

Workshop 3

Monday 9th November, 15.15 - 16.00

The Professional Doctorate within the context of Leadership Development Strategies

Professor Peter Smith

Professor

University of Sunderland, UK

Email: peter.smith@sunderland.ac.uk

Professor Peter Smith is Programme Co-ordinator for a cross University Professional Doctorate programme at the University of Sunderland. Peter joined the University as an undergraduate student in 1975 and received his Doctorate in 1981.

Since then he has been a member of staff of the University where he has held several teaching, research and management positions. Peter has published over 200 papers on subjects within computing, management and diversity, and has spoken at conferences throughout the world. Peter is a Fellow of the British Computer Society and the Royal Society of Arts, and believes passionately in the Professional Doctorate context.

Aim

This paper examines the potential of the Professional Doctorate as a senior staff leadership development programme. The authors have experience of using the Professional Doctorate in this way for a group of senior staff in two further education colleges. Although the students from the colleges are pursuing their own doctoral projects, each project is aligned with college corporate goals; and as a group the projects are contributing to major change programmes within the colleges. This paper aims to explore the experience of these candidates, reflect on these, and propose ways forward which may be useful to other organisations.

Background

The concept of the "Professional"

Doctorate offers opportunities for the development of work-based skills which transcend professional boundaries, and in doing so, can offer new possibilities for leadership development programmes. There is now an established basis for Professional Doctorates (Lest, 2004; Maxwell, 2003; Powell, 2005) with many Universities offering a qualification of this nature. The title is nationally recognized and is increasingly well understood by the academic community.

Organizations are now offering formal and sometimes accredited staff development programmes for senior managers. These leadership development programmes align the aspirations of the individual with those of the department and the organization and

can include approaches such as coaching and the examination of different leadership styles and personality traits. The important factor is that the staff development programme is strategically aligned with the vision of the organization and must support managers in developing a culture which will enable all staff to work towards that vision.

The University of Sunderland first approved a Professional Doctorate scheme in 2006/7. The initial scheme was approved as a research degree of the University and as such was approved by University Research Committee. The scheme was designed to meet the growing demand for a doctoral level qualification which enables candidates from business, industry and the professions to build an individual research programme on work which they are undertaking within the workplace. The scheme is largely portfolio based and enables a student to build up a doctoral submission which is based on a portfolio of evidence, drawing from material which is generated within the workplace. This portfolio can draw retrospectively on previous work, and build upon current and developing work. The candidate is required to undertake formal assessed coursework in the areas of reflective practice, research methodology and contextualisation and planning, and to ultimately produce a doctoral report which reflects upon the work contained in the portfolio and demonstrates the contribution made to knowledge and the impact which they have made on their profession.

Methodology

University staff have been meeting with candidates from the programme within the University setting and within their own workplaces. The meetings have been for a variety of purposes; the delivery of programme-related material, tutorial sessions and formal progress reviews. Throughout these sessions we have been taking the opportunity to collect data on the experiences of the candidates. This has been further supplemented by the use of interviews. This paper explores these data, reflects on the experience of tutors and candidates and draw lessons which may be of use to others.

Findings

Our findings suggest that the Professional Doctorate can be used as a vehicle in which individuals can align their own aspirations with those of the organisation and in making a contribution to the profession they are also moving their own organisation towards national or international stranding. We draw upon the experience of the authors and current students on the programme, and suggest ways in which programmes may develop in the future.

References

- Lester S (2004), Conceptualizing the practitioner doctorate, *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 29 (6), pp 750-777.
- Maxwell T (2003) From first to second generation professional doctorate *Studies in Higher Education* 28, 3, 279-291.
- Powell S and Long E (2005) Professional Doctorate Awards in the UK, UKCGE.