**The impact of doctoral studies on individuals and their practice: developing resistance and resilience**

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**Background**

The University of Sunderland has run a professional doctorate programme for seven years. The programme is a cross-university doctorate which supports candidates from a range of subjects. To date 23 students have graduated from the programme, drawn from a range of professions, including pharmacy, management, engineering, education, the caring professions, and the arts. Our programme seeks to develop personal transformation and enhanced reflexivity in candidates, and we have evidence to show (Smith et al, 2011) that its multidisciplinary nature helps to free candidates from their existing norms and explore different perspectives. We encourage candidates to explore their own value set, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their professional identity.

We are, however, increasingly aware of the resistance candidates may face in the workplace when they seek to challenge existing attitudes, and when their doctoral studies unravel values which may conflict with those of their colleagues or their employer. It is important that we provide our graduates with tools which will enable them to overcome or develop resilience to such conflict and resistance. This paper explores the continuing journey of our graduates; now they have had a chance to reflect on their own personal transformation.

**Methodology**

The methodological approach taken is the thematic analysis of a set of narrative accounts, obtained from the graduates. Graduates from the programme were invited to submit written narrative accounts detailing their experience since graduating from the Professional Doctorate programme. To date, 8 graduates have submitted accounts. These will be supplemented by interviews and focus group discussions, the data from which will be available for presentation at the conference. The 8 narratives are from: Claire, a pharmacy lecturer who has left education and established herself as a consultant since graduation; Ian, an equality and diversity professional who has also left his employer to establish himself as a consultant; Tony, a local businessman who works in the area of quality and management information systems in the oil and gas industry; Maureen, a senior member of staff from a local college who was seconded to establish a shared service for a group of colleges; Fiona, a health care professional who developed a commissioning framework for a NHS trust; David, a senior university research administrator who has moved to another institution since graduation; Hamid, an internal auditor for a major international bank, who has also changed employer; and Liam, an information specialist working in the health industry. The names of the graduates have been changed to protect anonymity.

**Discussion**

The first thing that is very striking is that many of the graduates have left their employer for a new challenge with a new institution or, in several cases, to establish themselves as a consultant. It seems that for many, the professional doctorate has been a major factor in career development and change, with 13 of the 23 subjects having changed jobs during or after graduation. Of the 8 graduates submitting narrative accounts, 4 have become consultants, 2 have changed job, and 2 remain with the same employer (although 1 of those is in a different role).

The narrative accounts reveal how the graduates' doctoral enquiries have created challenge and tension for them within the workplace. For instance, one candidate's narrative speaks passionately of *"times in my career when I have been tormented by negative feedback; I was seen to be too challenging; I did not realise how 'radical' I was."*. They speak of *"the*

*opportunity to contribute to, and lead, some of the most significant organisational changes that have occurred in my organisation"* and of how it was difficult to do so *"without having to renege on my philosophical outlook and values."* One graduate speaks of how *"the whole professional doctorate experience had a profound effect on me and changed me as a person. I am now a quieter person overall…more of a reflective practitioner….I am 'hooked' on research."*

Other powerful statements include *"I know that heretics are no longer burned at the stake …but…being different is a personal high-risk strategy" and how the doctoral journey doesn't end at graduation*", is a "life changing experience" and a "*journey of self-discovery"*. One graduate highlighted how *"individuals who have such strong convictions and values see a truth that contradicts the convention or traditional wisdoms of organisations and professional practice".*

**Conclusion**

It is important that, as a community committed to practice-based doctorates, we prepare our graduates for the challenges that personal change can initiate, and enable and empower them to develop resistance and resilience to continue their studies and to develop as individuals. Undertaking a doctoral study which is housed within the work-place can position the student in a challenging, lonely and highly political place. They often experience a clash between their personal values, and those of their employer, and fellow workers. This may result in change in the organisation or, as is the case with several of our own graduates, it may ultimately result in a situation where the graduate decides that they no longer wish to stay in the employment of that organisation. Often the graduates feel closer to those within their community of practice, than those within their own organisation, as many of the individuals within that community are experiencing similar issues. This raises the issue of how we can prepare our candidates to deal with clashes in values in such a way that the outcome may be positive for the candidate and the employer. This paper has begun to explore this complex area, and provide qualitative data to illuminate some of the issues involved. It is important that we continue to consider and develop this area, to the benefit of our students, their employers, their communities of practice, and our programmes.

*Reference*

Smith, P, Curtis, H, Sanders, G, Kuit, J and Fulton, J (2011) Student perceptions of the professional doctorate. Work Based Learning, 2 (1). ISSN 2044-7868

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