A professional doctorate with purpose in mind: developing an identity workspace for DBA candidates

HAZEL MESSENGER

London Metropolitan University, London, UK

Keywords: professional doctorate, identity, DBA, DBA candidates

In postgraduate business education there has been an increasingly loud call for courses to do much more than simply provide a qualification. The 'acquisition' approach of 'getting' a postgraduate qualification has been challenged for example by Roos (2014), who calls for the development of value-based practical wisdom, with as much attention paid to developing the identity of the student as thoughtful, creative and influential individuals as there is spent on subject matter. This is particularly relevant for the study for a professional doctorate, where developing an identity as a 'scholarly practitioner' is an essential area of focus.

The Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) at London Metropolitan University has a particular commitment to developing the identities of its candidates as scholarly practitioners with an awareness of equality and social justice (London Metropolitan University 2023). By seeing the course as an 'identity workspace' (Petriglieri and Petriglieri , 2010: 44), the difficulties associated with developing identity are acknowledged (Markus and Nurius 1986). The course therefore aims to provide a safe space for identity work (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2010; Kets de Vries and Korotov 2012; Petriglieri and Petriglieri, 2010). This is a particularly helpful concept for the development of a professional doctorate course which aims to develop value-based 'scholarly practitioners'. Scholarly practitioners are practitioners who are able to integrate scholarship and practice in their work, and show the practical wisdom so necessary for being influential despite the complexity and chaos that often characterises contemporary organisations (Banerjee and Morley 2013).

Models of identity structures that are relevant to this definition of a scholarly practitioner are that of a 'critical person' (Barnett, 1997) and also that of a person capable of 'self authorship' (Baxter Magolda 2004; Kegan 1982, 1994). Barnett suggests that a 'critical person' has an identity which is capable of integrating knowledge, knowledge of self and action for meaningful decision making. Simliarly, a person capable of self-authorship is also seen to be able to integrate these three elements into sense-making then meaningful action. Interestingly, both models emphasise the challenges associated with integrating the three elements and then taking action. Barnett (1997) considers that 'critical energy' is deployed and Baxter Magolda (2004) and Kegan (1994) draw on the work of Winnicott (1975/1953) to suggest that a suitable environment for development might be described a 'holding environment', one that is safe and challenging at the same time.

This concept is also deployed by Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) when they suggest that the 'holding environment' that is essential to an identity workspace acknowledges the challenges associated with developing identity and so provides an environment that 'reduces disturbing affect and facilitates sense making'. This type of environment may be created by an individual (Winnicott 1975/1953) or a group (Drago-Severson et al 2001). Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) suggest it has three main characteristics:

- Conceptual frameworks and routines that help with sense-making
- Communities that provide a combination of belonging, support and challenge
- Rites of passage that facilitate and recognise role transitions and identity development

If the course is to provide individuals with the opportunity to develop their identities as scholarly practitioners, another conceptual area that provides help with creating the right kind of environment relates to seeing the course as a liminal space (Turner, 1987), a time of identity change, role transition, disruption and potential growth. This concept aligns well with the ideas involved in promoting a identity workspace as it anticipates changes in roles and attitudes. Being 'betwixt and between', a work in progress, anticipates having chances to try things out and be imaginative and playful. Bigger (2010) points out, however, that the state of liminality needs to be facilitated and channelled if it is to be productive.

It follows therefore, that if entering a professional doctorate like a DBA is to be seen as an identity workspace and exists in a liminal space, there needs to be a structured approach through the three main areas named above to promote development.

At London Metropolitan University, characteristics of the DBA identity workspace include the following:

- **Conceptual frameworks and routines that help with sense-making**

During the first part of the course the candidates are required to create action plans for their own development as scholarly practitioners and to reflect upon their progress. The candidates are provided with frameworks to guide their plans for development which include:

An adapted Vitae Researcher Development Framework (Vitae 2020), the 'PRDF' Practitioner Researcher Development Framework

The Open University 'Digital and Information Literacy Framework'(DILF) (Open University 2023)

The seven elements of digital literacy (Jisc, 2012).

The Open University 'Researching Professional Development Framework' (Open Learn 2020)

Practice Capabilities for Professional DBA at an Australian University (Kimber (2001) in Banerjee and Morley (2013)

The inquiry wheel (Harwood 2004).

- **Communities that provide a combination of belonging, support and challenge**

From the outset, the course aims to provide a shared space and a spirit of 'communitas' between the candidates as they develop as scholarly practitioners. In particular there is an emphasis on authentic activities of the research community and:

Relationships, reciprocation and responsibility

Developmental processes involving self- awareness and interdependency

Recognition of the influence of group culture on learning and development

Providing opportunities for meaningful participation in authentic research development activities

Encouraging habits of self and group reflection and developing self awareness

A particular activity that aims to include all of these is the PRG (Practitioner Research Group), a monthly meeting where candidates present their developing research ideas to their peers and guest academic tutors. The PRG provides collaborative supervision before individual supervision commences, and the members provide productive feedback to their peers, so that each becomes familiar with authentic practice of the research community

- **Rites of passage that facilitate and recognise role transitions and identity development**

London Metropolitan University holds an annual Staff/Student Research Conference where research students are encouraged to present lightning talks and research posters. All of the DBA candidates are encouraged to take part, with the aim that participation in this authentic research activity marks their identity development as a scholarly practitioner

References

Banerjee, S. & Morley, C. (2013). 'Professional doctorates in management: toward a practice-based approach to doctoral education', *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 12(2), 173-193.

Barnett, R. (1997). *Higher Education: a critical business*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bigger, S. (2010). *Thresholds, liminality and fruitful chaos: revolutionary change in education*?

Drago-Severson, E. Helsing, D. Kegan, R. Popp, N. Broderick, M. and Portnow, K. (2001). 'The Power of a Cohort and of Collaborative Groups'. *Focus on basics: connecting research and practice*. Volume 5, (B October). [online]

Harwood, W. (2004). 'A new model for inquiry', *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 33(7), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234650066_An_Activity_Model_for_Scientific_Inquiry

Ibarra, H., & Petriglieri, J. L. (2010). Identity work and play. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 23(1), 10–25. https://doi.org/10.1108/09534811011017180

Jisc (2012). *The seven elements of digital literacy*. Available from
http://web.archive.org/web/20141011143516/http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/digital
-literacies/

Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: Problem and process in human development*. Cambridge,
MA: Harvard University Press.

Kegan: R. (1994). *In Over Our Heads: the mental demands of modern life* . Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University Press.

Kets de Vries, M. and Korotov, K. (2012). 'Transformational leadership development
programmes: creating long-term sustainable change'. In Snook, S. Nohria, N. and Khurana,
R. (eds). Sage Handbook on Teaching Leadership. London: Sage.

London Metropolitan University (2023) *Equality and Social Justice Framework*. Available at
https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/about/equity/centre-for-equity-and-inclusion/a-fair-
outcomes-approach-to-teaching-and-learning/the-degree-awarding-gap/education-for-
social-justice-framework/ Accessed 05.09.23

Markus, H. and Nurius, P. (1986) 'Possible selves', *American Psychologist*, 41(9) 954-969.

Open Learn (2020). *Researching Professional Development Framework'*, Available from
https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/education/researching-
professional-development-framework?in_menu=1501054

Open University (2023). *DIL Framework*, Available from https://www.open.ac.uk/library-
skills-framework/DIL-framework

Petriglieri, G. & Petriglieri, J.L. (2010) 'Identity workspaces: the case of business schools.'
Academy of Management Learning and Education, 9(1)44-60.

Roos, J. (2014). 'The renaissance we need in business education', *Harvard Business Review*,
July 2nd 2014.

Turner, V.W. (1987) 'Betwixt and between: the liminal period in rites of passage'. In Mahdi,
L.C. Foster, S. and Little, M. *Betwixt and Between: patterns of masculine and feminine
initiation*, (pp 3-23). Peru, Ill: Open Court Publishing.

Vitae (2020) Researcher Development Framework, https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-
professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework

Winnicott, D. W. (1975/1953). 'Transitional objects and transitional phenomena.' In Through
Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis. (pp 229-242). London: Karnac.