

**Chapter 17****Collaborative Ph.D. Examination**

Mike Metcalfe and Samantha Grant
University of South Australia, Australia

In many universities, there is either no requirement for an oral examination or for examiners to guide Ph.D. candidates prior to submission of their thesis. This policy is usually the result of the “tyranny of distance” and/or the positivism philosophy of “impartial observer.” This chapter argues for the Interpretivist approach of enriching the learning experience of examiner, candidate, supervisor and university by requiring the advantages of complex sustained interaction. Extensive evidence has shown that group learning is far more productive than individualistic learning. While individual universities need to make the resources argument for a more collaborative Ph.D. process, this chapter presents the management learning literature. It provides this literature in support of the argument that examiners need to be inter-actively involved with supervisors and examiners, especially in IS which changes rapidly and is experiencing a move from positive to interpretive methodologies.

INTRODUCTION

Many Information Systems (IS) schools are under pressure to change their Ph.D. supervision and examination practices. This has been discussed elsewhere with respect to the design of appropriate semi-structured first year programs (Wood Harper et al., 1999; Wood Harper et al., 1993; Metcalfe and Kiley, 2000; Lowry, 1997). This chapter looks at the examination process. As the writers are most familiar with the Australian system this will be used as the focus of this discussion.

Previously Published in *Managing Information Technology in a Global Economy* edited by Mehdi Khosrow-Pour, Copyright © 2001, Idea Group Publishing.

This chapter appears in the book, *Information Technology Education in the New Millennium* by Mohammad Dadashzadeh, Al Saber and Sherry Saber.

Copyright © 2002, IRM Press, an imprint of Idea Group Inc.

Many Australian Universities use the “tyranny of distance” or the positivism “impartial observer” arguments to encourage no interaction between candidate and examiners. An interpretive perspective concentrate’s less on bias being a negative thing, rather it sees actor interaction bring about a deeper appreciation of a situation. Therefore, this paper argues that interaction between supervisors, examiners and candidates is important for effective learning of all parties, including the respective Universities. Of course, “fair” grading is essential, the issue is how to ensure the grading process become a learning system. Supporters of interpretivist knowledge gathering believe that the examination process will be considerably enriched if the examiners can appreciate the “richer” research picture by being involved in dialogue and collective thinking. This is especially true in a discipline like IS which changes rapidly and is experiencing a move from positive to interpretive methodologies. While there is a resources argument to be made this paper only address the “learning” literature.

Reasons for Change

One of main drivers for these arrangements to be re-considered is the enormous change in the demographics of students over the last two decades. For example, the number of students doing Ph.D.’s has increased dramatically. Schools, who in the past may have only had one or two Ph.D.’s, now, may have 10 or 20. The average age of a student has risen, with mature aged, experienced, managers returning to study. More students are enrolling in a Ph.D. that is very different from their initial studies, generally because the material they learnt as undergraduates is out of date. This is particularly true in IS where even the research methodologies suitable to their old studies may no longer be appropriate. There are more international students with a range of different skills derived from the undergraduate course structure of their first degree. More students are coming from industry, or doing their Ph.D. in conjunction with their industrial experience, where they are accustomed to producing brief reports with very different criteria to that required from academia. Furthermore, the motivations for doing a Ph.D. can be seen to be changing. For more and more IS workers the attraction of a Ph.D. is that it may help them move into international consulting. Fewer want it solely as a ticket for a tenured lecturer’s job, or for some kind of life changing social experience. This changing environment combined with the Australian Federal Government’s support for mass tertiary education means that the old, quaint if indulgent, academic style of voluntarily supervising “one or two” Ph.D.’s needs re-thinking.

Other drivers for change come from the globalisation of business and from the “humanisation” of business studies. International recruitment companies are demanding more standardised qualifications. With the dominance of American multinationals, it is their methods that are being seen as the norm. In addition to

8 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/collaborative-examination/23619

Related Content

Exploring BYOD Usage in the Classroom and Policies

Ieda M. Santos and Otávio Bocheço (2016). *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education* (pp. 51-61).

www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-byod-usage-in-the-classroom-and-policies/161785

Discovering Learners Behaviour Patterns From Log Files Using LSA

Iness Nedji Milat, Hassina Seridi and Abdelkader Moudjari (2020). *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies* (pp. 90-113).

www.irma-international.org/article/discovering-learners-behaviour-patterns-from-log-files-using-lsa/248007

Online Mentoring

Elizabeth Buchanan (2009). *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning, Second Edition* (pp. 1525-1528).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/online-mentoring/11949

Educational Software Evaluation

Michael Shaughnessy (2005). *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning* (pp. 699-711).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/educational-software-evaluation/12180

Online Teaching and Learning: Essential Conditions for Success

Lynne Schrum (2000). *Distance Learning Technologies: Issues, Trends and Opportunities* (pp. 91-106).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/online-teaching-learning/8583