

Chapter 6

Scholar to Practitioner: A New Paradigm for Research Chairs

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the role of the research supervisor/dissertation chair has been to support the doctoral student with the goal of making the student a scholar through the research conducted for the dissertation. In the traditional research institution environment this research was designed to build theory. Today, while this research tradition still exists and the doctor of philosophy degree continues to be awarded, a shift has occurred in the higher education landscape such that a practice-oriented type of research is being produced in practitioner doctorate programs. Dissertations in the practitioner doctorate should be focused on research that has as its objective solving real world problems. As such, this may be a difficult change for individuals who have been mentoring doctoral students for years with the goal of building or testing theory over application of theory. Seasoned research supervisors/dissertation chairs educated in a research doctorate environment may resist this change, even as they supervise doctoral students studying in a practitioner doctorate environment.

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INTRODUCTION

While change management is inherent to business, many research chairs have been perpetuating a status quo, possibly inadvertently, by imposing their own research doctorate research norms to doctoral students studying for the practitioner doctorate. For these established academic professionals working within the new boundaries of a changed environment is a difficult transition. To understand the magnitude of the situation, the authors review the traditional role of the doctoral student and chair and the newest expectations in doctoral research. As the focus on building new or testing theory decreases in importance and the goal of applying theory into an active environment, such as an organization, is gaining momentum, research is moving to an experiential/applied level. In this changed landscape, research chairs must encourage students to conduct strong research using both qualitative and quantitative methods that will not only add to the body of knowledge, but also solve a problem in a real-world application. The traditional philosophical and theory building/theory testing approach to research is no longer the driving force, and concepts such as action research (AR) are front and center for doctoral students. Traditional research chairs must reconsider their learned views on philosophy and theory in order to help their students succeed. One way that institutions are encouraging changes of this type is matching the chair in a subject matter area with that of the student. However, even in these cases, the traditional ideas of the dissertation chair must be revised, leaving unanswered the question of whether individuals in the current generation of doctoral students are scholars or change agents. The new role for the doctoral mentor, chair, or supervisor requires a new mindset from traditional approaches to doctoral research to experiential application (McConnell, Geesa, & Lowery, 2019). This new mindset requires a move away from traditional theory building and testing into the realm of theory application.

BACKGROUND

Today's higher education institutions are rethinking their focus on offering doctoral degrees from the traditional academic driven degree to the practitioner-scholar driven degree. Whereas the research university has largely emphasized the traditional doctor of philosophy degree, some have added to the mix the Doctor of Business Management, and, in addition, the last several decades have seen considerable growth in a new sector of higher education, outside of the 'traditional' university, composed of institutions that offer accelerated doctoral degrees such as the Doctor of Business Administration or the Doctor of Management. These degrees have at their center the goal of producing doctoral dissertations that emphasize practice-

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