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After the doctorate? Personal and professional outcomes of the doctoral learning journey

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This paper explores the post-graduation experiences of 94 doctoral graduates from the Division of Business at the University of South Australia. Data were gathered by means of an online questionnaire. The first part examines the extent to which the original goals and ambitions of the graduates were realised in successfully completing the doctoral learning journey. The second part investigates ways in which doctoral learning outcomes were applied after graduation. These two foci are of interest to university policy-makers, marketing and administrative staff and academics ultimately responsible for the delivery of programs and the management of the doctoral learning journey.

Introduction: the focus of the paper

From a policy perspective Australian university doctoral education programs are driven by the need for outcomes (Vilkinas 2005, Wright 2003). The issue is widespread throughout universities engaged in the competitive business of providing doctoral education programs, notably in the international marketplace. Successful completions enhance the reputation of program providers and help them remain competitive. Indeed, as higher education consolidates as a business-like enterprise, there is a wider concern with customer satisfaction and service quality (Gatfield 1997). Although doctoral education is firmly locked in the grip of university bureaucracy there is awareness that meeting the needs and interests of customers, especially in the international marketplace, is an important aspect of staying in business.

These concerns of business, in which the equation between product, price, marketing and service delivery appears to treat the whole process of managing doctoral programs like any other commodity, is rather inclined to overshadow learning outcomes. Doctoral degrees are essentially about continuing professional learning and the complex process of actually starting, progressing through and successfully completing the journey, aptly described as 'the long march', underpins all the concerns of business management and marketing.

Using research findings from a recent survey of 94 doctoral graduates (Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) awards), from the Division of Business at the University of South Australia, attention focused on two aspects of the learning journey that are of considerable interest to university academics and management.

The research concentrated on what happens *during* the doctoral learning journey and *after* graduation. Accordingly, the paper

comprises two parts. The first part briefly here examines the extent to which the original goals and ambitions of the graduates were realised in successfully completing the doctoral learning journey. The second part in more depth investigates the ways in which doctoral learning outcomes were applied after graduation. The two focal interests are of equal value to university policy-makers, marketing and administrative staff and academics ultimately responsible for the delivery of programs and the management of the doctoral learning journey.

Ideas from continuing professional learning that relate to the doctoral journey

The doctoral graduates featured in the paper are adult learners, usually doing their demanding research-based studies on a part-time basis, and continuing their professional development well into and beyond the mid-career stage as mature-age students. As will be shown shortly, many of the doctoral graduates are executive level and senior managers in the business and corporate world, hardly typical of the average full-time doctoral student of younger years and seeking a foothold on the career ladder. Their experience of the doctoral learning journey has useful knowledge and understanding to add value to executive level education.

A key concept that links adult and continuing professional learning to the doctoral journey is that of the knowledge worker. In short, many of the doctoral graduates are living examples of the international business manager and global worker. Reich (1991) projected into the future the nature of work in the information age and hypothesised the emergence of what he termed symbolic analytical workers. In identifying the characteristics of the symbolic analyst cum knowledge worker, Reich described them as those with advanced training in research and various varieties of engineering (particularly the sciences and technologies), corporate executives with strategic thinking and management competency, knowledge experts in the professions of accountancy, academe, finance and investment, real

estate and property, organisational development and so forth. Taken together, Reich could easily have been writing about the majority of those who undertake doctoral degrees featured in this paper.

The emergence of the knowledge worker was recognised by adult educators at about the same time that the idea of the post-industrial society was emerging as a widely discussed prediction of the shape of societies to come (Bell 1974, and developed by others such as Kumar 1995). An influential book on the subject coined the term ‘continuing professional learning’ (Houle 1980), which was intended to convey the idea that learning was the lubricant to ensure that the professions were dynamic and driven by the search for knowledge as the basis of continuous improvement. In that regard the doctorate may be considered as an advanced level response to these changes in the nature of political economy and its impact on professional life and continuing education.

The research method

The research project evolved from “What happens after doctoral graduation?” to questions about realising motivational goals and ambitions, to the outcomes of learning and experience theme, through to personal reflections on the nature of the learning journey. In short, the research followed an inductive pathway drawing on observation and experiential learning to construct the on-line survey (the questions are presented in the appendix).

Overview of the sample

From an identified population of 259 doctoral completions between 1996 and 2004, most of the graduates lived out of Australia, the majority scattered across South East Asia and a few in Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East and the United States of America. Solely relying on the on-line survey approach, 94 doctoral graduates responded (40% response). Of these 94 doctoral graduates, 60% had earned a PhD and 40% a DBA.

Gender and age demographics

The proportion of female doctoral graduates responding to the survey was only 15% (n=14), not enough to venture generalisations about particular aspects of the female doctoral experience. The doctoral graduates may be reasonably described as early middle age (41–50 years). Table 1 summarises the findings for the sample in terms of their main occupational or employment position during the course of their studies.

Table 1: Employment position of the doctoral graduates during their studies

Employment Position	Frequency	Percent
Business owner/Chairman	8	8.5
MD/President/VP/Senior manager	41	43.6
Middle manager	14	14.9
Self-employed consultant	5	5.3
Academic	20	21.3
Other	5	5.3
Total	93	98.9
Missing	1	1.1
Total	94	100.0

The data indicate that there are three distinct groups. The first group is business and corporate managers (44%), business owners of companies (8%) and middle managers (15%); this group will be called ‘the managers’, representing two-thirds (67%) of the respondents. The second group, ‘the management consultants’, represents only five percent and is therefore too small to carry out further meaningful analysis. The third group is ‘the academics’ (21%); this is a sizeable group and expected consumers of doctoral programs with a clear and

obvious need to obtain the widely recognised 'trade qualification' for the academic profession.

Generalising the doctoral graduate demographic

The sample is typical of the majority of doctoral graduates from both the PhD and DBA programs offered by the Division of Business at the University of South Australia, even though it was not possible to obtain a complete return of the on-line survey. Based on the 94 responses the majority of doctoral students and graduates are in a mid-career stage of personal and professional development and some are in the later stages of working life. There are a smaller number of doctoral graduates at an early stage of their careers, although they, like the rest, appear to have secured their futures in regular employment with definite career intentions. They are certainly not typical of younger students studying for a doctorate on a full-time basis. Indeed, it is the fact that most of the doctoral graduates did their course work and research on a part time basis, while holding down demanding jobs, that distinguishes them as adult learners undertaking a higher degree. We may generalise to the extent of portraying the doctoral graduates as career minded people with a thirst for learning and the tenacity for the demands of doing largely self-directed research. By virtue of the profile they project, it could be supposed they have a strong commitment to continuing their professional learning. They broadly mirror the characteristics of the continuing adult learner depicted by Houle many years ago.

Part 1: An overview on the nature of the doctoral learning journey

The literature on the doctoral learning journey emphasises the multiple nature of motivation to undertake 'the long march'. Most of those starting out on the doctoral learning journey had in mind personal goals and ambitions that they at least hoped would result in positive outcomes. Ideally the actual experience should tally with the expectation that all the effort and time devoted to completing

the journey produces a satisfying outcome. The relationship between goals and ambitions on the one hand and the outcomes of the doctoral learning experience on the other is underlined by the fact that 78 of the doctoral graduates (84%) affirmed positively that personal goals had been realised. One-third of the sample also summarised the doctoral learning experience as their highest intellectual experience.

This overall finding requires a little more explanation as to what it meant to them in more specific ways (paraphrased statements made by individuals):

- proud of the ability to complete a doctorate by successfully meeting the intellectual challenges
- better understanding of the meaning of lifelong learning through personal experience
- personal self-actualisation and satisfaction at the accomplishment generally
- fulfilling a long-held dream to achieve a higher academic qualification and the status that goes with it
- proved to myself that I had truly broken through a modest history of educational achievement at school by completing a PhD
- improved analytical abilities that developed through the research process in managing the production of new knowledge and its interpretation.

For those focused on starting an optional academic career the following expresses key points:

- the doctorate is a foundation for an academic career
- using the research experience to develop teaching interests in university.

For those already in an academic career the doctorate served two useful purposes:

- diversified in a new subject area by becoming an expert in a specialised knowledge field
- academic promotion.

Each of the explanations conveys an impression of strong personal ownership in which goals and ambitions are realised and self-actualisation becomes an intangible but powerful outcome. This sense of empowerment is reinforced by earning credibility and respect among peers and in the community generally.

The findings show what might reasonably be expected as outcomes. The personal dimension is fairly strong (15%) in having a sense of achievement and enriching life experience (six percent), but the instrumental outcomes are rated more highly, such as learning application (20%), career advancement and improved job prospects (combined, 34%), securing credibility, recognition and respect (15%) and knowledge and skill formation (eight percent). It can be seen that these outcomes from the doctoral journey combine the intensely personal with the instrumental and extrinsic motivation to succeed.

The satisfaction factor: Reflections of the doctoral graduates

The majority of the graduates recorded a high level of satisfaction with their experience of the doctoral learning programs. The findings show satisfaction was obtained for just over half the respondents (52%) on both the personal and professional level, with a slightly smaller proportion claiming what appears to be a predominance of personal satisfaction (43%). Examined more closely, the personal level of satisfaction overlapped with the professional outcome. But it was in a more muted form with such outcomes as obtaining a higher degree, especially the doctor title and the social status that goes with it. Professional outcomes clearly related to career advancement and the development of a widely recognised competency in research and scholarly writing. Into this frame should be included the increase in personal confidence to enhance professional credibility.

It is useful to note that another outcome is evidence of the application of learning after graduation. We may reasonably assume that there is some correspondence between the doctoral learning experience and

its application into some post-graduation outcome. Taken together, we may then link the research to ideas about continuing professional learning to conclude the paper. This provides the content for the second half of this paper.

Part 2: The application of learning

Each doctoral graduation contributes to a solution to the completion problem that most concerns university policy-makers and program managers. From an educational perspective, however, there is a continuing interest in the extent and the ways and means doctoral graduates apply their learning after the research-based thesis or dissertation has completed the formal stages of academic examination. The emphasis placed by the University of South Australia on graduate qualities makes it clear that it takes seriously the idea of creating and applying knowledge and being committed to lifelong learning as indicators of serving the wider community. At the very least, it is reassuring to know that the doctoral journey produces knowledge and learning that goes further with the dissemination process, such as the peer-reviewed journal paper, the conference presentation and other such applications. This whole process is termed here the application of learning.

The research presented an application of learning model comprising five elements: (1) the application of research-based knowledge derived from the doctoral studies, (2) using the skills from the experience of conducting research to some other purpose, (3) passing on the benefits of the overall doctoral learning experience to others in some way or another, (4) being empowered in some personal and professional ways, and (5) capitalising on the journey to foster new developments, notably in 'jumpstarting' some new kind of personal, professional and/or business innovation. These five notions of applied doctoral learning move from the concrete towards the intangible and embrace both the personal and professional outcome.

Application of research-based knowledge from doctoral studies

The first aspect to note was the extent to which the doctoral students started to apply the knowledge they were acquiring *during* their research, to outputs beyond the official program requirements. Normally it is not usually a requirement to demand that students publish from works in progress, although supervisors adopt different practices on this matter and some definitely encourage it.

The findings show a respectable proportion (21%) of doctoral students did publish from their research while it was in progress. It is tangible evidence of knowledge application. This is admirable and probably indicates a particularly close and productive relationship with the supervisor and probably other qualities of personal character, as well as academic performance. However, the greater number did not publish or otherwise disseminate (51%), but it would be unfair to judge these results one way or another.

What about the evidence of the application of knowledge *after* doctoral graduation? Table 2 presents the data.

Table 2: Knowledge application after graduation

Knowledge application after graduation	Frequency	Percent
Publications	38	40.4
Conference presentations	13	13.8
Other presentations	3	3.2
Developing teaching and learning programs	12	12.8
Guest speaking	2	2.1
In progress	6	6.4
Other applications	11	11.7
Nothing at this stage	7	7.4
Total	92	97.8
Missing	2	2.1
Total	94	100.0

The findings require a little more explanation, although it is quite evident what publications (n=38) and presentations (n=16) mean. Being a guest speaker (n=2) meant explaining their research within the company or in response to invitations from others. Another small number (n=6) regarded themselves as making progress towards applying what they had learned to other forms of knowledge outcome, typically by journal publication.

Developing teaching and learning programs is a more specialised outcome, which several respondents (n=12) elaborated. For one doctoral graduate it meant applying the research by converting it into a professional development curriculum for teacher training, for another a number of modules were designed that focused on integrated learning in graduate level education, and for a third it was using the knowledge material to underpin and better focus an owner-managed consultancy in business management. Similar outcomes to these three examples included developing a business strategy course for the Open University in Hong Kong arising from the research that was undertaken for the doctorate, and designing an action learning curriculum based on Taoist principles for a university in Singapore. The rest were more vague but emphasised the idea of taking whatever opportunities that were presented to apply their doctoral research knowledge to teaching and learning materials.

As for the 'others' (n=11), responses embraced such things as using the knowledge gained to improve product delivery processes in the employing organisation, conduct 'in-house' research, setting up a small business in private investment funds, encouraging 'start up' enterprises to expand their operations into the Asia region, introducing concepts learned from the doctoral program to various consultancy clients, making specific recommendations to improve operations on the Stock Exchange in China and Hong Kong, and investing the learning by applying the knowledge to running the family business. It is clear that with all the examples given the

emphasis was on the practical application of the knowledge gained through research.

What emerges from the online survey findings is that knowledge is usually applied to the workplace (26%), which is a reasonable expectation from the doctoral graduates as they already held significant positions in their organisations and had considerable industry experience. In practical terms, knowledge application in the workplace meant such things as focusing on the enhancement of organisational development by impacting on company culture, changing human resource management policy and practice, embarking on new strategic thinking, developing a scenario analysis tool, implementing an interactive staff training program and through other means setting out to improve the competitive edge of the company.

Another sizeable group (19%) appeared to be aiming their knowledge transfer in the direction of academic life, notably through research presentation and publication. This is also evident in the number (n=9) who had already taken on academic activities such as research supervision, mentoring and examining on a part-time basis.

What is interesting to note is that only a small number (n=7) reported no activity arising from their own knowledge production. Most appeared to have quickly taken hold of the knowledge they had produced through their doctoral work to put into effect immediately their learning, apparently with confidence as well as competence. This outcome accords well with the University of South Australia's mission of educating professionals that create and apply knowledge and generally serve the business and wider community.

What follows in pursuit of a slightly deeper understanding of the knowledge application theme are the reflections the doctoral graduates offered about what it meant in a personal and professional way.

The greatest meaning was attached to the actual intellectual achievement (36%), not necessarily the application of the knowledge that sprang from the doctoral research. Others had a more applied focus as to what knowledge application entailed, such as addressing practical problems through research-based knowledge and providing critical insights into the analysis of problems. Thus the PhD, in the experience of one respondent, provided him with the cognitive tools for approaching workplace and organisational problems in a more systematic way using the research knowledge for leverage to change practices. Critical thinking took him beyond surface analysis and the research knowledge filled the gap in the understanding of a particular organisational problem.

Application of research-based skills from doctoral studies

It is evident that there is an overlap in meaning between the generation of knowledge and the development of relevant research skills, and it was to be expected that the respondents may not have been able to distinguish between the two. However, it was not considered of vital importance.

Table 3: Application of research-based skills

Application of research skills	Frequency	Percent
Publication	17	18.1
Conference presentation	7	7.4
Supervision	14	14.9
Coaching	17	18.1
Apply knowledge at work	14	14.9
In progress	12	12.8
Nothing at this stage	8	8.5
Total	89	94.7
Missing	5	5.3
Total	94	100.0

The figures in Table 3 indeed reveal some overlap between knowledge and skill application, notably in those reporting that the research-based skills that they had either acquired or extended in the doctoral program found their expression through publication and conference presentation. This overlap is understandable given that, in both modes of knowledge dissemination, it is usual to explain, justify and defend the research design and methods used, which has often entailed a good deal of new learning and skill acquisition. A case in point would be a doctoral graduate who learned for the first time both the theory and the practical application of the Delphi method, which was then applied with excellent results in the thesis research and continued into journal publication afterwards.

The two aspects of skill application reveal themselves more explicitly in the activities of research supervision (15%) and academic coaching (18%). For example, some respondents had taken up the supervision of other doctoral students (including in the same DBA program), which typically involves considerable coaching and application of research skills. Another designed a complete PhD program focused on human resource management for his university. Others were heavily involved in giving guidance on design and methods to undergraduates, most notably on action learning research.

Direct application to the workplace is also illustrated (15%). In one example, a doctoral graduate used recent research skills to change workplace practices in her company, another reported applying research skills to fine-tune an international marketing strategy and a third applied specific skills used in his thesis to improve financial analysis methods. A couple of management consultants reported using research skills to enhance presentations to clients and gaining more authority in the process.

Application of the overall doctoral learning experience

In a narrow sense the meaning of learning experience can be confined to the technical aspects of conceiving, planning, implementing,

analysing and writing up the doctoral research through to completion and examination. That is how it was defined in the survey, with the emotional and other psychological aspects placed under the broader theme of personal empowerment. The findings are presented in summary form below (Table 4).

Table 4: Application of the benefits of the overall learning experience in the doctorate

Application of learning experience	Frequency	Percent
Sharing research findings, literature review	22	23.4
Sharing research experience and dealing with the pitfalls and problems encountered	18	19.1
Advice/encouragement on studies	42	44.7
Supervision and assistance	7	7.4
Nothing at this stage	4	4.3
Total	92	97.9
Missing	2	2.1
Total	94	100.0

What the figures show is that sharing the learning experience, in one way or another, is the main way skill it is interpreted. What is passed on is personal insight, drawn from direct experience, that academic research is intellectually rigorous and demanding, with no short cut to the learning required for doctoral level studies. One graduate identified that learning to write a comprehensive literature review and linking it to the research idea and design is a demanding experience but essential to a successful outcome. The same applies to using abstract concepts as a foundation for the research as another important learning experience to pass onto others. Another stressed the importance of developing a conceptual 'road map' for the research early in the process as a key element in the learning

experience to transfer on to other learners. Yet another went back to an even earlier stage in the research process, which was to be clear about what it was the doctoral candidate wanted to know, that is, the core research problem. It was for him the most profound part of his learning experience which he felt compelled to pass on to others. A final illustration comes from one doctoral graduate who learned much about the different paradigms of research knowledge and how important it was to grasp these at the formative stage of the research process. Each in different yet complementary ways were the lessons of learning to teach or guide others into appreciating as they grappled with the research process. Together, the message from the doctoral graduates was that the lessons they had learnt should be available for others to take account and avoid some of the pitfalls and costly mistakes in the research process.

A different angle on the learning experience and applying what was understood to others reflected more on the emotional side of the doctoral journey, particularly the need for persistence, tenacity and single-minded determination over the distance of ‘the long march’. It was recognised that all doctoral students needed regular encouragement and personal support, for it is not just an academic and intellectual experience but also an intensely personal journey, largely taken alone. One respondent stressed the importance of living a balanced life, with ample physical exercise and a good diet, to offset the long hours of studying. Another PhD graduate claimed that he was able to pass on the benefit of his doctoral learning experience in helping his son with his graduate research.

Personal empowerment arising from the doctoral learning journey

This outcome theme is the most elusive of the five and rests very much on personal perception and interpretation. Below are the main findings summarised to reflect the main clusters of the empowerment experience (Table 5).

Table 5: Personal empowerment arising from the doctoral learning experience

Evidence of personal growth	Frequency	Percent
Positive self-development	31	33.0
Gain credibility, respect and trust	14	14.9
Enhance skills and sharpen thoughts	5	5.3
Promotion/get a job/ better career prospect	14	14.9
Publications	8	8.5
Nothing at this stage	14	14.9
Total	86	91.5
Missing	8	8.5
Total	94	100.0

The idea of personal empowerment has several meanings. It is easy for academics to underestimate the power of getting research published, yet for some respondents (nine percent) it meant a great deal to them in terms of personal empowerment, as did the honing of analytical and critical thinking skills (five percent). Others (15%) regarded empowerment as about career enhancement, which in the context of doing a doctorate makes sound sense. The largest group (33%) interpreted empowerment in more expected terms – as self-development. Not to be overlooked is the finding that empowerment was regarded by some respondents (15%) more in terms of gaining credibility, respect and trust. This makes sense almost anywhere, but especially in the Asian context where high educational status carries considerable recognition in the wider community.

With reference to the credibility and respect theme, it was interpreted as enhancing business dealings, achieving recognition from colleagues (peers as well as senior staff) and more generally as an

acknowledgement of a demonstration of ability. For the academics it had a direct link with career advancement, including some that aspired to work in the university sector.

Not everyone felt a particular benefit in terms of empowerment. Explanations included the expected one that the benefits, beyond the personal sense of achievement, had not yet appeared as it was too soon after graduation to realise much gain. Another claimed he was too old to relate empowerment to career opportunity, so was content to treat the outcomes in purely personal terms.

Creation of professional, occupational and business opportunities arising from doctoral studies

The fifth application of learning theme captures just about everything else. Its intention was to narrow the focus to 'start-up' or 'jumpstart' business opportunities or innovation that could lead into something beyond the doctorate, with the learning acting as a catalyst for new developments.

Table 6: The 'jumpstart' provided by the doctoral journey

The jumpstart provided by the doctoral journey	Frequency	Percent
To a great extent	39	41.5
To a certain extent	23	24.5
Very limited	10	10.6
Nothing at this stage	17	18.1
Total	89	94.7
Missing	5	5.3
Total	94	100.0

From the results in Table 6, it is not demonstrated that gaining a doctorate provided a significant 'jumpstart' for new business

opportunities. Instead, respondents were more inclined to mention other things covered elsewhere that were not directly related to the business development theme. This is not to deny that, for some, new ideas and opportunities were sought and found, either deliberately or partly by happenstance. And there is always the future where a connection might be made between the outcomes of the doctoral journey and the process of innovation and new business development. This line of thought points to a future research direction with a longitudinal approach.

In spite of this somewhat muted conclusion there are three different examples, drawn from the actual experiences of a two PhDs and one DBA graduate, connecting to the 'jumpstart' and innovation idea.

The first is the case of a successful business owner who decided to use the doctorate as a catalyst for personal change. He sold his share of the business and set off in a new direction, writing a book on a completely unrelated topic to his thesis, which gained immediate newsworthy publicity and many invitations to give public presentations to a wide range of interest groups. In short, he 'reinvented' himself and found new outlets for his lateral thinking skills as well as business acumen.

The second example is a PhD student in Hong Kong whose research, using the action learning approach, began a process of product innovation and change management in a family business that quickly gained momentum and a return on investment well in excess of expectations. In other words, the actual research for the thesis was the 'jumpstart' for a fresh beginning in a business that was slowly going stale and uncompetitive in the markets of Hong Kong and China. The other illustration is of a similar kind in Hong Kong where the research stimulated new business thinking and the wholesale adoption of a continuous innovation management strategy in the company, which specialised in a popular but risky 'fad business'. In these latter two examples, the two Chinese doctoral graduates remained truly faithful

to their business and company commitments, leading and innovating from within their respective organisations. It may be argued that the doctoral programs provided the platform for such innovative business developments.

Summary of the application of learning

The findings provide, not unexpectedly given the character and active lives of the doctoral graduates, evidence of a considerable amount of application of learning in the five ways identified, although less clearly in the 'jumpstart' dimension than might have been anticipated. The findings also clearly indicate that the application of learning embraces the personal as well as the professional domain, which broadens the concept beyond a narrow form of instrumental outcome.

A fitting closure to the whole enterprise of the doctoral learning journey as an application process is well expressed by a PhD graduate who explained:

The doctorate should act as a spring-board to future endeavours but it would largely depend on the incumbent. The PhD gives you the key. It is up to you to open the door with it. It is only the beginning of a long unending journey with no destination. Having a destination would only dampen our excitement and imagination.

This statement reveals much about the character of mind of the doctoral graduate successfully undertaking continuing professional learning.

Conclusion

What implications do these research findings have for the theory of continuing professional learning? Cyril Houle (1980), the American adult educator, was among the first to see the connections between what he termed 'the zest for continuing professional learning' and the emergence of the information age and the knowledge economy in the early 1980s.

Like most adult educators, Houle sought an understanding of the motivation to continue learning. He identified three main kinds: (1) goal-orientated learners, (2) activity-based or social learners seeking a means to engage in relationships with others, and (3) those seeking learning primarily for the intrinsic satisfaction.

Goal-orientated learning is the most obvious motivation relevant to doctoral studies. The desire to acquire vocational and professional knowledge and skills provides the main reason for undertaking the journey. However, as the evidence in this study has shown, the power of intrinsic rewards and enhanced social status cannot be ignored. Accepting that important point focuses on the concept of continuing professional learning and the link with the nature of doing business and work for the doctoral elite described in this research.

The work of Houle also identified three modes of adult learning, which have a varied relationship to doctoral education: (1) the mode of *inquiry*, (2) the mode of *instruction*, and (3) the mode of *performance*, which "is the process of internalizing an idea or using a practice habitually, so that it becomes a fundamental part of the way in which a learner thinks" (1980, p.32).

The mode of inquiry obviously marries with the doctoral research process – everything from the basic conception through all the stages to the final throes of completion, largely on a self-directed basis as the independent adult learner. The instruction mode takes in the process of learning about research methods and the difficult task of developing an acceptable research proposal. It is sometimes necessary to give instruction or direction as there is some mystery on the road to mastery of the research process. As an example, there is no short-cut to getting to grips with the literature and incorporating the received knowledge into a discourse with the research. Nor is there an easy way to learn (if required) how to use advanced statistical techniques as a first-time learner, and most candidates struggle with the writing of a thesis or dissertation. With these struggles it is perfectly normal

to seek advice and submit to instruction from those who have the 'know-how'. As for the mode of performance, doctoral studies are fundamentally about producing new knowledge and developing an academic mindset to achieve the desired outcomes, which has to pass through the rigours of peer-review and examination. It is common for candidates to have to make revisions to their research, which can be a painful experience and a test of the capacity to perform to an exacting level, sometimes after it was hoped and believed the journey was at last over.

Houle's classification, although somewhat dated in years, nevertheless still faithfully reflects the 'zest for continuing professional learning' which he identified. It is a reasonable claim that the doctoral graduates described in this paper are *goal-orientated* adult learners who continue to apply the knowledge they had diligently researched, often to their own workplace and organisational context. The *mode of inquiry* they had embraced in doing that research had created new knowledge, not just information but also insight and interpretation that could be applied to address business and management problems. Moreover, doctoral graduates are trained in the mindset and actions of the *mode of performance*. Although most would be content to define themselves as *pacesetters*, in Houle's terms, a few are true *innovators*, by using research-based knowledge to 'think outside the box' and use their new learning as a change-driver in often complex business environments. All of this is essentially about the application of learning, and doctoral graduates by continuing their professional education to this high level perfectly reflect the graduate research qualities profile of the University of South Australia.

There is a close connection between continuing professional learning and the application of learning theme explored in this research on doctoral graduates. This fit might be reasonably expected of the kind of adult learners drawn to the demanding process of generating new knowledge, acquiring research skills and more generally upgrading

their overall professional competence. Houle produced a valuable framework of ideas about the nature of continuing professional learning for which these doctoral graduates provide practical expression.

Quite often the doctoral graduates made remarks to the effect that the learning journey was their highest academic and intellectual achievement, for which there can be little doubt. More than that, quite a number treated the knowledge they produced and the skills they learned as transferable assets to be passed on to others, through academic publication as one means of dissemination to direct application to an organisational and workplace context or through interpersonal communication with others in a helping capacity.

Academic supervisors have a significant role to play in enabling doctoral students to plan actively for the application of their learning after their studies are formally completed. This encouragement may support and strengthen the motivation to complete 'the long march'. For doctoral program managers, they can more fully understand the importance of taking a long-term view of the learning journey and to lend support to the dissemination process and the values and practices of continuing professional learning. For other university staff involved in doctoral education programs, they too can and should appreciate that graduates often play an influential role, not only within their industry environment but also in the wider community. They are potentially ideal members of university alumni and the best form of positive advertisement.

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About the author

Dr. Barry Elsey is a senior lecturer in the International Graduate School of Business, University of South Australia. He has a background in adult and continuing education and has published widely in the field. He is currently involved in doctoral research supervision in the area of business management, mainly in the Asian region. His research supervision experience has often resulted in several joint publications with former students. He has a special interest in workplace learning and change management and continues to publish in the field.

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Appendix: The research questions

Factual information:

- A1. In what year did you graduate?
- A2. What was your age when you graduated?
- A3. Where was your doctoral program located?
- A4. During the period of your doctoral studies, how would you describe your employment position?
- A5. Are you male or female?
- A6. What is your nationality?

Please provide some details of your research topic:

- B1. In what broad knowledge area would your research most comfortably fit?
- B2. If you managed to publish from your doctoral work before it was examined and passed, provide a brief summary.
- B3. Did you do anything else to use your research in your professional or personal life while you were studying? What did you do?

Your original goal and ambition in relation to your doctoral studies:

- C1. Have your academic/professional goals and ambitions been realised through your doctoral studies?
- C2. Briefly explain what you wanted the doctoral experience to mean to you.
- C3. Briefly explain what you wanted a successful outcome to do for you.

The core research themes and questions:

The following themes refer to five key features of the doctoral research process, with each having a number of related questions. What I want to understand is what kinds of **application** have taken place since completion; that is to say, from the whole process of doing doctoral research to what happens afterwards to the knowledge, skills and learning experiences you had and may have subsequently applied in your professional and personal life. What the questions that follow seek to find is whether there are self-perceived, tangible links between various aspects of your doctoral learning journey (expressed as the five themes noted above) and your subsequent professional and personal development.

Theme 1: the application of specialised knowledge from your doctoral research

- D1. What have you done with the knowledge you produced for your doctoral research?
- D2. What else have you done to apply your doctoral research knowledge?
- D3. What insights would you like to make about the pure and applied value of the knowledge you produced in your doctoral research after graduation?

Theme 2: the application of research-based skills from your doctoral studies

E1. What have you done with the research skills and knowledge you developed for your doctoral research?

E2. What insights would you like to make about applying the research skills and knowledge you developed in your doctoral research after graduation?

Theme 3: the application of learning experience arising from your doctoral studies

F1. What aspects of the doctoral learning process as a personal experience have you been able to pass on to others?

F2. How significant was your learning experience in doing the doctorate? To what extent have you been able to continue to apply the doctoral learning experience to other situations?

Theme 4: the experience of personal empowerment arising from your doctoral studies

G1. What evidence can you produce to show that the personal growth that took place while doing the doctorate has made you feel more empowered in your professional and personal life?

G2. Apart from how others have perceived you after gaining the doctorate, what have you felt about yourself?

Theme 5: the creation of professional, occupational and business opportunities arising from your doctoral studies

H1. In your assessment, to what extent has achieving doctoral status, as well as the actual knowledge and skills you acquired, connected with any subsequent business and career opportunities, either directly or indirectly?

H2. Looking back, to what extent did you consider that doing a doctorate might provide a kind of platform or jumpstart for further opportunities in your professional and personal life?

In conclusion: looking back at the experience of 'the long march'

J1. What for you were the most memorable aspects of your doctoral journey?

J2. To what extent have your original motives for doing a doctorate been satisfied by personal and professional outcomes after graduation?

Final reflections

K1. What else could you write about the professional and personal outcomes you have experienced since gaining your doctorate?

~~The relative value of investment in 'second chance' educational opportunities for adults in Sweden and Australia: a comparative analysis.~~

~~Tom Stehlik~~

~~University of South Australia~~

~~Michael Christie~~

~~IT University of Göteborg~~

~~Chalmers, Sweden~~

~~The article presents a comparative analysis of educational policy and provision in Sweden and Australia, with particular emphasis on the relative investment in continuing and further education in both countries. The authors investigate the extent to which further education opportunities provide a 'second chance' at learning for adults and contribute to social and economic capital.~~
