

FOREWORD

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Since its founding in 2013, the Business Science Institute has become an internationally networked academic institution that focuses exclusively on the development of an Executive Doctorate in Business Administration for managers who want to step back briefly from their professional activities and engage in a thesis project that is anchored in their managerial experiences.

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When manager-candidates meet with the Business Science Institute's professors, they become able to make an impact, not only on their own personal development but also, from a managerial perspective, on their organizations and society as a whole.

That is why we considered it to be important to publish a series of works with a publisher, EMS Management & Société, that distributes both e-books and physical books, in English and French,¹ written by professors and other holders of doctoral degrees. To the best of our knowledge, this collection, which now comprises 25 books, is the only one dedicated to the Doctorate in Business Administration.

The professors publish books that provide manager-candidates with specific guidance on the doctoral research process. The

1. A work in German has also been published – Michel Kalika, *Der erfolgreiche Weg zum DBA*, 2019 – as well as one in Chinese.

following works have appeared In English: *How to Successfully Complete Your DBA* (Kalika, 2017), *Discovering New Theories* (Walsh, 2017), and *Research Methods for the DBA* (Chevalier, Cloutier, & Mitev, 2019). Thus, it was a logical next step to issue this book, *The DBA Thesis Project in Practice*, which will give manager-candidates critical advice on how to develop their research projects.

After their thesis defense, holders of Business Science Institute DBA degrees also have the possibility of publishing works in this collection that will disseminate their results to managers in order to create managerial impact. Some dozen works have been published by these DBAs, including *Development Program Monitoring and Evaluation System Effectiveness* in 2019 by Abdourahmane Ba, whose thesis was supervised by Professor Paul Beaulieu.

INTRODUCTION

Paul Beaulieu

The doctoral thesis has changed over time in terms of its scope, its format, and what is required of candidates. In the last 30 years, disciplines such as education sciences, engineering, and art theory and practice have come up with innovative concepts of how to produce a doctoral thesis that focuses on the creation of knowledge dedicated to the field of practice (Burnard, Dragovic, Flutter, & Alderton, 2016; Fulton, Kuit, Sanders, & Smith, 2013; Scott, Brown, Lunt, & Thorne, 2004).

This change has also tracked the transformation of various disciplines in the development of knowledge and the evolution of activity and doctrine in the practice of science. Thus, gradually, a movement was established that wanted to transform and grow the processes and training types related to doctoral research and how to learn the now diversified roles within fields of knowledge (O'Meara & Rice, 2005).

This dynamic aspect of the doctoral thesis will continue to evolve and become further refined to adapt even better to the diverse contexts and objectives of the development of scientific knowledge. Within the maelstrom of this apparent chaos of disciplines (Abbott, 2001), progress in the form of the continuous emergence of new schools of thought and the innovation of scientific knowledge practices within the “big family” of social sciences has shaken the established canons regarding the completion of a doctoral thesis (Mohrman & Lawler, 2011).

A new phenomenon has appeared in the wake of the dynamic of the globalization of human activities over the last 30 years. The complexity of management activities and systems will increasingly require restructuring of the social division of work concerning the production of scientific knowledge about management. Thus, the creation by managers of scientific knowledge of the progress in management practices (Beaulieu & Kalika, 2015) will become a key fact marking the start of a new age of organizational management in an ever more complex world.

Following a first wave of creation of DBA programs in business schools around the world, the preparation of a DBA-type doctoral thesis has become a subject for experimentation with new educational and skills-development strategies for the production of scientific knowledge in the field of management science (AACSB, 2013; Anderson, Gold, Steward, & Thorpe, 2015; Bishop, Boyle, Clune, & Hermanson, 2012; Stoten, 2016).

There is no absolute truth or doctrine regarding the “right” doctoral thesis or project statement. It is true that there is some degree of consensus regarding its scope, focus, objective, usual content and the quality requirements to ensure its scientific value.

It is useful to consider a DBA thesis as a system of activities (Engeström, 2015) that make up the foundations of the acquisition and formation of the distinctive competencies needed to advance scientific knowledge of changing practices. The essential nature of a DBA is that it is literally “the practice of knowledge for practice.” DBA programs that succeed in assuming an approach to education and, necessarily, to the completion of doctoral theses that are congruent with the intrinsic aims of this kind of training have generally adopted an epistemic and formative approach in which the “practice turn” has been accomplished maturely and effectively.

The DBA thesis, considered as a locus for learning, is a practice whose intrinsic purpose is to contribute to the improvement of management practices and to have an impact on the settings concerned by these practices.

At the first stage of developing the thesis project statement, it is undeniably important to clearly identify the categories of its content, the logical steps in the process, and its foundations. But it is even more important to pay careful attention to the essential questions that will allow a candidate to consider his/her experiential research site with a “critical eye” and remain aware of the challenges posed by the complex realities of scientific work. This concern must mainly be addressed from a perspective in which research effort applies primarily to managerial practice.

With the aim of taking this attitude of distancing and critical discussion of the doctoral thesis project into account, we invited a group of authors to join us in making a collection of essays available to doctoral candidates and their supervisory teams. These essays should catalyze consideration of the essential benchmarks in the design of a high-quality thesis project.

This book brings together complementary texts that are intended to guide the work of designing and developing a doctoral thesis project. The seminars that mark out the classroom time for practice-based doctoral programs in management are structured so as to promote the acquisition of the knowledge that is essential for doing scientific research and becoming a “scholar” who is committed to making an impact within management settings and who is aware of the full complexity of management practice.

The chapters in this collective work bring together four classes of concerns that we consider to be relevant in writing a DBA thesis project: the framing of the thesis and its essential activity of problematization; the critical attitude to be cultivated with regard to the research to be done; the communication dimension, as it relates to both the task of writing and the dissemination of the new knowledge that will be produced; and finally, the practical implementation of this research work.

This book presents a set of considerations concerning practice; the order of the chapters reflects the logical process for preparing a DBA thesis project.

Chapter 1 by Paul Beaulieu is intended to delimit the essential characteristics inherent in a DBA thesis. There are significant differences between DBA, PhD and, of course, MBA theses.

This brief outline, presented at the outset, draws candidates' attention to the management practice that is the core of their creation of new scientific knowledge.

Chapter 2 by Paul Beaulieu summarizes the main formal configurations for presenting a DBA thesis and its results. In addition to the “traditional” format for presenting a doctoral dissertation, alternative configurations for “reporting on” the research work carried out are now accepted as legitimate in various scientific disciplines while still maintaining high scientific quality standards.

Chapter 3 by Emmanuel Josserand discusses the relations and correspondences between the choice of design selected for the doctoral research project and the various options for structuring the dissertation.

Chapter 4, written by L. Martin Cloutier concentrates on a phase of work that is essential to establishing the research project for the thesis: the problematization of the chosen research subject and the corresponding formulation of the related managerial problem within the field of practice.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the iterative process that characterizes an action research approach, where the formulation of the research problem involves continuous interaction between the researcher(s) and the stakeholders in the management situation under study. The corresponding problematization process is illustrated by means of a study conducted by the two authors, Vincent Mottet and Marc Bonnet, concerning the management of the cooperative dynamic among players in the administration of Greater Geneva.

Chapter 6 by Françoise Chevalier tackles the theorizing approach generated from practice situations. This chapter unpacks the “theory building” path – an inductive path that involves constructing theoretical, field and interpretive memos in alternation. The emphasis is on providing “thick” descriptions addressing “the what” of the situations observed. The work then consists in moving away from the descriptions and gradually addressing “the why” of those situations. As the author reveals, a specific

mode of reasoning, “the method of anomalies,” opens the way to interpretation and theorization.

The doctoral researcher’s relation with the vastness of the scientific literature is a complicated affair that drains a lot of energy. In *Chapter 7*, Isabelle Walsh investigates why students should conduct a thorough review of the existing literature when engaging in their doctoral studies. She recommends bibliometric techniques as useful tools to help speed up the review process, and she shows how this can be done in practical terms.

Chapter 8 by Jean Moscarola discusses some crucial issues that are key to articulating and analyzing data from surveys and meeting the quality criteria imposed by scientific research. He presents the tension that underlying the triangulation of data sources, protocols for collecting such data, and the analysis methodology that is applied. This chapter is complemented by an appendix, located at the end of the book, which presents the Sphinx system for computerized processing of research data.

Writing a dissertation is a highly sensitive task that plays a determining role in the development of scientific argumentation on the basis of the research study. A DBA thesis is a formal document that is intended to communicate and defend a series of new proposals for scientific knowledge. In *Chapter 9*, Pierre-Jean Benghozi discusses the main questions related to producing a coherent written document and presents the various components of a thesis.

Chapter 10 by Sébastien Liarte presents a very important discussion of the fine balance that must be maintained between the search for simplicity in scientific discourse and consideration of the complexity of the problems and situations covered in a thesis. The author presents certain essential rules in this regard.

In *Chapter 11*, Michel Kalika, creator of the *Business School Impact System* (EFMD/FNEGE), considers a crucial characteristic defining a DBA thesis: the managerial impact of the new scientific knowledge to be produced by means of the thesis research project. This managerial impact must be anticipated and embodied throughout the research process that leads up to preparing a DBA thesis project.

Finally, in the *Conclusion* to this book, Michel Kalika clearly and parsimoniously summarizes the key practical recommendations that are essential for effectively preparing a DBA thesis project.

To sum up, obviously, this book makes no claim to present an exhaustive analysis of all the considerations that doctoral candidates must pay attention to while preparing their DBA thesis projects. Rather, what we hope to accomplish with this work is to provide more support for the effective, ongoing process of critical reflection that is so essential for completing a thesis project focused on practitioners' concerns.

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