



DOCTOR DOCTOR

REINVIGORATING THE PhD

PhDs are increasingly under scrutiny for being 'irrelevant' and 'lacking impact'. But given the right tools, **Simon Linacre** believes that they still have much to offer

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How might the PhD develop in the digital age? Some think the PhD's days are numbered, but I believe that there are one or two initiatives that may prove the doubters wrong

It may surprise some to know that the PhD, as it is today, only goes back to the 19th Century. As a result of education reforms in Germany it was established by Humboldt University, Berlin. Similarly, the vision of higher education offered by the undergraduate, master and PhD levels was only developed in the US in the late 1800s.

This information was provided by Wikipedia and as such is not necessarily reviewed and corroborated for authenticity. It does however; provide an apt way to start a discussion on the status of the modern PhD. And more importantly, how it might develop in the digital age. Some think the PhD's days are numbered, but I believe that there are one or two initiatives that may prove the doubters wrong.

Academy awards

One such initiative is the Outstanding Doctoral Research Awards, jointly supported by the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and global publisher, Emerald Group Publishing.

The awards – commonly known as the “ODRAs” – were conceived in the early 2000s as a way for EFMD and Emerald to recognise and promote emerging, high-quality PhD theses. Recent PhD graduates may submit a summary document of fewer than 2,000 words succinctly describing their PhD research. In order to bring out the more impactful elements of the research, submissions should highlight the following elements:

- Significance/implications for theory and practice
- Originality and innovation
- Appropriateness and application of methodology
- Data and findings

The submissions are judged by Emerald editors from its sponsoring journals in the business and management research portfolio (see box page 50). Winners in each category are awarded a cash prize of €1,500, along with a certificate and winner's logo.

Winners are also encouraged to follow up their success by writing up their research and submitting it to the appropriate sponsoring journal subject to normal peer review protocols.

Celebrating success

In the early days of the awards, there was some variance in the interest they provoked in researchers, mainly depending on the category. However, in recent years they have enjoyed significant success. The most recent awards in 2013 attracted 525 submissions from 78 different countries – an increase of more than 100 on the total submissions the year before allied to a much greater international coverage.

This supports the hypothesis that not only is the reach of organisations such as EFMD growing but also that much of the vibrant new research that has demonstrable impact is happening outside the established bastions of management education in Europe and North America.

What is notable about the submissions over the years is what they have signified for the development of postgraduate researchers' careers. Emerald is, of course, only able to access its own data and the figures across all publishers will probably be even more impressive. But of the 980 ODRAs submissions in 2010-2012, their authors went on to publish 437 articles in Emerald's journals, 70 book chapters and 62 case studies. Other achievements include:

- 70 authors won awards with Emerald
- A further 31 were highly commended or runners up
- 38 authors became Editorial Advisory Board members of journals
- 20 were invited to become Editors or have senior editorial roles

525

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980

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20

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Human faces

With a blizzard of such figures, it is easy to forget the real stories behind these achievements. Notable among these is the story of Yuxian Liu, who followed the sage direction of a recently graduated PhD student and ODRA winner, Liang Liming, to win her own award in 2011 (see box page 51). In a world of performance management data and research analytics, it is worth remembering that such engagement with doctoral students is actually a key driver to help academics of the future emerge.

Future of research impact

While the award winners listed here are notable for their academic achievement, there is a wider question regarding the future of management research and, indeed, even its validity and value.

A recent article in *Global Focus* by Marco Busi (Volume 8 Issue 1, January 2014), from his book *Doing Research That Matters: Shaping the Future of Management*, published by Emerald) proposes a new model for enhancing the value of research and seeks to stimulate a debate so that its importance is not left to slide down the list of priorities of governments.

EFMD is seeking to address the concerns over wider impact by launching its Business School Impact Survey, which enables institutions to assess the extent and nature of their impact on the city or region where they are located.

"It is a service for any business school anywhere in the world that is interested in collecting key statistical data on its impact," says EFMD CEO and Director General Eric Cornuel. "Once collected, this information can then be used both internally and externally with key stakeholders to widen the debate about 'the role of business schools in society' and showcase the enormous added value they bring the community."

Such developments are reflected in other major initiatives in Europe and the rest of the world. The well-documented Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK has gone through its first cycle of submissions from higher education institutions (HEIs) with results to be announced at the end of 2014.

For the first time, HEI submissions had to contain impact case studies on their research activities, which will contribute 20% of the final award made of total government research funding for the next half dozen or so years.

In the UK the Association of Business Schools (ABS) has also sought to support the impact agenda through their development of the Small Business Charter (www.smallbusinesscharter.org), which it says is "designed to recognise business schools with exceptional levels of engagement with SMEs".

This together with changes to AACSB accreditation standards in 2013 and heightened levels of awareness of impact in countries such as Australia and New Zealand show that there is substantial impetus for the impact movement for business schools and other HEIs globally.

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ODRA SPONSORING JOURNAL SUBJECT AREAS:

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGY

HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

INFORMATION SCIENCE

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACCOUNTING RESEARCH

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT

LOGISTICS AND SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

MARKETING RESEARCH

OPERATIONS AND PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT

Future perfect

This movement looks set to continue, particularly with the recent announcement by the Dutch government that it, too, was looking to implement impact-based measurement to decide some of its direct funding to higher education research.

And, of course, looming large is the increasing influence of the €80 billion in the Horizon2020 kitty for EU research, which includes impact-focused criteria to determine successful submissions.

Simply put, the bigger the stick and carrot used to both beat and incentivise business schools into realising the wider implications of the research they facilitate the more they do so and the more marginalised established metrics such as citation levels and Impact Factors will become.

Which brings us back to a relatively small award scheme that, at its inception, sought simply to enable recently graduated PhD students to make explicit the wider impact of their research in established business and management disciplines.

Perhaps its growing success is linked to the wider support for the impact agenda but the hope is that its continued support of PhD research in business schools will also lead to a second century of the revered *philosophiae doctor*.



WINNER'S STORY

In 2007, Liang Liming, a doctoral student of Professor Ronald Rousseau, won the prestigious Emerald/EFMD Outstanding Doctoral Research Award. Her inspiration had a long-lasting effect on a colleague, Yuxian Liu, from Tongji University in China.

Yuxian Liu says...



I had just began to pursue my doctoral programme and Liang said to me that we were both lucky to have a great supervisor and that under his guidance my doctoral thesis would also be excellent. Four years later, her encouraging words came true and I too won the Emerald/EFMD ODRA. I believe that all dreams will come true one day... And then, I got more than I dreamed of: an international prize on top!



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Linacre is the Business Development Manager at global publisher, Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Based in West Yorkshire in the UK, Linacre has published on journal metrics and research impact in scholarly journals and has presented on these topics at international research conferences.