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Abstract:

This paper explores how students interpret being part of a doctoral community, with a particular focus on the social and affective dimensions to membership of a doctoral school. It provides the views of a range of students reading for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy or Doctor of Business Administration at an English Business School, and draws from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis for its research methodology. The findings suggest that far from identifying with the wider doctoral community, students tend to see themselves as being part of a smaller group, usually defined in terms of the qualification studied and their status within the university. This paper reports on the diversity of these standpoints, and the differing ways students interpret others within the doctoral community.

Keywords:

Social Network theory; Doctoral Community; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; Business School.

Introduction:

This paper is concerned with one research aim, which is to elicit students' interpretation of their membership within a doctoral community at an English Business School. In general, the literature focusses on the bifurcation of students' doctoral journey into two possibilities: the idea of the lone scholar, isolated and unsupported, or that of the student as being part of a community (Lee, 2008). This paper has two principal research questions. Firstly, how do students perceive their interaction with others in the doctoral school? Secondly, what are the social and affective outcomes that pertain to this perception of interaction? Importantly, Ibarra, Kilduff & Tsai (2005) recognised that perceptions of relationships within a community condition interpretation and consequent human behaviour. Pyhalto, Stubb & Lonka (2009) reported that doctoral students tend to have a more positive view of their community following constructive engagement with its membership. This research differs from that of Pilbeam, Lloyd-Jones & Denyer (2013) who reported that the value doctoral students ascribed to their community did not correlate with their experience of it, or its value to them.

This paper provides an insight into doctoral education through research undertaken at a post-1992 English university in the north east of England. As such, this paper 'gives voice' to the interpretations of doctoral students of their position within a doctoral community, and contributes to the debate over the value of community to the individual student as outlined by Pyhalto et al. (2009) and Pilbeam et al. (2013). The paper starts by providing a contextual framework for doctoral education in England, albeit that many of its themes of Government policy drivers, economic and quality imperatives are replicated internationally, particularly in North America and Australasia. It then moves onto a discussion of the nature and possible impact of a community of doctoral students with reference to Social Network Theory. The research methodology is informed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; its findings point to the varied nature of doctoral study and the diversity in students' experience and understanding of being part of a community.

Situating the study: The changing context of doctoral education

Lewicki & Bailey (2009) characterise the conventional model of doctoral education as a dominant paradigm predicated on three principles. The first principle is a focus on the primacy of research above other skills development, such as teaching expertise. The second principle aligns career progression to research output and the third, that all Business Schools should adopt this 'research-driven' model is the only viable course of action in an increasingly competitive, globalised Higher Education (HE) market. Marx, Garcia, Butterfield, Kappen & Baldwin (2015) call for a fundamental re-orientation of Business Schools away from this dominant paradigm to one that offers a more diverse and enriching experience for doctoral students.

A number of macro, meso and micro factors have acted in the past three decades to transform doctoral education and, in doing so, change expectations of who doctoral students may be and their particular needs. Macro-policy decisions taken by Government focus on an economic model for HE that combines elements drawn from economic instrumentalism, the search for ever greater efficiency and effectiveness, as well as national employability agendas (Hopwood, 2010). In 2001, those Research Councils that fund postgraduate study issued a Joint Skills Statement that established an expectation that universities should support skills development in order to promote students' employability. These skills are more closely related to models of social learning rather than traditional didactic modes of knowledge transmission. Importantly, we should acknowledge that 'sustained funding constraints… are likely to drive the further concentration of research funding and activities in fewer, larger and more research-intensive institutions than at present…. It is not just the availability of funding that matters, it is the form in which the funding is made available to doctoral students.' (Park, 2007, p.15). Moreover, as Mellors-Bourne, Robinson & Metcalfe (2016, p. 58-59) note:

> Although up-skilling is required in order to succeed in the knowledge economy, the underlying trend is financial belt-tightening, as organisations have narrower margins…. This impacts on the willingness of employers to fund programmes, allow study time or provide workplace supervision or support…. For prospective PD [Professional Doctorate] candidates, there are fewer funding options available in comparison with other doctoral provision…. Compared with the perceived financial returns available from undergraduate, taught postgraduate and PhD programmes, staff may struggle to articulate the value of a PD to the institution.

The impact of funding methodologies means that doctoral study may gravitate towards larger, more research-intensive institutions that possess clearer economies of scale. This logic also applies to particular subject domains where, for example, a business school may possess a more diversified set of income streams for doctoral study than say an archaeology or philosophy department may be able to access, or where the Public Sector is not willing to sponsor a nurse or teacher to undertake a professional doctorate.

As such, Government policy has pushed universities to reconsider how they should view doctoral students and their doctoral journey. This is manifest, for example, in the development of cohort-based programmes, particularly at Master's level but also at doctoral education where economies of scale again impact on decisions relating to programme viability. As a result of grant-awards, or specific funding by universities for particularly study programmes, universities no longer simply view postgraduate study as a singular activity. This movement towards cohorts of students rather than discrete individuals is a feature of recent developments. Importantly, this development has changed the way doctoral students are supported, and of their interaction with their wider learning environment.

Curriculum change has taken place at meso level across the sector. The introduction of professional doctorates, most notably the Doctor of Education (EdD) and the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), as well as the introduction of the 'New Route PhD' has provided greater diversity in the intake of those recruited to doctoral study (Goodall, Huggins, Webber & Wickett, 2017; Jung, 2018; Rayner, Lord, Parr & Sharkey, 2015). Instead of the 'apprenticeship' model that is characterised by the lone student supported by a supervisor, professional doctorates are often conceived differently. Whereas the traditional Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is described often as a solitary journey or a struggle (Gray, Agillas & Schubert, 2015), professional doctorates are designed to integrate professional knowledge and skills into addressing complex organisational problems (Lindsay, Kerawalla & Floyd, 2017). Moreover, instead of isolating understanding in individuals, collaborative forms of learning within cohorts are encouraged. One significant development that has been reflected throughout the UK during the past two decades is the establishment of graduate schools that aim to support postgraduates and engender a sense of identity. As such, universities are redefining what it means to be a doctoral student.

At institutional level, micro-decision making has fashioned various models of supportive infrastructure. One example of developing mechanisms of support for doctoral students are doctoral conferences where researchers may present their work to a sympathetic audience; another is the practice of offering 'writing retreats' or writing groups (Cotterall, 2011) that encourage students to meet and share their insights and concerns. A further example is the provision of a common research methods induction programme that introduces students to a range of research paradigms and methodological approaches. The annual research methodology study visit to Dublin by doctoral students at the Business School where the research was undertaken is one example of how universities can promote a collective identity through common practice. Importantly, this event brings DBA and PhD students together at least for a week with a common agenda.

Theoretical context

What do we mean by community?

The shift in the literature from the traditional PhD conception of doctoral study to one that includes cohort-based professional doctorates mirrors changing approaches within universities in response to Government policy and market pressures, as well as educational innovation (de Lange, Pillay, & Chikoko, 2011; Amrein-Beardsley, Zambo, Moore, Buss, Perry, Painter, Carlson, Foulger, Olson, & Puckett, 2012; Bista & Cox, 2014; Wheat & Sumner, 2014). Clark (2007) acknowledges that although the idea of community may appear to be a confusing concept, it is predicated on the notion of belonging. Clark (2007) highlights the evolution of the concept from one that was based on territorial proximity to one that is now determined by a range of factors, such as technological change and new forms of social identity and voluntary networks- community is therefore increasingly defined in terms of the nature of interaction. For Wellman, 2001, p. 227):

> We find community in networks, not groups…. In networked societies: boundaries are permeable, interactions are with diverse others, connections switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies can be flatter and recursive…. Communities are far flung, loosely-bounded, sparsely-knit and fragmentary. Most people operate in multiple, thinly connected, partial communities as they deal with networks …. Rather than fitting into the same group as those around them, each person has his/her own personal community.

Social network theory offers a more sophisticated insight into community than the early literature that placed community within a territorial context. Social network theory views community in terms of the quality and frequency of interaction of members within a network. Moreover, for Granovetter (1983), a key feature of an individual's network is the delineation between strong and weak ties. An important

aspect of Granovetter's (1983) work is the identification of weak ties in binding loose communities together. Although Clark (2007) acknowledges weaknesses in this social network approach, it does offer a nuanced view of the complexities of human interaction. Fundamentally, however, Delanty's (2003, p. 177) observation that 'networks are built by the choices and strategies of social actors' is central to an understanding of how communities operate.

What interpretations of a 'community' of doctoral students have been offered?

A number of scholars have offered competing models of communities. Much of the literature on community in an educational context relates to the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on communities of practice, or the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). Although the idea of a 'community of practice' has tended to dominate the discourse on collective learning (Kriner, Coffman, Adkisson, Putnam & Monaghan, 2015), Roberts (2006) argues that there are inherent limitations to this model. Take for example, the focus by Lave and Wenger (1991) on shared practices and a common interest of members, which is often situated in a work-based context. Such a representation of a doctoral community would be inaccurate, as each individual is embarked on a personal rather than a collective journey of research. Brown & Duguid (2001) have offered the idea of 'networks of practice' across organisations, whereas Pyhalto et al (2009) conceive as it as being a 'scholarly community', and other models such as community of circumstance or of place have been developed to describe the relatively loose ties that characterise some communities. In short, instead of searching for strong ties that bind doctoral students together, perhaps researchers should focus more on those ties that support a network instead of the conventional approach that focusses on formal institutional linkages between the student and university?

Method

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is recognised as an appropriate research approach in the elicitation of participants' understanding of their context and what particular social phenomena mean to them as individuals. IPA is used extensively in qualitative research where the purpose of the study is 'concerned with understanding an individual's personal account of a particular experience or phenomenon, rather than trying to find causal explanations for events or produce objective 'facts'' (Clarke, 2009, p. 37). In this respect, IPA is ideographic and inductive, in that it is concerned with the particular rather than the generalisable, as is the case in nomothetic research. IPA draws from phenomenology and hermeneutic theory in that it aims to elicit an insight into others' experiences and how they make meaning from their interpretation of a phenomenon. Hermeneutics informs how IPA researchers should approach and interpret their data through an inter-subjective hermeneutic circle of meaning-making between researcher and research participant. For Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009, p. 37), 'without the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret, without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen'.

The sample was purposive in nature, in the sense that all were enrolled as doctoral students at the Business School. Following ethical approval for the research, the Programme Leader for doctoral studies within the Faculty was asked to pass on an invitation to students to participate in the research. As a member of staff and doctoral supervisor, the author felt it inappropriate to approach potential participants directly, so had elicited participation through a neutral figure. Moreover, the author also chose not to elicit participation from current supervisees or former students in order to maintain a detached ethical position. This stance served to recognise and accommodate the asymmetrical power-relations implied in faculty-student research. Platt (1981) highlights the complexities involved in undertaking research within the same institution as research participants and the difficulties associated in detaching a research project from a wider context. In addition, Whitely (2012) discusses some of

the ethical issues for doctoral supervisors in business schools who undertake a qualitative research project, not least is the issue of how to avoid imposing the researcher's concept map of the research onto that of the participant. Participants were provided with a preliminary document that not only explained the purpose of the research project, but elicited informed consent and assured participants of their anonymity, and that they would be able to withdraw at any point without sanction. Assurances were also provided that described the nature of data collection, storage and disposal.

This open invitation was important as it opened-up the possibility for 'convergence and divergence' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 50) within the sample. As a consequence, the sample included a range of students who were able to bring a variety of life experiences, professional contexts and roles to the research. In particular, although the author did not realise this as the interviews started, three distinct clusters of participants were to emerge through the research conversations. Firstly, a number of international students who were enrolled as full-time PhD students, all of whom also worked within the Faculty as occasional associate lecturers. A second cluster were represented by permanent, full-time lecturers who were studying for a DBA on a part-time basis. The third category related to the role of the Graduate Tutor, who whilst studying for a PhD is employed by the University in a range of administrative and teaching roles. This diversity within a supposedly homogeneous sample highlights the richness of the sample and the inherent complexities of dealing with human beings within qualitative research. The distribution of the sample is described below in Table 1, with pseudonyms used to ensue anonymity.

Gender	**Full-time PhD**	**Full-time staff, undertaking a part-time DBA**	**Full-time Graduate Tutor, undertaking a PhD within a five-year contract**
Female	**Martha**- in late twenties, from the Caribbean with teaching experience. **Minuli**- an early thirties Sri Lankan academic studying for a British doctorate.	**Rachel**- in early forties, with two decades of industrial experience **Nicole**- late thirties, with two decades of experience in the financial sector **Chloe**- in early fifties, with three decades experience in retail.	
Male	**Peter**- an early thirties Nigerian, with a wealth of experience in the banking sector in Africa and Europe.		**John**- a local student, in early forties who had taught prior to the doctorate.

Table 1. The distribution of the sample, according to nationality, gender, status, and qualification sought.

As Pietkiewicz & Smith (2012, p. 364) note, 'samples in IPA studies are usually small, which enables a detailed and very time consuming case-by-case analysis'. Turpin, Barley, Beail, Scaife, Slade, Smith, and Walsh (1997) recommend a sample of six to eight participants, whereas Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) suggest a range between three and six. For Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009, p. 51), 'the issue is quality, not quantity, and given the complexity of most human phenomenon, IPA studies usually benefit from a concentrated focus on a small number of cases'. Given these recommendations, the sample presented above is consistent with established IPA research.

As is usual with IPA, the method of data collection was through the use of a semi-structured interview (Brocki and Wearden, 2006; Clarke, 2009; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). As IPA involves the interpretation of text, the research interview provides the researcher with the opportunity to elicit rich data through inter-subjective discussion. The interview was conducted in a neutral location and

ranged from 30 to 40 minutes. The interview questions were ordered in the form of an interview schedule and included a range of question types as recommended by Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009): the 'structural' (Questions 2 and 5) and 'descriptive' (Question 10), the 'narrative' (Question 9); the 'prompt'; (Question 1) the 'probe' (Question 2a, 3a and 3b) and the 'evaluative' (Question 6). The focus of the questioning revolved around the interpretation of the idea and perception of community, the experience of studying for a doctorate and the transformative nature of that experience, and related to the typology of the doctoral learning experience of 'participation', 'acquisition' and 'becoming' as outlined by Lindsay, Kerawalla & Floyd (2017). The questioning was designed to be open in order to encourage the respondents to answer as they wished, and elaborate further on a point beyond its initial focus. The interview schedule is presented below:

1. Have you encountered any particular challenges as a doctoral student?
2. Tell me how you were inducted into doctoral study?
    a. Was this as an individual or as part of a group?
3. Tell me about the nature of interaction between you and other doctoral students?
    a. Is it formally organised?
    b. How often does interaction occur?
4. Tell me about how you feel about being a doctoral student?
5. Are there opportunities for you to get together with other doctoral students to discuss your experience?
6. Do you feel that you have changed as a result of studying for a doctorate?
7. Do you feel that you belong to a community of doctoral students?
8. Do you feel that your general well-being has suffered as a consequence of being a doctoral student?
9. Do you feel that you have been able to influence the development of the group of doctoral students?
10. Is it possible to describe the group of doctoral students: A close community, loose, or non-existent?
11. Can you sum up what it feels like to be a doctoral student?

The interview was recorded and transcribed in full. A copy of the transcript was provided to participants for methodological validation and ethical transparency. The transcript was subsequently structured into separate columns as is usual in IPA studies, for original data, explanatory comments and thematisation, as suggested by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2012).

Analysis of interviews

The analysis of interview data is performed through an iterative reading of the transcript. An IPA analysis is predicated on the Heideggerian practice of interpretation through the focussing on the 'objects of concern', which relates to the phenomenon studied and the respondent's 'experiential claims', which relate to their interpretation (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006, p. 111). However, IPA analysis is not simply a description of what is contained in a transcript. The analytical stage involves the researcher interpreting the meaning of the experience as they understand it. Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) offer a six-stage structure to the process of the analysis: reading and re-reading; initial note-making; developing emergent themes; searching for connections across emergent themes, before moving onto the next participant, and then looking for patterns across interviews as a whole.

The process of analysis:

Each transcript was printed out and read to gain an insight of the discussion, and then it was re-read to identify key points. During a third reading, notes were made of key points using post-it notes and the associated text within the transcript highlighted. The standard method of reporting data in an IPA

study is through a column framework (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012) and is adopted below, where the original data, comments and emergent themes are presented. The initial exploration of the data generated 115 codes, which were then coalesced to 66 emergent themes, and then to seven super-ordinate themes that dominated the discussions.

Illustration of the data analysis process:

Original transcript	Comments	Emergent themes
Interview question: Can you tell me about the nature of interaction between you and other doctoral students?	Generalised, open invitation	Study rooms as an issue in identity
It's very much PhD students, DBA students. I don't know if PhD students make that type of distinction but to me it feels like there's a PhD room not a doctorate room (Source A: Rachel)	Why does Rachel not know what PhD students think? A lack of interaction / communication?	Difference identified
To be honest, I tend to think of the doctoral student group as being full-time, whereas I am quite different as I am not. So, I have my little group [of fellow DBA students] that I talk to … but I have nothing against them. It doesn't feel like a community to be honest. If you go down to the canteen, they're all together and I am not at that table. If they say 'hello', I'd say 'hello', but I would never sit with them…. I don't resent them and I don't think why can't I go and sit at that table. It doesn't bother me. (Source B: Nicole)	Is it because these DBA students are also staff? Is it because these PhD students are international, not British?	Identified time as a differentiating factors Refers to a micro-group of DBA students. The canteen is a territorial divide.
Not at all. Not very much. But we're sound. I think it's a little generation thing and I think it's because we're full-time members of staff and part-time DBA students. I think there is still a little bit of a stigma between DBA and PhD…. I feel the majority, not always, there is a divide because I'm there in my teaching capacity and I'm trying to do this on the side. It's not my primary focus, but if you're a full-time PhD student, it's your prime focus. …I don't feel part of a community in terms of people who are following the same journey as me and are in a very similar circumstance to me- out of their community, not at all. (Source C: Chloe)	Raises age as a possible dividing factor, or is this an excuse? Did Chloe know that PhD students also teach in the Associate Lecturer role? Sees the PhD as a very different journey to the DBA	Age. Being full-time staff, with attendant constraints Clear sense of divide identified by DBA student

Original transcript	Comments	Emergent themes
I think it is 90% PhD, 10% DBA. Most of the DBAs are not around, but for those that are, we did induction together…. We have a drink, or when anyone has a viva we go and buy cards for them to congratulate them. But that depends actually. It revolves around them not being around. (Source D: Peter)	This suggests PhD student engage and support others, including DBA students Presence also appears crucial in forming bonds Very different from DBA interview- why?	Support for others Presence
In the first year, because of a lack of available resources- we had about 11 desks but there were over 30 PGR plus DBA students… so it was contentious because the ones that were here before didn't want the first year students in the room- there was drama…. At that point the doctoral community was more of a clique. By clique, I mean in economic terms there were barriers to entry into the community (Source E: John).	Rooming identified as a political issue within the doctoral community Cliques identified reflecting competition for resources	Study rooms Cliques and divisions

Probing question: Do you think this has changed? Definitely it has changed because I know during the time I have been a PGR rep. we work closely with the Students' Union…. We PGRs really pushed hard in the community. We used to have nights out with the group, we communicated better with everybody in the community…. It's now hard. We have first years who we don't know who they are. A lot are staff, but we don't know who they are- there's no contact with us and it became too fragmented. There was a lot of friction when they tried to merge Law with Business into the one room. (Source F: Martha) There is no difference between PhD and DBA, whoever comes into the PhD rooms, we get used to and talk about our research issues and I really don't identify who the DBA or PhD students are…. When we go to the Library as well, or in getting coffee as well, we are introduced to other PhD students in other faculties. (Source G: Minuli)	Efforts to develop the community driven by student reps. Lack of information on fellow students? Lack of resources again driving conflict Sees no distinction between cohorts, but refers to the PhD rooms- the door has 'doctoral students room' on its front Why mention only meeting PhD students?	Student-led initiatives are temporary Information flow Study rooms Study room is tagged with PhDs in error Social context to community

Original transcript	**Comments**	**Emergent themes**
I am aware that there is a doctoral group, I tend not to mix with them. The people who mix with them mostly are doing a doctorate, but it tends to be the Graduate Tutors (GTs) and it tends to be, because I think we share lots of things. When I first started, GTs were put across in Ellison Terrace. There were about 8 of us at the start, so it was brilliant because at any one time there was one of use having a meltdown…. There are real highs and lows but I haven't sought that outside my GT group…. You're asking doctoral students to take on this collective role and other PGRs- it has to be said- have got 101 other things to do. (Source H: John)	Personal factor here Long-established support group built around GT role Pressures of work / study	Personal agency Importance of GT group and a distinct identity Differentiates GTs from PGRs Constraints on community
Ohh, it could be down to one word- lonely, at the beginning. But, now once you start finding your feet then it becomes a bit interesting. It's like a phase. Everything is going well and then not. It's a loop and then everything keeps going on and on, switching between phases. It's a loop of continuity: lonely, very interesting, lonely, very interesting. (Source I: Peter)	Links to the isolation often identified in previous research	Lonely, interesting, cycle of experiences
This doctoral study is really stressful. Never thought that it would go in this depth. I have started some physical symptoms like, I have started losing quite a lot of hair, and I think my hormones have changed. (Source J: Minuli)	Quite open here- need to adhere to ethical practice	Stressful, physical symptoms
It's a churn. It's a churn that is sometimes you can be at peace, but as soon as you put in another load, you're thinking where is my other sock, but you still get caught in the corner of the dryer and no one sees you. (Source K: Martha)	Cycle of experiences, sense of isolation	Churn, sock in dryer
When you do a DBA, you leave your dignity at the door, because the whole process can be quite demeaning at times. It can be rewarding, but it can really shatter your confidence and that's why you build this resilience. (Source L: Rachel)	How do academic staff relate to each other in this particular type of relationship?	Leave your dignity at the door, quite demeaning, rewarding you build this resilience.

Table 2. Extracts from the qualitative data generated through interview.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 96) suggest that these emergent themes be developed into 'super-ordinate themes', through *abstraction* that 'involves putting like with like and developing a new name for the cluster'. Similarly, a cluster may be formed through *subsumption*, where emergent themes coalesce around a dominant emergent theme. Table 3 shows this analytic process in respect to the seven super-ordinate themes generated by the interviews in which both abstraction and subduction are identified. This clustering of emergent themes into super-ordinate themes enables the researcher to identify any continuity and patterns in the data, and through this process arrive at more generalised understanding of the data. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend that themes be organised using columns in order to provide a framework for analysis. Table 3 provides one variant of this approach in organising and cross-referencing data. In particular, Table 3 identifies the source of the emergent themes and points to the relevant analytic process involved in developing the super-ordinate theme, as well as linking the super-ordinate theme to relevant literature.

Super-ordinate theme	**Illustrative source**	**Illustrative emergent themes that feed into the super-ordinate theme**	**Analytic process.**	**Relevant literature**
The range of challenges confronting doctoral students *12 initial codes, with 4 emergent themes*	Source C Source H Source L	workload related; supervisor impact; status confusion; family context	Abstraction	Lee (2008); Pilbeam, & Denyer (2009); Pilbeam, Lloyd-Jones & Denyer (2013)
The nature of induction as preparatory to doctoral study *6 initial codes, with 5 emergent themes*	Source D	poor quality of induction; well-intentioned goals for induction; formation of learning sets; constraints on staff who study; opportunity to meet others	Subsumption	Lee (2008)
The formation of community of doctoral students *12 initial codes, with 2 emergent themes*	Source E Source F	self-organising community; relevance of resources	Abstraction	Kilduff & Tsai (2005); Cotterall (2011); de Lange, Pillay, & Chikoko, (2011); Lindsay, Kerawalla & Floyd (2017).
The sense of being in a community of doctoral students *30 initial codes, with 22 emergent themes*	Source A Source B Source C Source F Source G Source H	non-existent; degree-specific clusters; unstable nature of community; part-time/full-time divide; layers of community; relevance of assessment regime; inferiority of Year 1 students; lack of influence over the community; feeling of being in a sausage factory; international PGRs students as separate; lack of cultural awareness; staff DBA are distinct; DBAs' presence; PGR support for viva candidates; global Facebook DBA group; DBAs don't use the online discussion board; lack of use of email to communicate; Library and lunch as a meeting venues; Blogging as a means of sharing concerns; GTs as a distinct cluster; PGRs as a distinct group; cliques	Abstraction	Granovetter (1983); Kilduff & Tsai (2005); Handley, Sturdy, Fincham, & Clark (2006); Lahenhuis, K. (2012); Pilbeam, Lloyd-Jones & Denyer (2013); Kriner, Coffman, Adkisson, Putnam, & Monaghan, (2015)

Differences between doctoral students *6 initial codes, with 5 emergent themes*	Source A Source B Source C	Difference in role and status; no difference between degrees; generational difference; different assessment regime; differing logistical constraints on staff	Subsumption	Roberts (2006); Hughes (2010): Bista & Cox (2014); Jung (2018)
Personal struggles *34 initial codes, with 20 emergent themes*	Source C Source E Source H Source I Source K Source L	lonely; solitary; insecurity; stress; phases of highs and lows; sleep loss; weight gain; mental health; depression; scary; exciting; churn; role transition; self-esteem; biggest challenge in life; frustration; lack of support; the brick wall; leave your dignity at the door; the lost sock in the washing machine	Abstraction	Goffman, I. (1978); Pearson & Brew (2002); Lee (2008); Rayner, Lord, Parr, & Sharkey (2015); Goodall, Huggins, Webber, & Wickett (2017)
Personal development as a doctoral student *115 initial codes, with 8 emergent themes*	Source I Source L	learning philosophy; being more cynical; having lower expectations; being enriched by the experience; recognising the value of family support; being pragmatic; becoming more sophisticated; becoming more confident with others; finding your feet; loop of continuity; demeaning, rewarding, you build resilience.	Abstraction	Lee (2008); Rayner, Lord, Parr, & Sharkey (2015); Pilbeam, & Denyer (2009); Goodall, Huggins, Webber, & Wickett (2017)

Table 3. The development of super-ordinate themes.

Limitations to IPA and this study

Yardley (2000) presents a set of criteria of quality for qualitative research that should be applied to IPA, and to which Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) have supplemented subsequently for IPA. These criteria relate to: sensitivity to context; commitment to rigour during research; the transparency and coherence of the analysis; and, the impact and importance of the study. The author took these criteria into account when considering the limitations for this research project.

In terms of the particular limitations of the research process, there are a number of issues that should be acknowledged from an IPA perspective. Firstly, a richer insight into the experiences of participants could be obtained if the research had been undertaken as a longitudinal study for as Jung (2018, p. 12) recognises 'students often change their identity and perceptions of learning experiences within the process of doctoral study'. In addition, the role of the researcher as an integral part of this project should be acknowledged. Although the ethical positioning of the author is discussed above, the role of a researcher extends beyond preliminary ethical considerations. For Parry (2018), 'determining positionality is a dynamic and evolving process involving self-reflective practices to critique and question one's approach…. Articulating such processes provides transparency to, and disclosure of one's self in, the research process.' For Wilson (2018) this often leads to one of two research positions, either 'to bracket off their own experience and self. Or whether it involves integration of their position with the research'. Moreover, this particular interview scenario was complicated by the multiple positions in situ, with both the research participant and the researcher being a member of staff. For Wilson (2018) this complication of role-identity 'risks positionality blindness, where the similarities between the two researchers are over-looked and they do not give rise to reflection'. Qu and Dumay (2011, p. 261) suggest that 'all too often ethical considerations are established at the beginning of a study and are either ignored or changed', and taking this into consideration is a fundamental methodological concern if we are to maintain a claim to ethical practice in research. Jung (2018) draws attention to the inter-subjective nature of interpretative research and the need for epistemological reflexivity on behalf of the researcher and the importance of rigour in the analysis of respondents' contributions (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Clarke, 2009; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

As Bryman & Cassell (2006) acknowledge, 'the issue of reflexivity has attracted a great deal of attention in business and management research'. Cunliffe (2003, p. 985) contextualises reflexivity in terms of the power-relations of the interview scenario and alluded to above, and sees it as 'entwined with a crisis of representation that questions our relationship with our social world and the ways in which we account for our experience'. In practice, this means that a reflexive interviewer is obliged to 'explore how we as researchers and practitioners constitute meaning through our own taken-for-granted suppositions, actions, and linguistic practices' (Cunliffe, 2003, p. 989). This obligation to act reflexively has for Bryman and Cassell (2006) two levels- the first being a form of methodological reflexivity concerning the relevance of questioning and a second that addresses power-relations within the interview. For Alvesson (2003), such an approach means that researchers should be aware of contextual micro-politics within the institution and avoid taking a particular stance. Moreover, Qu and Dumay (2011) acknowledge that the transcript itself is not a perfect representation of the interview, but one that is fundamentally subjective in nature and is the product of the researcher's interpretation of the conversation. For Copestake and Davies (2018, p. 12) this means that 'less focus is given to positionality during data analysis,' and the issue of 'who we are coding for' is important to consider. Although we may claim that research provides a voice to participants, it should also be acknowledged that their voice is interpreted and reproduced by the researcher with all the limitations that this may involve (Suri, 2008; Roulston, 2016). Although the transcripts were provided to participants for validation, the inherent power-relations within the interview scenario, as well as the subjective nature of social interaction, mean that no absolutist claims can be made in relation to an objectified representation of truth. As a hermeneutic exercise, the success of IPA research is ultimately dependent on how we as humans understand each other.

Discussion

This research suggests that although universities may wish to coalesce doctoral students into a community of researchers, in practice, this community is weak and fragmented. Importantly, although a number of university systems are designed to support students, structural divides inhibit and constrain the development of a common identity. This problem is particularly evident in respect to those staff who are required to study for a doctorate, usually a DBA. In this instance, although research allowances are provided, staff do perceive themselves as very different to PhD students. This perception is not necessarily based on an objective understanding of others' positions as PhD students, many of whom are also parents, work for the university and who have extensive work experience. This lack of understanding of others is one possible indication of the more profound lack of communication within the doctoral community, all of whom work in close proximity. If progress is to be made in developing a more cohesive community, then consideration should be given to how to promote opportunities to meet and share information. In short, although universities tend to claim that there is parity of esteem/challenge in undertaking a DBA or PhD, students do not think of themselves as progressing along the same journey.

Hughes (2010, p. 46) suggests that 'contrary to received wisdom, the social aspect is least important for membership of learning groups and it is knowledge-related aspects which are fundamental to engagement and learning'. Hughes' (2010) analysis mirrors that of Goffman (1978) and Pilbeam & Denyer (2009), who argued that identity, and hence community development, is produced by context and is often characterised by an instrumental approach by students. This paper suggests that there are limitations in Hughes' (2010) thesis and there is a need to revisit our interpretation of doctoral communities. The typology proffered by Lindsay, Kerawalla & Floyd (2017) may be of use here as it presents a staged evolution of community development, each aligned to a particular form of connectivity. Although students may participate in joint activities and

acknowledge their formal membership of a doctoral school, these behaviours often represent a weak tie within the network. As students become more accustomed to the culture and rituals within an institution, or more particularly, a degree programme, then they may identify more closely with those attendant aspects of being connected to that network. Finally, adopting a particular identity as a PhD or DBA student is a complicated process that draws upon a range of social and affective resources, and which is indicative of a sense of belonging. This paper questions Hughes (2010) argument that the social context is less important that operational or knowledge-related aspects of study and draws from Social Network Theory to provide a conceptual alternative. The evidence generated in this study suggests that a failure to engender a social-affective transformation in doctoral students' sense of belonging may lead to fragmentation by study programme. Indeed, the best indicator of strong ties within a doctoral community could be how each student identifies with the idea of a doctoral community rather than their degree programme.

In order to develop a more coherent doctoral community a number of actions should be considered both at Faculty level and across the wider University that target not just operational and knowledge-related aspects of doctoral study, but also its social context. Firstly, administrators need to respond to clear developmental needs relating to induction. Instead of a collection of the 'willing and able' presenting what they believe is important from their doctorate, a more coherent programme of research methods and philosophical underpinning is required, and presented in a more practical and accessible manner. Secondly, induction should not be conceived as a 'one-stop shop' but the first stage in a series of support mechanisms. Although learning sets are set up, they are not sufficiently monitored and supported to reinforce the benefits of mutual support. The idea of self-organising students is laudable, but all too often it exists as a default position as a result of a lack of supportive intervention by the university. As a consequence, doctoral students tend to self-organise along demarcation lines established by the university: qualification studied, cohort year and status. Future research should explore how best HE is able to address these cross-cohort cleavages.

Conclusion:

This paper has explored the experiences and insights of students as members of a doctoral community, drawing ideas from Social Network Theory. Although HE may promote the idea of a cohesive doctoral community, there are significant organisational and social cleavages that militate against coherence and a common identity. This paper offers a theoretical contribution to the literature on doctoral education through reference to the notion of strong and weak ties within social networks. The findings from this research suggest that an integrative model of conditioning factors- operational, knowledge-related and social- may provide a more holistic understanding of the being a doctoral student, and of being part of a group of like-minded students. This paper argues that doctoral students may benefit from different types of social network and that these provide a range of support mechanisms which are key to success. To be effective, a community of doctoral students should be characterised by high levels of purposeful social interaction, community identity and a sense of belonging that is live and not nominal.

The past decade has witnessed significant improvements in the way that doctoral students are supported, most notably through a formal induction programme. However, much has still to be done in order to build on these good intentions, both in conceptualising issues and providing practical options. Future research could, for example, stage interviews at important stages in the doctoral journey, and this would generate more time-specific and deeper data. Secondly, future research could explore either different disciplines or combine a range of disciplines in a comparative approach. In this way, IPA could contribute to the corpus of work on the experience of doctoral students more widely. Nowadays, institutional initiatives are conceived in terms of cohorts of students, not necessarily individuals. This paper suggests that although a cohort model of doctoral study may have

advantages, particularly in the management of limited resources, it also has disadvantages, most notably in creating cohort-based sub-cultures and identity.

A vibrant, purposeful and coherent doctoral community has the potential to transform and enrich the experience of doctoral study. If we are to engage more fully with the ideas drawn from the literature on how different types of community support individuals, a paradigm shift away from 'naive provisionism' to one where we envisage a much more developed learning infrastructure that supports the diverse needs of doctoral students. Such a change will necessitate a revision of how universities conceive community, and indeed how different Faculties may resource different types of doctoral programme. It will involve changing practices in the use of information technology, social media and how students are managed. Instead of a spatial, time-oriented and programme-specific view of community, we need to move to a much more flexible model that can be virtual and real, cross-disciplinary and across doctoral programmes, with strong and weak ties that enable students to access support as they wish.

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