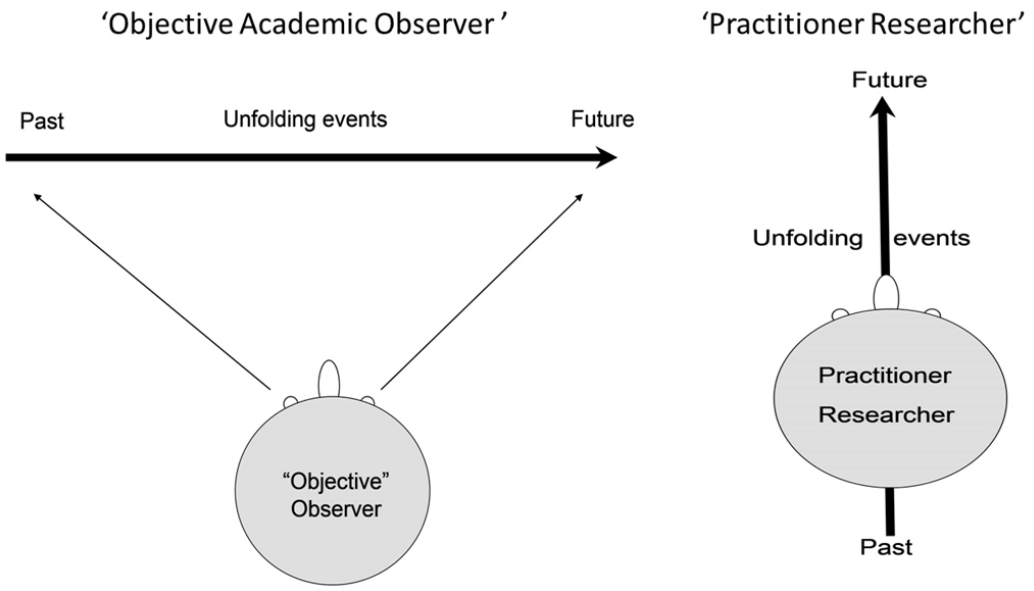

Fig. 1. The alternative positions of the "researcher" (looking down upon their head, as it were)

Source: Own elaboration.

Now we must compare this with those circumstances where the practitioner researcher engages with their constituents in action research, as shown in Figure 1, being fully associated with the unfolding events, on the time-line, and having to respond and use developing knowledge in the management of the situation in the here and now – and generating more tacit knowledge, more particular knowledge, and more narrative knowledge that others must seek to generalise into their own contexts as seems best to them (I-theory[4]), which McNiff and Whitehead [2003, p. 22] described as: "theories which are already located within the practitioner's tacit forms of knowing, and which emerge in practice as personal forms of acting and knowing." such research, carried out in the actual settings of social practice, allows any research findings to be seamlessly projected into practice.

As Stringer [1996, p. 10] noted: "Action Research is a collective process, engaging people who previously have been the subjects of research in the process of defining and redefining the corpus of understanding on which their community or organisational life is based." Indeed, Burnes [2004, p. 984] observed that: "Lewin's view was very much that the understanding and learning which this process [of Action Research] produces for the individuals and groups concerned, (…,) is more important than any resulting change as such."

Definitively, Levin and Greenwood [2001, p. 103] commented that: "Universities, as institutions charged with the generation and transmission of knowledge, have created a variety of conditions inimical to the practice of action research and thus to competent knowledge generation, thereby producing poor quality of knowledge and isolating themselves unproductively from the societies they claim to serve".

ACADEMIC VERSUS PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES

Within Higher Education's acquisition of the research domain came the right to confer associated qualifications. As such the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), initiated in nineteenth century Germany, was dependent upon an epistemological position that academically valid knowledge must be abstract and, to all intents and purposes, universal [Lester 2004], and which was considered to provide an appropriate pre-service training for research professionals [Park 2005] founded upon "the Humboldtian belief" that academic staff and also the students are in higher education "for the sake of science and scholarship" [Becher et al. 1994].

In recent years the fitness for purpose of this doctoral qualification has been widely questioned [Park 2005]. Increasingly the PhD has been seen as insular, esoteric and irrelevant to the world outside academia. Gilbert [2004] listed the following shortcomings of the PhD:

- consumers of research outcomes are demanding closer attention to problems generated in the practices of everyday life;
- multi-disciplinarity as a research context is most productive of innovation and discovery;
- changing conceptions of knowledge challenge the compartmentalized approach to research training which has been institutionalized in university academic structures;
- traditional university processes are being tested by the increasing pace and dispersal of knowledge production and innovation, including the increase in research activity outside the university sector;
- new roles are proposed for academics, experts and intellectuals, derived from ideas of entrepreneurship, knowledge work, the public intellectual and advocacy for science and research;
- forms of the doctorate are increasingly diverse, with an increase in the role of portfolios and the establishment of professional doctorates in many fields;
- debates over competing research paradigms and methodological issues have created tensions which complicate the construction of the doctoral curriculum;

[4] Where McNiff and Whitehead [2003, p. 22] have describe I-theory as: "a dialectical form of theory, a property of an individual's belief system".

- concerns for the outcomes of doctoral research training have produced a widespread focus on the development of generic or transferable skills.

Furthermore the pursuit of a doctorate seems to have become longer and more difficult, for example McAlpine and Norton [2006] drew attention to the high attrition rates in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the USA and their implications for the institutions, individuals and societies concerned. Consequently, there has been a general shift from the focus upon the thesis product of the PhD to a more student development approach emphasising skills. There is a new demand from funding bodies and potential employers that training within PhD programmes should be more structured and better coordinated, that it be broadened to embrace key or transferable skills as well as research skills, be compulsory rather than optional, and be more sensitive to issues of employability that extend beyond simply creating new academics.

In the United Kingdom, as a result of the benchmarking work of the Council for Graduate Education, the Quality Assurance Agency has suggested a set of outcomes for doctoral awards [QAA 2011] as follows:

1. Knowledge-based:
   - K1 – systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice;
   - K2 – creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication;
   - K3 – detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.
2. Research skills:
   - R1 – the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;
   - R2 – make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data;
   - R3 – able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
3. Attitudes:
   - A1 – continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches.
4. Professional skills:
   - P1 – have the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.

Note that this constitutes a radical change of emphasis from the contribution of new knowledge as the primary objective to the generation of new researchers who have undergone "training" in research and new knowledge generation.

There is also a clear recognition that new knowledge can also be generated outside of academia – predominantly in professional practice, underwriting the emergence of the Professional or Practitioner Doctorates. Thus the growth of professional doctorates represents the arrival of the "student-development" approach at the doctoral level. Such professional doctorates place the highest development of the student at the heart of doctoral study, compared with the PhD which has the highest development of the discipline at its heart.

The practitioner doctorate challenges the PhD-based orthodoxy since it is explicitly concerned with practical knowing and doing, and does not set out to license researchers. It suggests a need for conceptualizations that are not defined by academic research and knowledge generation. In a practitioner doctorate research is undertaken with a particular aim in mind, and new knowledge is generated for a purpose, even if it is subsequently disseminated through publication. Graduates of a practitioner doctorate will necessarily be able to

operate as practitioner-researchers, but they are foremost capable and thinking practitioners. This enables doctorates to be conceptualized in terms of the kind of high-level thinking and action needed to create significant and considered change and development in complex practical situations [Kowalski and Kaminski 1999].

Professional doctorates now form an established alternative to the PhD, both in the UK, the USA and Australia. The culmination of this development is represented by what might be termed practitioner doctorates, based on development projects that result in substantial organizational or professional change and a significant contribution to practice. Such programmes present a challenge to traditional conceptions of what constitutes doctoral work based on research. Nevertheless, they are constituted in a way that is both robust academically and appropriate for the complex and far-reaching problems encountered in contemporary society. In particular the knowledge generated is to be validated on the basis of "what works" rather than the objectivity of data gathering, or some such. Thus the "traditional" Doctor of Philosophy degree is intended to develop professional researchers, the practitioner doctorate is designed to develop researching professionals. That the two types of doctorate are indeed distinctly different and that the new practitioner doctorate meets a very different need can be seen through comparisons set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Various aspects of the provision of the traditional and practitioner doctorates are compared

Aspect	Traditional Doctorate	Professional Doctorate
Topic	Any within reason	Limited in focus often agreed with employer
Taught elements	Possible but not prescribed	Prescribed and extensive
Start date	Whenever registered	Fixed (usually biannually)
Relationship to other students	Individual within a departmental group	Part of a cohort of students
Assessment	Thesis and *viva voce* Or body of published work and *viva voce*	Course work (products, portfolios, published papers), thesis and *viva voce*
Research focus	Episteme; E-theory; Mode 1	Techne; Phronesis; I-theory; Mode 2 [Gibbons et al. 1994]
Research Methods	Experiment; Objective 3rd party data gathering	Action Research; Subjective involvement in generating data
Career	Pre-service	In-service
Contribution	To a body of knowledge	To professional practice
Audience	Academic colleagues (Peers)	Community of Practice

Source: Neumann [2005].

CONCLUSION

Thus, just as in 1995, we find the provision of Business Administration qualifications at the edge of a great opportunity wondering whether as an international academic community we can and should grasp it with both hands. Can we create an International Doctorate of Business Administration? One that is multi-centred, peripatetic and which will support the development of business leaders in agriculture and related enterprises?

The AgriMBA offered by SGGW is uniquely placed to provide a basis and template for such a development. Its strengths are that:

1. It is truly international in content and intention.
2. It is in-service – so highly practice oriented.
3. It involves the mixing of staff and students from partners across Europe.
4. It is founded upon breaking with traditions.
5. It is unpretentiously eclectic.

Nevertheless, we have to be cautious in our advocacy of change. The philosophical positions outlined above also require that individuals have to find meaningful solutions which are appropriate for their own context. In this respect it is vital that changes are brought about and implemented by the staff of the institutions concerned. They cannot be driven from above, nor from outside. We must remember that although it is the external grain of sand which causes the pearl to form, it is the oyster itself which does the making. Those farsighted, entrepreneurial academics who drove the AgriMBA are not in a position to drive forward an AgriDBA, but they represent a resource of experience to support those who would.

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CZAS „PRZYSZŁY CIĄGŁY": POTRZEBA ZAWODOWEGO DOKTORATU – MIĘDZYNARODOWEGO *DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION*

STRESZCZENIE

Cel kształcenia na poziomie akademickim jest w coraz większym stopniu przedmiotem weryfikacji, podobnie jak szkolnictwo wyższe analizowane pod kątem niedociągnięć systemu. Ostatni bastion hegemonii akademickiej – doktorat, rekonstruuje się z formy rozprawy teoretycznej do dysertacji, w której doktorant rozwiązuje praktyczne problemy badawcze. Przekonanie, że wiedza może być generowana w domenach innych niż akademickie doprowadziło do pojawienia się koncepcji zawodowego doktoratu. Byłby on realizowany w trybie tzw. badań w praktyce działania (ang. *action research*). W artykule postawiono pytanie, czy właściwe byłoby rozwinięcie modelu MBA (ang. *master of business administration*) do modelu DBA (ang. *doctor of business administration*).

Słowa kluczowe: badania w praktyce działalności, *action research*, doktorat *business administration*, Dewey, wiedza, umiejętności badawcze