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Davies, Julie

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Supporting in-house faculty DBA completions: AACSB ruse or real boost to legitimacy? Julie Davies

This paper explores the antecedents and impacts of industry accreditation processes on individual employees. Specifically, we investigate how aspirations to gain AACSB accreditation are changing the behaviours of business school faculty where institutional research policies require full-time academic staff to achieve scholarly academic or practice academic status by gaining doctorates. On the one hand, we see this as a positive development to improve research capabilities in business schools and enhance personal and corporate intellectual legitimacy. On the other hand, we ask whether this is an 'illusion trick' (Alvesson, 2013: 15) where in-house professional doctorates are awarded that raise questions about the potential for conflicts of interest, inbreeding, and excessive anxiety for individuals embarking on doctorates to gain employment security without fully appreciating the culture of rejection (Horn, 2015) that will ensue in an academic publishing career. Drawing on concepts of legitimacy, professionalism, and workplace identities, we categorise three overlapping types of faculty/students registered on in-house and external PhD and professional doctoral programmes as (i) "pragmatic", (ii) "self-actualising", and (iii) "histrionic."

Firstly we contribute to debates in the literature on differences and similarities between traditional PhD and professional doctorate programmes. Secondly, we ask what are the ethical dilemmas and evolving identities for faculty enrolled in their own schools as DBA students? Thirdly, we examine legitimacy at multiple levels (Bitektine & Haack, 2015) linking individuals and strategic business units (SBUs). We consider the consequences of adopting a policy of "growing one's own." Through an analysis of individual narratives in one-to-one interviews with policy makers, supervisors and students, we discuss useful insights into the lived experiences of business school academics pursuing doctorates. The findings may be extended to gain an understanding of employees who are working towards advanced qualifications in knowledge intensive organisations where their continued employment depends on successful completion of these credentials to boost the employer brand in mature industries.

Context

With the establishment of AACSB International's office in Amsterdam and its aggressive strategy to globalise (as it approaches its centenary in 2016), increasing numbers of UK schools are embarking on the AACSB accreditation journey. Deans in post 1992 institutions are inspired by Newcastle Business School's lead. Standard 15 of the AACSB International accreditation standards for faculty qualifications and engagement refers to four categories: scholarly academics, practice academics, scholarly practitioners, and instructional practitioners. AACSB requires a business school to document its faculty portfolio in supporting the school's mission, expected outcomes, and strategies within the five-year AACSB review cycle. "Scholarly academics" must have earned research doctorates. Consequently, when hiring and developing academic staff, business school deans are not only influenced by research publications for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) but they are seeking to raise the proportion of academic staff with doctorates.

At Northumbria University, Newcastle Business School's strategy over a decade was explicitly designed to achieve AACSB accreditation. Integral to achieving this strategy was the generous funding of staff to attain in-house DBAs. Similar policies are reflected university-wide in other institutions, e.g. at City University London a staff development doctoral track was established in 2010. At Huddersfield University (Havergal, 2014), all academic faculty are required be triply qualified: to possess a professional accreditation, Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, and a doctorate (or to be working towards one). These credentials are seen as impacting positively on student satisfaction. In contrast with this broad view of what it means to be an academic, Macfarlane (2011) suggests that in reality the notion of the fully rounded

academic who can excel in teaching, research, executive education and corporate engagement is diminishing. Colquhoun (2015) expresses concerns about Warwick University which is establishing a subsidiary to outsource teaching to enable researchers to focus on REF. This preoccupation with research is set against a backdrop of government concerns for employability, productivity and a proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Within this context, we consider the implications at the individual level for academic staff embarking on doctorates, particularly DBAs in-house. Is there a danger as Alajoutsijärvi et al. (2015) observed of intentions to gain legitimacy backfiring?

While Sillince et al. (2011) explored the creation of ambiguity to achieve buy in to an internationalisation strategy within a business school to achieve accreditation, and Lejeune & Vas (2014) reflected on the consequences of failing an accreditation visit, there have been no studies of the effects of accreditation processes individual academic staff and their careers. The literature on doctorates has overlooked coercive influences in decision-making to become a doctoral student. Moreover, the doctoral experience tends not to connect employer branding and legitimacy with doctoral experiences although it could be argued that where doctoral students are placed very much reflects back on the reputation of their supervisor and awarding institution. This perspective contrasts with studies such as Bedeian et al.'s (2010) which indicate that a doctorate achieved in more prestigious institution directly influenced the first academic placement in prestigious institutions and later this was combined with the perceived quality of publications.

The dynamics of legitimacy

The drive for academics to acquire doctorates reflects the shift in the legitimacy of management research based on credibility within the academy (Goodrick, 2002). It signals a move from the vocationalism derided by Simon (1991: 139) and Gordon & Howell (1959). Alajoutsijärvi et al. (2015), however, note how in privileging one form of legitimacy, business schools suffer unintended consequences in de-legitimising other forms; they claim, for instance, that in seeking "scientification" we lost sight of practitioner relevance. Nevertheless, symbols of triple accreditation, faculty doctorates (aspiring to match levels in STEM disciplines) and "journal list fetishism" (Willmott, 2011).

While management may not be considered a profession (Barker, 2010), business schools in universities tend to be regarded as professional schools. They prepare individuals for professions such as accountancy and provide education to managers who are members of professional associations. Business schools as relative newcomers to the academy have sought to legitimise their activities through the mechanisms of national academies of management, journals and business school associations and by becoming members of recognisable industry clubs through gaining accreditations such as AACSB, EQUIS/EPAS and AMBA. Over time as more players engage in 'global mimicry' (Wilson & McKiernan, 2011), the currency of the number and type of accreditations, terminal degree qualifications, publications, research income, etc. changes and new forms of credibility are sought for competitive advantage. One dilemma for business school deans is to balance academic and practitioner expertise. The Foundation for Management Education (FME) which funded practitioners to complete doctorates in UK business schools has closed (Boyde, 2013) and in 2015 the AACSB's one-week Bridge Program to support executives to teach in business schools was launched in the UK. The support provided by business schools for existing staff to complete doctorates suggests that where it is difficult to buy in faculty, support for internal staff is an important solution provided these individuals are not soon after poached by local competitors. One might assume that former practitioners in academic roles experience the reverse of what Parker (2004) experienced in moving into a head of department role.

Bringing the individual into the frame

Academic identities in leading UK business schools seemed to be increasingly based on the currency of leading journal articles and their “REFability”, i.e. to what extent they fulfil the requirements for a top submission in the next REF. Knights & Clarke (2013: 18) contrast the public rhetoric of the ‘sweetness of a potentially esteemed career’ as an academic combined with the ambivalence of unrealisable and often unrealistic personal ambitions of an idealised self. An increasing focus on metrics and performance management as well as accreditation mania are making life tough for many academics.

Unlike in some institutions where members of faculty without doctorates supervise doctoral students, at the University of East London (UEL) where professional doctorates have recently been launched this is only allowed up to the first stage equivalent to Master’s level and beyond this only for pastoral support. In addition, any assessment of their own doctoral study must include an external assessor and the number of internal students on professional doctorates should not exceed the number of outsiders. As well as clear policy advice and such invaluable reflections on how professional doctorates contribute to professional knowledge that Anderson et al. (2015) provide, we advocate practical support for in-house doctoral students such as writing retreats to overcome isolation and issues of time management, high quality supervision, stress management, personal physical and mental wellbeing (Anon., 2015).

Typologies of academic faculty-student

Neumann (2005) highlights differences in the types of students enrolling on professional doctorates compared with PhDs, programme structure differences and perceived status. In coding data from a pilot study of interviews with 10 faculty registered on doctoral programmes, three types of individual emerged. Table 1 indicates the three categories of biases in responses given for choosing different rationales for pursuing PhD or professional doctoral programmes in-house or externally.

Mode of Study	Rationale for Decisions		
	Pragmatic	Self-actualising	Histrionic
External PhD	<i>I figured it would be useful to get out and see what our competitors offer and to get in as many taught research methods courses I can this term.</i>	<i>It's great to have the option of working with some of the best professors in a top school. I've changed career twice and I think I'm really lucky to do this.</i>	<i>If you're only going to do one doctorate you've got to immerse yourself fully in it and spend virtually every waking moment working on it.</i>
External DBA	<i>Well, I fancied doing it somewhere local outside.</i>	<i>I can follow-up on what I was doing before as an assessor before I came here.</i>	<i>I just didn't have time to do the application last year because the deadline was just before teaching, it was all too much.</i>
In-house PhD	<i>I did my Master's here straight after my degree so I just kept going.</i>	<i>I was working in a private college abroad that was just focused on intensive teaching. I needed to be in a proper research environment.</i>	<i>It's exhausting to work and write your thesis at the same time. I spent so long analysing my data that I really can't bear to look at it for a publication.</i>
In-house DBA	<i>I need the structure and it saves travelling.</i>	<i>I'll just do what it takes and try and get ahead.</i>	<i>Like child birth, they warned me that it would be fine once it's over. Have you seen Stephen Hawking's viva in the film 'The Theory of Everything'?</i>

TABLE 1. Types of faculty-doctoral student responses in pilot study

It would be interesting in further research to track the career trajectories of staff who achieved in-house doctorates and to investigate how this model may be adopted to support research capacity building for business school faculty in emerging economies. Without the opportunities to embark on an internal doctorate, some excellent former practitioners whether for family or mobility reasons may find alternatives limited and not be sufficiently motivated to register for mainly on-line delivery. While the legitimacy of the university/business school and individuals' CVs can be enhanced by this policy of funding academics with practitioner backgrounds to gain a higher terminal degree, we need to ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are in place to facilitate identity shifts and intellectual, emotional, time pressures (Mills et al., 2014), and practical challenges to transcend the vicissitudes on their doctoral journeys.

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