



DOCTORATE HUB

EMPOWERING THE DOCTORAL RESEARCHER IN YOU

DOCTORATE HUB | 2020

WHITEPAPER

**THE 'R&D' DILEMMA: WHILE 'D' IS TEMPTING,
ONLY THE 'R' WILL EARN YOU THE DOCTORATE.**





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IT'S ALL ABOUT THE FOCUS

We often see doctoral students struggle as they do not clearly understand what the focus of their doctoral research is actually about. This is notable for those who carry out their research within their work environment and is linked to a workplace-based problem.

This struggle often seems to stem from one of the following situations:

- (1) a research-problem, research-question, research outcome expectation miss-match,
- (2) a solution bias and lack of understanding of what constitutes a problem, or
- (3) the R&D dilemma.

All of the three appear to be inter-linked and are at their most dangerous for a students' progression once combined. In this whitepaper we discuss the R&D dilemma to understand how it can inhibit a student's progression, and what students can do to resolve it.

What exactly is the R&D dilemma?

The dilemma in this situation, and as depicted in Figure 1, is not in R&D in itself, but in the weight and focus students place on the development ('D'). The 'R' is then often geared towards researching on what sort of D ('R-on-D') will need to be done to get to the desired solution ('S')

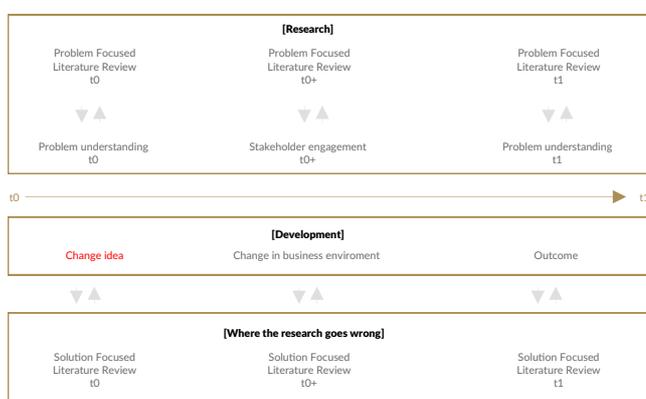


Figure 1 - The R&D Relation (from a doctoral study perspective)

LET'S WORK WITH AN EXAMPLE

As a concrete example, let's say that the problem faced is an employee performance management system ('PMS') that is not working as expected. Therefore, the desired outcome ('O') of any D would be to work towards a fully functioning employee PMS.

In this situation, the most obvious research question ('RQ') would be:

“How can we design a working performance management system?”

And a more detailed RQ of the previous RQ would be: “How can we design a working performance management system (PMS) that does not have the problems the current PMS has?” An even more detailed sub-RQ would be: “What problems does the current PMS have?”. Taking a look on how the same problem would be approached from R, the research perspective. The problem faced is a non-working PMS. Therefore, the most obvious RQ would be: “Why is the PMS not working?” And a more detailed RQ of the previous RQ would be: “What elements of the PMS do not produce the expected results?” An even more detailed sub-RQs would be: “What are the issues that are creating the nonworking elements? How do working and non-working elements compare and relate to each other? and How are the respective stakeholders impacted by this?” Looking at the above two examples it becomes quite clear how the D and R foci respectively take your research into very different directions?

Why then do students engage in D?

There are a variety of reasons. Amongst those we often observe are:

- Direct reward feels good.
- Where there are problems there is a need for solutions, so looking for a solution is natural.
- Where there are new opportunities and technologies there is room for new services and products to be created and to innovate, which is tempting to do.
- Envisioning solutions is more exciting and easier than needing to look very long and deep into things that do not work as expected and keep on asking why that is the case.



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As in business, students, like most of us, are framed by delivering quick fixes, rapid solutions, disruptive innovations, and the like. This tends to also frame how people see the way research will work.

Should I then do R without D?

Let's flip that question a bit: Can you do R without D? If the answer is 'yes', then ask yourself: What is the motivation and benefit to also carry out D? Once you have the answer, reach out to your supervisor, peers and the like and discuss why you should be doing both.

And while the 'yes' answer is a quite straight forward case, all others possible answers are perhaps not. Let's say that you are tasked to fix the PMS in your workplace as this is a duty of your position you hold. The question then would be: Can you do D without compromising R? Is there anything that is preventing you from doing D, R-on-D as well as R, angles? Is it possible for you, as a practitioner, to work with your team and the related stakeholders to try resolving the PMS issue the D and R-on-D way? And if so, what then would be holding you back to approach the same PMS issue from a R perspective at the same time?

Take a look at Figure 2 below to see how R and D might be brought together within one combined research context.

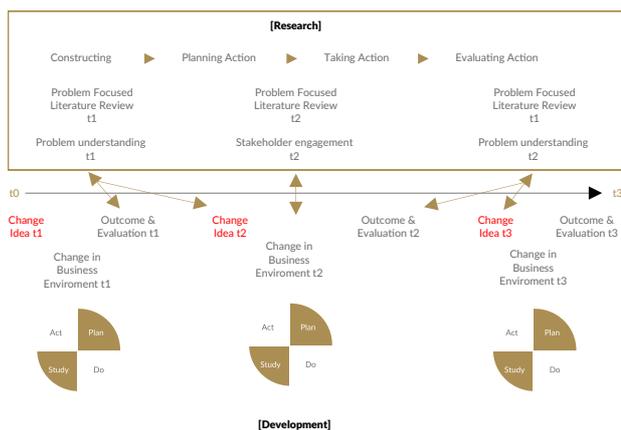


Figure 2 – Systematic combination of R, D and R-on-D

Sources:
Deming PDCA Cycle <https://www.deming.org/explore/p-ds-a>
Action Research Cycle <https://www.study.sagepub.com/coglianandbranic/student-resources/author-qa-videos>

As Figure 2 shows, doing R next to D and R-on-D is – in principle – feasible, as long as you, as the researcher, are aware of the duality of your actions. You are as much a practitioner as you are a researcher and have the command of the respective vocabulary.

As an example, the Deming PCDA cycle is well known in the business world, as is the Action Research Cycle in scientific research. Therefore, you might want to attempt applying both in parallel and where each has a dedicated focus.

In doing so, this may allow for a common vocabulary and shared views to facilitate your role as a researcher in your organisation and to communicate with your development focused colleagues to align your R with their D and R-on-D efforts.

If you want to learn more about the Doctoral research and the R&D dilemma, the webinar slide-decks, replays and forthcoming live sessions can be found in our **webinar section**.

About the author

Dr. Andreas Meiszner, PhD is one of the Co-founders of the DoctorateHub and with a particular focus on strategy development and training development.

Since 2012, he has tutored, mentored and coached beyond 500 professional doctoral students with the University of Liverpool (UK) Management School's Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) program, and since 2016 also with the DoctorateHub.com. Andreas is also an active research fellow with more than two decades of global research experience in the areas of Innovation, ICT and the Internet, Education, Management, and Economics. He has worked for leading academic institutions, such as the United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT), frequently ranked as one of the global top 3 institutes in its domain next to Harvard, MIT, Stanford and the London School of Economics. Andreas obtained his PhD in 2011 from The Open University (UK) for work carried out at the Institute of Educational Technologies and that is titled 'The Emergence of Free / Open Courses - Lessons from the Open Source Movement'. He also holds three higher education degrees in management from universities in France, Germany and The Netherlands, and with majors in 'International Management' and in 'Human Resources and Organizational Management'.



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DOCTORATE HUB IS YOUR PARTNER DURING YOUR DOCTORATE JOURNEY AND BEYOND

WHAT DOCTORATE HUB CAN DO FOR YOU

DoctorateHub is an exclusive and thriving community of practitioners that are on their pathway to establish themselves as doctoral scholars.

It is the space for professional doctoral practitioners to connect and to meet up in the virtual and physical world thereby allowing overcoming one of the main challenges of the doctoral journey: being on one's own without a peer network with whom to connect.

The doctoral journey is long and lonely, and unlike undergraduate and graduate programs, the doctoral students largely struggle to find and engage with doctoral peers. The DoctorateHub attempts to address this and to provide complementary support to professional doctoral practitioners that work towards a doctorate.

CONTACT US

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