

Why does a doctorate in business administration (DBA) provide such unique impact on all its stakeholders?

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Research Domains

Postgraduate scholarship and practice (PGSP)

Abstract

This paper suggests that the professional doctorate in business (DBA) provides a unique opportunity of partnership and impact on all its stakeholders. Unlike the traditional PhD, a DBA does not just prepare its graduates for a career in academia, teaching or research, but also for higher-level professional management careers. This paper examines nature and background to the DBA, and its ability to bring learning gain and to create a professional community of practice. The three authors each take a different stakeholder perspective and use this to discover the reasons behind this professional doctorate's efficacy, as well as its ability to leverage added-value to students, their employers, and the universities which teach the degree.

Full paper

This paper suggests that the professional doctorate in business (DBA) provides a unique opportunity of partnership and impact on all its stakeholders. Unlike the traditional PhD, a DBA does not just prepare its graduates for a career in academia, teaching or research, but also for higher-level professional careers. In addition, it is a qualification which requires an additional immediate benefit to business policy and practice.

This paper examines the nature of the DBA, and its ability to create learning gain and a professional community of practice. The three authors each take a different stakeholder perspective and use this to explore the reasons behind this professional doctorate's efficacy, and its ability to leverage added value to students, their employers, and the universities which teach the degree.

The paper proposes that the DBA benefits all stakeholders in a manner that the traditional PhD does not. As Bareham et al (2000) say, "Whereas the PhD is aimed at developing professional researchers, the DBA aims to develop researching professionals. Rather than viewing research as an end in itself, the new DBAs have placed research at the service of the development of professional practice and the development of professional practitioners." (p.394)

The benefits of the DBA programme for the research student are many, varied, and tend to differ from the traditional PhD (Anderson, 2015). A case study of DBA student voices from Aston Business School, UK, will be drawn on to highlight these which include a special relationship or partnership with a knowledgeable supervision team. Madichie (2020) articulates this as the management of equals. This provides students with a link between academia, theory and practice and stimulates ideas through debate and discussion within their professional discipline. Furthermore, talking through research issues and possibilities whilst also giving guidance on academic requirements and rules helps to provide a foundation on which students can be nurtured and grow in academic confidence (Sambrook and Stewart, 2007).

Enabling students to feel part of a community of scholars, academics and businesses, through courses and events such as symposia is another example of an important benefit. A supportive system which provides a helpful learning community, bringing together current DBA students and examples of DBA alumni can enable students to keep track of their research, learn from others, address

challenges that may arise and stimulate practice-based ideas and connections.

Management and business research has been criticised for being of little relevance to practitioners in business and that "...the gulf between science and practice in a profession such as management is widening" (Van de Ven, 2007). This paper suggests that engaged scholarship (as demonstrated in the DBA) can address the theory practice gap and is defined as "A participative form of research for obtaining the different perspectives of key stakeholders (researchers, users, clients, sponsors, and practitioners in studying complex problems". (Van de Ven, 2007).

The DBA provides an innovative way to allow businesses and organisations to benefit from this approach in two distinct ways. Firstly, the very approach of the research is to be engaged with stakeholders in the situation to ensure that the research is grounded in those who experience and know the problem situation. In the second place, the person conducting the research is themselves in the situation. They are an embedded action researcher who is both researcher and practitioner at the same time, a scholar-practitioner (Anderson et al., 2015). Thus, the potential benefits to organisations are immense. The DBA researcher can tackle the most complex problems, acting as a bridge between the two worlds of academia and practice.

Finally, the paper looks to the benefits to university business schools. Using Aston Business School as an exemplar, it looks at how the development of a large DBA programme has had considerable benefits for the School and its strategy. The paper argues that there are now greater connections with industry, and the reputation of the institution since its foundation for excellence and reach in work-based learning has been developed along new lines. Furthermore, the increased professionalism in service-quality and understanding of how busy scholar practitioners (often Executive-level leaders) learns has benefitted other students studying on more traditional programmes.

This paper demonstrates that the DBA is a game-changer because it provides and develops opportunities for research-informed professional development, through the communities of practice and

partnership-working that Wenger et al. (2002) talk about. Additionally, it helps business schools to look at their internal processes in a new way. This brings major benefits across an institution, to students, and to the organisations they work in.

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