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# Discourse, knowledge and power: the continuing debate over the DBA

## Abstract:

The Doctor of Business Administration Degree (DBA) has been viewed as a new stage in the development of 'useful' knowledge bringing together academic and business professionals. The DBA was introduced during the 1990s along with a number of other so-called professional doctorates in an effort to address perceived failings with the conventional Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree. The main focus of this paper is related to how students and academics in a business school perceive the DBA in terms of its purpose and value compared to that of the conventional PhD. The research methodology involved a two-stage approach in which a pilot questionnaire and short interviews with 37 students was followed by a second questionnaire to 21 academics employed at a business school at a post-1992 English university. The findings suggest that although the DBA is valued as means to develop professional knowledge and expertise, the PhD remains the premier choice for those who wish to embark on an academic career. This paper, however, recognises that the conventional doctoral paradigm may change as we revise our conceptions of useful knowledge, and move to a greater variety in doctoral qualifications.

Key words: Doctor of Business Administration (DBA); knowledge production; professional-researcher; practitioner-researcher; Professional doctorate; business; Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

## Introduction:

In February 2015, the Economic and Social Research Council in England responded to concerns about the expense and quality of the conventional PhD by reforming its funding methodology so as to concentrate its allocation to a select group of 15 'Doctoral Training Partnerships'. These partnerships were tasked with raising the quality of doctoral provision through better engagement with industry and supervising larger cohorts of students. This announcement represented a continuation of central Government policy that had developed since the 1990s. The kernel of the approach is a concern over the usefulness of the conventional PhD in the ever-changing business environment. The solution, in part, is the DBA- but should we really view the DBA as a substitute for an increasingly challenged PhD, or more properly a new doctoral qualification in its own right with its own currency for students and wider society. Park (2007: 7) raises two further questions that lie at the heart of the debate over the DBA: who owns the doctorate, and who cares? Park (2007:37) then identifies three themes that are at the centre of the debate on the future of doctoral education: What is the essence of 'doctorateness'? What is the doctorate for? How can the supply chain of doctoral graduates be sustained? This paper will explore these themes through empirical research at a business school and offer a view on the value of the DBA.

According to De Meyer (2012: 479), [the traditional] model of PhD education... is insufficient for our future needs', and in particular, 'the creation of new forms of doctoral studies... may well be better adapted to the needs of lots of the emerging educational institutions in management or business administration'(De Meyer, 2012: 478). Although the past two decades have witnessed the growth of professional doctorates in Australia, the United States (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), their long-term future is still open to speculation. There is no common prognosis for the future of professional doctorates internationally. In the USA, professional associations have driven the development of these work-based qualifications in a wide range of employment contexts. In contrast, there has been little support for professional doctorates in Canada either from academia or Government. Although there was initial enthusiasm for professional doctorates in Australia, their growth has been limited in recent years, as issues relating to quality and status have been raised. The UK has also witnessed the growth of professional doctorates, not least the Doctorate in Education (EdD), but their potential appears limited as the PhD is reworked into new variants such as the 'NewRoute PhD' that adopts a structured approach rather similar to that of a professional doctorate. Perspectives differ on the purpose, rigour and value the professional doctorate. For some critics, such as Evans, Macauley, Pearson and Tregenza, (2005), the immanent question is: 'why do a prof. doc. when you can do a PhD?' For its advocates, the professional doctorate offers us the opportunity of constructing new pathways to new forms of profession-based inquiry as well as the reorientation of insular universities outwards to the wider community (Banerjee and Morley, 2013: 174; De Meyer, 2012). The main aim of the paper is to explore the growth and development of one of the most common professional doctorates- the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)- as well as eliciting the views of students and academics on these three key issues of purpose, rigour and value. In doing so, we may move closer to a tentative judgment about its *raison d'être* in the twenty-first century, and the future of this qualification.

For De Meyer (2012) the review of the traditional system of doctoral study can be traced to the perceived inadequacy of the PhD model in the twenty-first century. This 'decline of the traditional PhD thesis' is predicated on a number of drivers of change principally related to the changing nature of 'knowledge production' and the impact of globalisation. Together with these international drivers there were a range of national pressures for a re-evaluation of doctoral study, particularly in Australia and the UK. In both countries, Government policy publically endorsed the emergence and development of professional doctorates in response to the perceived failings of the traditional PhD through the publication of White Papers in 1987. In Australia, the Labour Government responding to concerns expressed from the professions and commercial interests launched professional doctorates in the late 1980s (Lee et al. 2009: 277). Bourner et al. (2000) trace the creation of professional doctorates in the UK to the interplay between Central Government and the University sector, in which Government policy (Harris Report, 1996; Quality Assurance Agency, 2000) had similarly emphasised the need for the evolution of doctoral study beyond the traditional PhD. These policy developments were indicative of two strands that were underpinning Government thinking. The first strand related to economic instrumentalism and the wish on behalf of policy-makers to improve high level skills, such as research and evaluative thinking, within the workforce. The second strand, more conspicuous under a Labour Government in the UK after 1997, related to an increased emphasis on widening participation in education at all levels and promoting aspiration.

The short history of professional doctorates in Australia, Canada and the USA and the UK (see table 1) suggests that there appears to be a market for this form of doctoral qualification outside of

the traditional clientele for PhD study. In 2009, there were 19 Australian universities offering 27 DBAs of various formats (Miller, 2010: 6). In 2014, there were a reported 32 universities in the UK that offered 65 professional doctorates, whilst Kot Chiteng and Hendel (2012: 351) reported that in their study of 32 American universities they found 33 professional doctorates. In terms of the DBA as a discrete qualification, it continues to be the second only to the EdD as the most popular professional doctorate studied in the UK. There were 47 DBA degrees offered in 2014, of which only 15 were offered as full-time courses. (Hotcourses, 2014). This compares to 16 universities in the UK that were offering DBAs in 2000. In part, the growth of the DBA has been facilitated through an ease of access with most professional doctorates designed to be delivered on a part-time basis or through distance learning. In Australia, the DBA appears to have been promoted across the university sector as a qualification in its own right. For many of the pre-1992 universities in the UK, the professional doctorate has also provided an opportunity to respond to the widening participation and skills agenda proclaimed by Government, without jeopardising their gold standard qualification – the PhD. The introduction of professional doctorates has also been motivated by the wish to improve completion rates for doctoral qualifications, now that these are measured by Government as a key performance indicator of quality, and ultimately funding. Interestingly, many of the proponents of professional doctorates in the UK have been the more traditional pre-1992 universities, not the vocationally-oriented post-1992 universities, in contrast to Australia.

Importantly, the evolution of the DBA has generated some criticism from within academia. The critique of the professional doctorate is predicated on a number of fundamental concerns: the degree of intellectual rigour required to obtain a DBA, the lack of focus on developing research-based knowledge, as well as the inconsistencies that exists between different models of the DBA. According to Bareham et al. (2000: 394) there appears to be little consensus on the core content required to obtain a DBA, 'notwithstanding the fact that the Association of Business Schools (ABS) has published guidelines on the DBA. It is important for the credibility of the DBA for there to be clarity about what the award stands for'. According to the United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education (2002: 62), the defining feature of a professional doctorate should be:

'A programme of advanced study which, satisfying the University criteria for the award of a doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the University, and which develops the capability of individuals to work within a professional context.'

Within such a view is the kernel of the critique of professional doctorates both from a conceptual and practical perspective. Firstly, the DBA is designed to meet the needs of a relatively new and 'external' clientele who are quite separate from Faculty staff and their traditional doctoral mentees. Secondly, the purpose and value of the professional doctorate is presented in terms of professional development and not as research-based learning. Researchers across the globe have criticised professional doctorates as a poor alternative to the PhD; lacking in intellectual rigour and research-orientated skills in the UK and Canada (Winter et al. 2000; Allen et al, 2002) or a lack of quality controls over their growth in Australia (Sarros et al. 2005). For McWilliam et al. (2002: 1104) although the DBA and PhD are 'differently rigorous...', there is little consistency in how these graduate degree programmes are delivered, monitored, and evaluated'. In short, the DBA still faces a challenge to address the issues of credibility and legitimacy, not least within the academic community from which the degree originates.

## An International comparison of the position of Professional Doctorates

Country	Significant stakeholders	Quality or policy reviews	DBA used as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Nature of assessment	Employment context
UK	Central Government has promoted professional doctorates as a matter of policy.	White Paper, 1987. UKGCE report, 2002. Park (HEA) report, 2007. Accepted at Level 8 (PhD equivalent). Growth of alternative 'NewRoute PhD'.	Yes, in completion rates.	Varies, but usual to have a research methods foundation, original research thesis and viva.	Driven by Central Government together with Government agencies linked to professions. Seen as an 'in-service' qualification.
USA	Professional associations. Universities in developing new qualifications. Accreditation bodies, such as AACSB.	North Central Association of Colleges and Schools report, 2005 recommendations on development.	NA.	Varies, but often have examinations, coursework, and short dissertation, and no viva.	Driven by increasing 'credentialism' in USA. Often seen as a 'pre-entry' qualification.
Australia	Federal Government has promoted Professional Doctorates as a matter of policy.	White Paper, 1987. Dawkins reforms, 1989. Kemp White Paper, 1999. Accepted at Level 10 of the Australian Qualifications Framework (PhD equivalent) in 2011.	Australian Business School Deans draft guidelines, 2004-07. Moved away from entry to completion data as a KPI after 2011.	Varies, but can be 66% based on original research for DBA, no viva (Wallace et al. 2015).	Originally driven by Federal Government and professions. Seen as an 'in-service' qualification.
Canada	Provincial Governments (i.e. Ontario) - absence of public funding has inhibited professional doctorates.	Ontario Government has not invested significantly in the development of Professional doctorates.	NA.	NA.	Not seen as a viable alternative to the conventional PhD.

Table 1. An international comparison of the position of professional doctorates.

## Literature review:

The idea of a professional doctorate, as in the case of the DBA, opens up the opportunity for the development of knowledge in new contexts. As a number of observers have noted (Banerjee and Morley, 2013: 174; De Meyer, 2012: 479) Government and the private sector now recognise that 'knowledge production' takes place outside the university sector in the guise of 'think tanks', policy institutes and commercial research establishments. This increasingly pluralist context for knowledge production has important implications for universities as they have been amongst the foremost engines of knowledge production since the Victorian era. The once omniscient position of the university sector as the progenitors of knowledge is now challenged, and with this change, the unquestioned hierarchy of knowledge that was generated by universities. The changing context of knowledge production also has profound implications for knowledge producers with De Meyer (2002: 483) reporting that Singapore University has developed a three career track system that reflects emerging trajectories for professors: traditional academic, practice-based and education-focussed.

For some observers, the emergence of the DBA is indicative of a critique of the traditional model of the business school and its curriculum. For Bennis and O'Toole (2005) business schools have prioritised obtaining academic credibility from such organisations as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) rather than engaging fully with practitioners in sharing knowledge. For a number of commentators, business schools are primarily engaged in a process of external legitimation rather than meeting the needs of the wider community (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Banerjee and Morley, 2013). One key contemporary driver of business schools' strategic planning is conformity with the AACSB's criteria for accreditation. During 2006-2009, AACSB (2009) refined a series of standards in order to obtain AACSB accreditation. In response, aspiring business schools across the globe then re-engineered their curriculum, quality systems and staffing policies (Noorda, 2011). In particular, the 2009 AACSB rubric sought to divide faculty membership into two categories: those with a doctorate and academic publications, described as 'academically qualified', and those with a Master's degree and substantial work experience, described as 'professionally qualified'. This nomenclature was further refined in 2013 when AACSB (2013) produced a typology of four categories: the 'scholarly practitioner' and the 'instructional practitioner' for those without a doctorate but with varying amounts of academic publications and work experience, and the 'scholarly academic' and 'practitioner academic' for those who hold a doctorate. In this respect, career pathways and appropriate qualifications within business schools are being re-engineered by market pressures originating from outside the university sector. A second driver of business schools' strategic positioning is ensuring that its external reputation is secured through the tracking of its research outcomes. In the UK, Central Government audits the productivity of business schools and measures its value through a series of key performance indicators (KPIs), not least the metrics scores of its academics along-side a number of KPIs described in a variety of league tables that are derived from assessments of institutional research outputs. Elite business schools are clearly influenced by the need to be viewed as 'research intensive' rather than 'practitioner-oriented'. The creation and evolution of the 'elite' Russell Group of 24 'research-intensive' universities in the UK mirrors their wish to be perceived as research-based institutions, as this is regarded as the most effective method of attracting external funding. Indeed, the Russell Group reports that it attracts '60% of the total income from collaborative research involving both public funding and funding from businesses to UK universities' (Russell Group, 2014). Although there are 116 universities in the UK that award degrees,

it is evident that the greater amount of funding is drawn to those institutions that position themselves as being 'research-intensive'.

The preoccupation with theory-based research rather than practice-oriented development amongst leading universities has led many business schools, particularly in the UK and Australia, to project a particular, and rather limiting, message about their work. For Noorda (2011: 521-522) business schools should now consider a new stage of their evolution:

'Business schools have been leaders in the field of ranking and accreditation for quite some time now. I would like to invite them to become leading in redesign and development as well. ... A broader scope and more variety of standards would be very welcome.... Business worlds are changing, student populations are changing, and so should schools'.

For Noorda (2011) the challenge is to undertake a fundamental review of the work of business schools and their contribution to wider society. This critique of business schools is echoed in the reports from Pfeiffer and Fong (2002) and by the AACSB (2008) that decry the lack of impact of business research and the disjoint between university research and industry. If business schools are to produce research that has relevance to contemporary business practice, universities need to focus on meeting the practical needs of businesses rather than engaging in esoteric theoretical research. The starting point for the next stage of evolutionary maturation should then be the reappraisal of knowledge-production as a process and an outcome. Building on (Schoen, 1995) ideas on professional work and learning, Lee et al. (2009: 282) argue that: 'there is a continuing need to address a continuing privileging of the idea of knowledge- particularly disciplinary knowledge, understood as disembodied, abstracted from practice, de-situated- over practice per se and its distinctive logics and imperatives'. This relationship between forms of knowledge, asymmetrical power relations and intellectual discourse has been researched from a number of opposing perspectives including that of post-structuralism and Foucault (1969) and social constructionism and Habermas (1984/1987). Although Lee et al (2009: 281-282) concede that a 'discourse of demise' appears to have enveloped the professional doctorate in Australia, they argue that reports of the death of the professional doctorate are exaggerated. At the root of the discourse on knowledge is a debate relating to the role and importance of dominant groups in society, such as universities in creating and legitimating knowledge and cultural power.

The emergence of professional doctorates, such as the DBA, could be seen as a positive shift towards a repositioning of some universities and their view of the varying forms of knowledge. For Bareham et al. (2000):

'The DBA can be viewed as a form of work-based learning. From this perspective the development of the DBA represents the coming of age of work-based learning within the higher education curriculum. Doctoral awards for work-based learning imply acceptance of work-based learning at the highest level of higher education'.

This movement towards a more inclusive view of appropriate knowledge at doctoral level, opens up the possibility of engagement with a wider audience. It also offers us the opportunity to narrow the divide between 'professional-researchers' and 'researching professionals' (Bourner et al., 2001) and recognise the possibility for sharing knowledge. Erwee (2004) has reported on the benefits of developing links between universities and industry as well as Kemp's (2002) distinction between

'surface level' and 'deep level' linkages and their limitations. Despite differences in vested interests, the development of closer ties between academia and business is to be welcomed in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. Sarros et al. (2005: 42) argue that 'the DBA degree approaches [applied learning] mode 2 knowledge and learning styles but also incorporates the need for academic rigour as contained in the [disciplinary, research-based] mode 1 approach'. For some observers, the coalescence of professional doctorates around the twin principles of research and practice has created a new form of 1.5 mode of learning. If so, a synthesis of both approaches could address the theory-practice divide that has inhibited economic growth in recent history.

Another important outcome of the emergence of the professional doctorate is the momentum it has engendered towards the creation of communities of professional practice (De Meyer, 2013: 484). Bourner et al. (2001: 75) cites the experience of English universities:

'The cohort experience is introduced ... is intended to enhance the collaboration and responsibility expected of high level professional practice'

'Its focus is on research in relation to professional practice, pursued with a cohesive group of professionals working together'.

Whereas universities have historically recruited and supervised individuals to study for a PhD, the professional doctorate aims to recruit cohorts of students and support them through a common research training stage. The impact of such an approach is to inculcate a mutually supportive environment in which students are able to disseminate and share their research ideas, methodological approaches and findings. This approach may also reduce the degree of isolation that is often reported by PhD students (Wellington and Sykes, 2006: 724) and facilitate a community of practice as described by Wenger (1998) and Wenger et al. (2002). Wenger's (1998) thesis can be interpreted as combining a social theory of learning introduced by Bandura (1963) with the notion of identity formation (Cote, 1996) in the development of a community of learning. Bourner et al. (2000: 492), as an illustration, reported that one university established 'themed' groups that were predicated on mutual research interests. This cohort-based approach offers a number of advantages over that of individual supervision associated with the traditional PhD, not least in economies of scale, but principally in relation to the development of a community of research-focussed practitioners. An adapted model of a community of 'practitioner-researchers' is presented below in Figure 1:



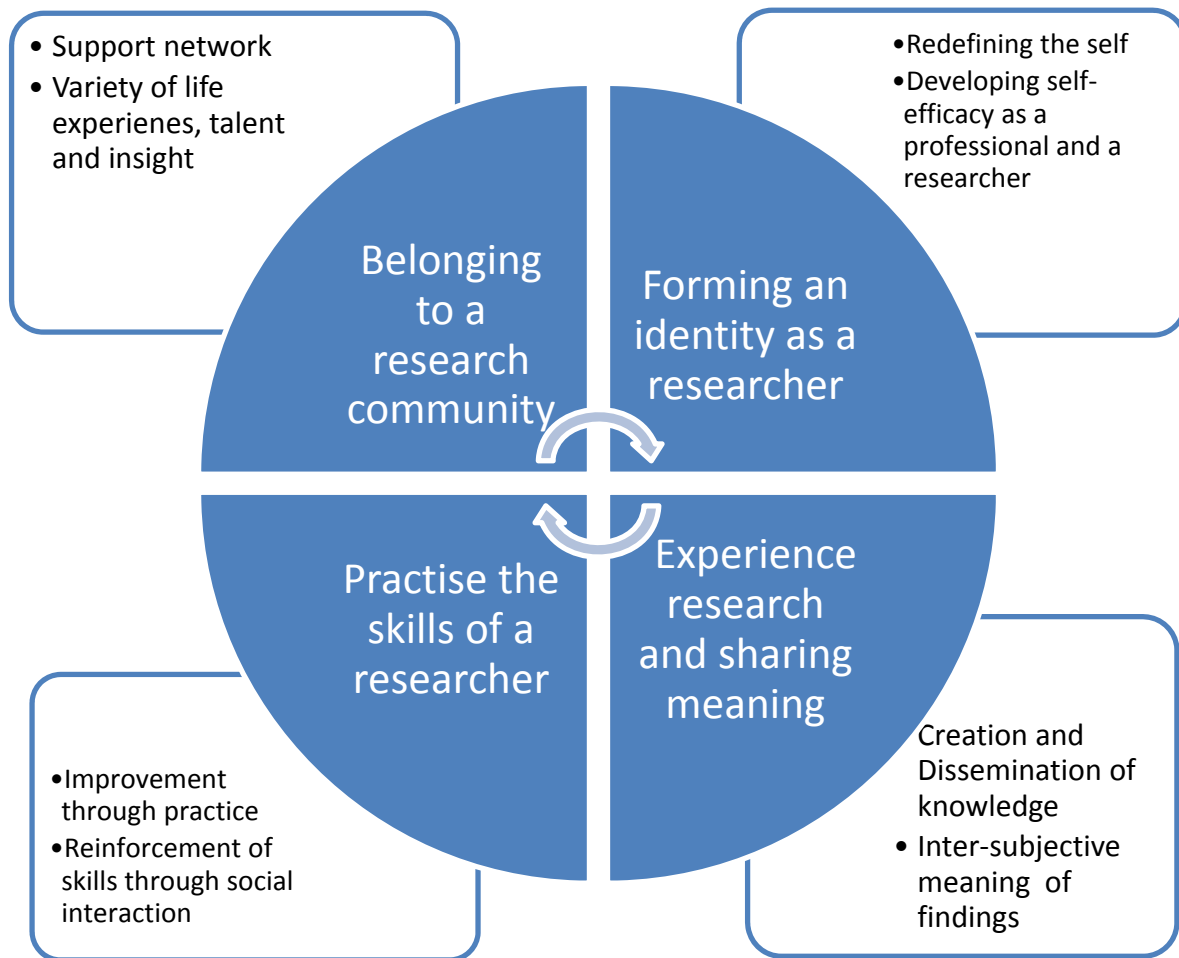


Figure 1. An adaptation of Wenger (1998) and the notion of a community of practice.

The creation of communities of practitioner-researchers is a worthy aspiration for the professional doctorate and its advocates. There are, however, other developments in doctoral education that have emerged in response to the rise of the professional doctorate. In simple terms, universities have sought to remodel the PhD without jeopardising its position. In addition, to the established option of PhD through publication, universities have developed a model of doctoral education that draws ideas from the professional doctorate. In 2000 a consortium of 10 British universities, funded by Government agencies, established a new route to a PhD. According to the NewRoute PhD Consortium (2014):

The principle of the NewRoutePhD is to integrate in-depth study (often inter-disciplinary), research training, and high level professional skills training. Students gain a powerful combination of knowledge, skills and research experience that makes them highly employable in business, university teaching, government and public service.

This new form of doctoral education offers supervision in a range of 12 disciplines ranging from the physical and social sciences to sports science and humanities, as well as Business. Although still in

development, the 'New Route', or 'Integrated' PhD as it is also known as, represents an evolutionary step away from the traditional thesis only PhD offered by British universities. It is also indicative of the continuing drive by Government to make the PhD more relevant to the world outside of academia, to raise the quality of doctoral supervision and to address the relatively poor completion rates of PhD students (Park, 2005). The New Route PhD also acknowledges the contribution of the professional doctorate to postgraduate study. In prefacing the research element with a preparatory skills-training phase, the New Route PhD has recognised the importance of a supportive framework within which to undertake research.

### **Research methodology:**

The research methodology adopted a mixed methods approach over two distinct phases. In the first phase, three target groups were identified as potentially useful informants: current DBA students, those who had rejected the DBA in order to study for a PhD, and the Head of Department of a major business school who held a DBA. This variety in research participants would, it was anticipated, provide a range of perspectives on the key issues of purpose, value and academic rigour. In terms of obtaining data from the DBA students, a highly structured questionnaire with 20 statements was distributed to the 37 students enrolled on the DBA programme. Each of the 20 statements was followed by a five point Likert scale that enabled a quick response as well as space to elicit some commentary from students to provide greater detail. Statements, such as, 'I would rather generate theory-based knowledge than practice-based knowledge', and 'I think that a DBA is easier to obtain than a PhD', and 'I hope the DBA will prepare me for an academic career', as well as 'I think the DBA is more useful than a PhD in the contemporary business environment' explored the key issues generated by the Literature Review. This research was undertaken 'in-house' with colleagues, and as a result, there were a few ethical issues to address in terms of confidentiality and process. In addition to the sample, some desk research was undertaken in order to obtain statistical data on trends and completion rates between the DBA and PhD. It was felt important that some chronological perspective be obtained in addition to looking at success rates for these two qualifications.

In the second phase to the research, the research questions were narrowed down to four key issues that had emerged from the literature and responses to the initial questionnaire. This questionnaire was distributed to 21 academics that held doctorates. The majority (13) of these participants held a PhD, whilst a minority (8) held a DBA. The sampling was purposive in nature as one of the research objectives was to see if there was any significant difference between those academics who held a PhD, and those who did not, over the issue of professional doctorates. There were four statements on the questionnaire, together with the opportunity for a supplementary comment. A fifth item on the questionnaire asked for some extended comments on their choice of doctoral programme. The four statements were:

- The DBA is better suited to furthering professional practice than a research-based PhD
- The DBA is better suited to developing employable skills than a research-based PhD
- The DBA is better suited to developing an academic career than a research-based PhD
- The DBA is better suited to developing research skills than a research-based PhD

Participants were asked to respond using a seven point Likert scale ranging from 'disagree strongly' to 'agree strongly'. A seven point scale was chosen for the second questionnaire in order to provide participants with a greater range of response options, and to tease out different viewpoints between those who held a PhD and the DBA.

There were clear limitations to the effectiveness of the research. In the first phase, although 37 DBA students were contacted, a minority responded albeit with useful information. In the second phase, 21 academics were surveyed. In future research a larger number of DBA students and academics from several universities could be surveyed to generate a much larger sample, together with feedback from doctoral supervisors on the DBA and PhD process compared. The feedback from the Head of Department was useful as it reflected his personal perspective both as a DBA graduate and an academic lead. Despite these limitations, the research did generate insight into the motivations of DBA and PhD students and the context within which their studies were set. In particular, one issue that emerged from the research was the degree to which the DBA was a possible substitute not for those who intended to apply their doctoral understanding directly to the commercial world, but to academia.

## **Findings:**

### *Qualitative findings:*

#### *From the DBA students:*

The findings suggest that the idea of a clear distinction between a vocational, work-based qualification and the academic doctoral qualification is too simplistic. It is clear that the majority of DBA students view themselves as 'practitioner-researchers', but do not accept the point that their DBA is inferior to the PhD in terms of intellectual rigour.

'Similar breadth of knowledge, just for a different application. I anticipate that the DBA will primarily produce knowledge that practitioners can transfer into their workplace rather than extending the body of knowledge from a theoretical perspective'.

Some students were already members of the teaching staff at the University and did not see the DBA as changing their self-identity, although they did view it as more useful than the PhD in the contemporary business environment.

'This is the real reason why I am undertaking a DBA.... This is the fundamental difference between a PhD and DBA'

There were a multitude of drivers that persuaded students to opt for a DBA, and no clear pattern was discernible. For some, as academics it was important to achieve some form of doctoral qualification as the University was applying for accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) and it was deemed an increasingly important condition of career development. There was, however, no pattern that suggested an imposed policy of DBA registration for academic staff. For some students, they had been advised by their line manager to study for the DBA, for others it was solely their choice to register for doctoral study. It appears that personal circumstances and preference were the prime drivers in students' choice of

doctoral study. In terms of status, rigour and challenge, DBA students did not regard the DBA as inferior to the PhD.

*Academics that held a DBA:*

There was a clear coalescence of opinion within the group of academics who had graduated with a DBA. For example:

‘Basically, because it is practice related’.

‘The Professional Doctorate encourages a contribution to practice which fits well with furthering vocational practice’.

‘PDs are particularly targeted for employed people and focus on more strongly practical skills’.

‘A Professional Doctorate tend to be focussed more on impact and contribution to the professional field rather than research PhD where contribution to theory is also usually expected’.

However, one academic made an important point about the development of a future career in academia following a DBA:

‘The challenge here is where the academic may want to publish. If the doctorate is focussed on practice there is an interest in publishing in journals focussed on a different audience which is not valued so highly by the academy- i.e. 4 star journals are not often read by practitioners’.

The other dominant theme that emerged from DBA holders was the structured format and convenience of study:

‘I believe the DBA follows a more structured format and relates to my learning style. I also believe the DBA is an ideal route for an early career researcher as opposed to a research-based PhD’.

‘For me, the deciding factor was relevance to practice and time scales’.

*Academics that held a PhD:*

The viewpoints generated by PhD students differed in some key respects, namely in terms of academic rigour and professional status. In general, PhD graduates did not regard the DBA as equal to the traditional thesis plus viva examination process in terms of intellectual challenge. Two experienced members of staff reported that:

‘My supervisor always told me to put PhD after my name rather than Dr before it, so people knew it was a PhD and not a professional doctorate.’

'I do believe that it is more beneficial personally to link the qualifications I do to the career I want. I am looking at an academic career and therefore a PhD and its requirement for a contribution to theory is appropriate.

There was a consensus of opinion that the DBA was not only inferior to the PhD but was potentially in decline internationally as a doctoral qualification. A third PhD graduate opined that:

'Australia is moving away from recognising the DBA as equivalent aren't they?  
I know that they're not the same in the USA.'

One academic conceded that they had become embarrassed after ridiculing the DBA in the presence of a work colleague who was also a DBA student. It was evident that those who held a PhD felt that the DBA was an inferior qualification for a career in academia, but offered different skills that were valid in a professional context. This critique of the DBA, and indeed professional doctorates in general, was predicated on its perceived lack of rigour and theoretical insight. Whereas the traditional PhD is assessed by thesis and viva, some professional doctorates are examined by a portfolio of work that includes a thesis of typically 50,000 words compared to that of a PhD of 80-100,000 words. Criticism of the DBA partly centred on the lack of depth to the thesis and the practice of submitting portfolio work of shorter pieces of work, rather than the extended writing normally associated with doctoral study. A related criticism of the DBA, that is present in the literature, is that it does not engage sufficiently with research but instead in reporting practice. This alleged lack of research expertise is regarded by PhD informants as a major limitation in professional doctorates, and a barrier to a career in academia.

#### *The Head of Department:*

The Head of Department confessed that he had 'agonised over whether to study for a PhD or DBA', but felt that studying for the DBA was more appropriate for him. In terms of the positive attributes of the DBA, the Head of Department felt that:

'I would see the growth in DBA as a leadership development qualification although this will require greater differentiation from the PhD and greater focus on practical outcomes'.

And that,

'Contribution to practice. It should be seen as a work-based alternative to a PhD which can be an effective senior leader development programme'.

In terms of steering potential doctoral students to one or the other qualification, the Head of Department thought that:

We tend to advise based on the initial topic area, background of the student and what their career aspirations are. For example, if a learner joins us to study a doctoral award and is being sponsored by an employer their topic is often very practical and a contribution to practice is essential to demonstrate return on investment- this would indicate a professional doctorate is more beneficial. If the candidate is not sponsored and maybe is studying to seek a career in academia, a PhD would be promoted.

The issue of steering doctoral candidates was explored in some depth as a number of academics within the Department, including the Departmental Head himself, and others had chosen to read for a DBA instead of a PhD. Indeed, it had been one of the reasons for undertaking the research- why were there so many DBA graduates working in the department when academia is supposedly the preserve of the PhD? This initial observation seemed counter-intuitive. These DBA graduates had transferred from working in a commercial or public sector background into academia, contrary to the conventional expectation. One possible conclusion to be drawn is that each student chose independently to study for a DBA rather than a PhD, perhaps because they could bring vocational experience to their doctoral studies. Finally, the Head described a difference in approach taken in doctoral supervision:

I supervise a DBA differently to a PhD. In the early and latter stages I focus very much on practical contribution. I also tend to be more practical on the methodology section. Eisenhardt (1989) offers a procedural framework for a professional doctorate methodology. She specifically advises not to get too bogged down by the research methodology and find an approach the researcher is happy with and just get on with it.'

Although the evidence generated from the Head of Department reinforces the divide between the conventional PhD and the DBA in terms of purpose and methodology, there is no concession to the DBA being easier than the PhD, just different.

*Statistical findings:*

The tables below record the responses to the second questionnaire:

All respondents (21)	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Tend to disagree	No response	Tend to agree	Agree	Agree strongly
Q.1 The PD is better suited to furthering professional practice than a research-based PhD	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 1 Total:1	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 2 PhD: 7 Total:9	DBA: 6 PhD: 3 Total:9	DBA: 0 PhD: 2 Total:2
Q.2 The PD is better suited to developing employable skills than a research-based PhD	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 2 Total:2	DBA: 1 PhD: 4 Total:5	DBA: 2 PhD: 3 Total:5	DBA: 3 PhD: 0 Total:3	DBA: 5 PhD: 0 Total:5	DBA: 0 PhD: 1 Total:1
Q.3 The PD is better suited to developing an academic career than a research-based PhD	DBA: 1 PhD: 2 Total:3	DBA: 3 PhD: 3 Total:6	DBA: 1 PhD: 6 Total:7	DBA: 1 PhD: 2 Total:3	DBA: 2 PhD: 0 Total:2	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0

Q.4 The PD is better suited to developing research skills than a research-based PhD	DBA: 0 PhD: 1 Total: 1	DBA: 1 PhD: 5 Total:6	DBA: 2 PhD: 5 Total:7	DBA: 3 PhD: 2 Total:5	DBA: 2 PhD: 0 Total:2	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0	DBA: 0 PhD: 0 Total: 0
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Table 2. The data generated by questionnaire 2, distributed to 21 academics

The statistical data indicates that the vast majority of both PhD and DBA cohorts of academics agree to some degree with statement 1, 'that The Professional Doctorate is better suited to furthering professional practice than a research-based PhD'. This echoes many of the comments drawn from the second questionnaire. There is, however, a more diverse response to statement 2, 'the Professional Doctorate is better suited to developing employable skills than a research-based PhD'. Whereas a significant number of PhD holders reject the idea of the DBA as better placed to provide employer-friendly skills, most DBA students either 'tend to agree' or 'agree' with statement 2. There appears very little support for the notion that 'the Professional Doctorate is better suited to developing an academic career than a research-based PhD' in statement 3, with only 2 DBA graduates arguing in favour of the DBA over the PhD, and 15 in total indicating a preference for the PhD. Finally, there is also little support for the idea in statement 4 that 'the Professional Doctorate is better suited to developing research skills than a research-based PhD', with only 2 DBA graduates advocating the DBA as better in promoting research skills. These findings suggest those surveyed felt that although the DBA was relevant to investigating organisational problems, its value in developing a future academic career was limited, and inferior to that of the conventional PhD. These findings echo much of the work of Neumann (2005).

### Discussion:

The context within which university educators work is dynamic and open to the influences of a range of stakeholders, including Government and the business lobby. The period since 1990 has seen a significant change in how universities respond to this external environment, not least with the development of the professional doctorate. In part, this response from universities has been a reaction to market forces and the drive for new revenue streams. In part, the approach has been influenced by the realisation that Higher Education should cater for a larger proportion of the population and recognise work-based learning in broader sense (Bareham et al., 2000: 398). Although we should acknowledge this movement from within the university sector towards the recognition of the value of applied knowledge, we should not lose sight of the underlying tension that permeates the debate over the professional doctorate. The critique against the professional doctorate is predicated upon the idea that in offering a DBA, universities are moving away from two of their most cherished principles. Firstly, that the DBA is inferior to the PhD because it involves less challenge in terms of research and theory- and, in doing so, undermines the supremacy of knowledge derived from research. Secondly, that education should be primarily concerned with the development of the individual and not their professional competencies (Boyatzis, 2008: 5). For those who adhere to this liberal notion of holistic education, the movement towards competency-based frameworks of knowledge is essentially reductionist in nature. The challenge for universities is to present this movement towards professional doctorates not as a reductionist approach to

knowledge that is conceived solely in terms of occupational value, but as encouraging knowledge in a broader sense. It is clear that the undergraduate curriculum has changed in recent years to accommodate the drive for employability of graduates, it remains to be seen if this movement can be replicated at doctoral level.

The findings generated from this research suggest that the DBA continues to face challenges if it is to develop further as a prestigious doctoral qualification. There appears to be a constituency of opposition, even within those departments that offer DBA supervision. In part, this body of opposition relates to the nature of examination and the amount of personal research that is undertaken. In part, this opposition is attributable to 'identity-status' divide between those who have studied the PhD and DBA. The idea that the PhD is a 'superior' qualification survives and undermines the future development of professional doctorates. One of the challenges that universities must address is how to inculcate a new culture of 'doctorateness', and moreover arrive at a consensus of doctoral identity. The findings suggest that there is a constituency of support for the DBA but that this is limited to those who have advocated the development of a professionally-orientated doctoral curriculum and those who see it as beneficial for their career. Perhaps the future of the DBA resides with those such as the Head of Department who are in a position to lead by example and promote the idea of a diversified doctoral curriculum that meets the increasingly diverse needs of those who are engaged in both business and academia. Finally, we should note the contribution made to academia by those who hold professional doctorates. The conventional PhD may serve the aspirational needs of those who wish to enter academia, but it is not the only option available as is evidenced by those DBA graduates who contribute to our business schools on a daily basis.

### **Conclusion:**

This paper began with three questions which lie at the heart of the debate over doctoral education: what is the value of the DBA, who owns it and who cares about its development? This paper has described the participation of a number of stakeholders in this debate: students and their supervisors, business schools and Universities as well as employers and Government. It is clear that the development of the DBA has been linked to a wider debate on the future of the PhD; in a crude sense the debate has sometimes been reduced to a zero-sum game. This reduction in the discourse over the DBA and professional doctorates more generally is too simplistic. What is clear is that Academia has engaged in the growth of the DBA partly through 'push' factors such as Government policy or business lobbying, and partly through 'pull' factors such as the educational and pedagogic interests in developing a curriculum for the twenty-first century. In short, the development of professional doctorates is the outcome of interactions between stakeholders and public policy. The growth of professional doctorates should therefore not be seen as a response to the perceived limitations of the PhD- but as a new stage in doctoral education.



A recurrent issue that underpins the discourse on doctoral education is the idea of 'doctorateness'. For Denicolo and Park (2010: 2), doctorateness refers to the characteristics of holding a doctoral degree:

'the mix of qualities required of a person who has or is acquiring doctorateness, including such things as intellectual quality and confidence, independence of thinking, enthusiasm and commitment, and ability to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities'.

In this sense, doctorateness could be specified and established with a set of universal criteria. Such an approach would appeal to those such as Nerad and Heggelund (2008) who anticipate the move towards a global PhD. In their discussion of the 'components of doctorateness', Trafford and Lesham (2009: 308) argue that:

'doctorateness is a jigsaw puzzle that can only be fully appreciated when all of the components are present and fitted together. Thus the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts'.

For Wellington (2013) such an effort would be unproductive as he challenges the notion that there is some 'inner essence' that defines doctorateness, either in terms of the written thesis or a quality inherent to doctoral graduates themselves. For Wellington (2013), the proliferation of differing types of doctorate together with variations in their mode of assessment, means that the idea of doctorateness is a contestable concept. Wellington (2013) suggests that we give up in our effort to define doctorateness in favour of conceptualising a doctorate as part of a 'family' of qualifications, each with differing features but sharing some characteristics, but that makes a contribution to knowledge. How then should we develop doctoral education? Is doctorateness a characteristic discernible in individuals, their thesis or wider contribution to knowledge through their professional practice? These questions remain unresolved but can stimulate further debate within academia about what we want to derive from doctoral education and doctoral graduates.

The 'professional doctorate paradigm' proffered by Bourner et al. (2001: 79) offers one possible model to explore the idea of 'professional doctorateness'. This paradigm of doctoral study has several features that distinguish it from the traditional thesis-based PhD. Firstly, the professional doctorate separates research training from research practice and is taught as a foundational programme of coursework. Secondly, students are often clustered together according to their research interests rather than isolated as individual researchers. Thirdly, the primary interest of undertaking research is to generate knowledge that can be applied within a work context. This paradigm offers up the opportunity to broaden our conception of knowledge and its inherent value, with a move to a synthesis of mode 1 and 2 learning in favour of mode 1.5 learning in which both theoretical and practical knowledge are valued as recommended by Huff (2000). It encourages universities to think beyond their research, to its applicability in the wider world. Whether this paradigm can address concerns relating to doctorateness is debatable but at least it provides a reference point for debate. The DBA is useful in that it expands the opportunity for research-informed professional development, through a community of practice (Wenger, 2002), and ultimately more effective managers. The emergence of the New Route PhD can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the advantages of the DBA approach and its emphasis on structured support. The discourse on doctoral study continues and attracts contributions from a variety of perspectives, not least from those who mistakenly regard the DBA as an inferior qualification to the PhD. The DBA

is an alternative to the PhD, not a substitute and has its own raison d'être as identified by Bourner et al. (2001). It is within this wider paradigm and more inclusive understanding of doctoral study that we should place the DBA and its contribution to knowledge.

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