Using the PhD to train across the diversity of senior tourism careers - not just researchers

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TTRA 2019 Extended Abstract Template:
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Introduction

What is the current purpose and value of a PhD? Some ask whether it is training the future academic workforce as 'stewards of the discipline' or a more utilitarian contribution to industry? (Probert, 2014).

There is greater scope. There is real potential to recalibrate the PhD process as a networked knowledge exchange training ground for our future leaders in tourism - be they entrepreneurs, government policy-makers, industry practitioners, academic teachers or researchers.

In the past, studying for a doctorate was viewed as preparation for a job in academic teaching (Probert, 2014) and research. It taught topic depth and the skills to communicate with other academics through conferences and academic publications.

The world, including its expectations of value for money, has changed.

Not only is there a dearth of academic positions for emerging graduates (Schillebeeckx, et al 2013), the biggest shift in research education has been the changing view that primary outputs should emphasise transferable, generic or employability skills of a PhD as opposed to generating a thesis alone (McCulloch et al, 2015). Certainly, interdisciplinary and industry collaboration are becoming more common for doctoral education in Australia (Stengers, 2012). Similarly, international efforts to recalibrate aspects of the model, such as the UK based commercial Vitae Researcher Development Framework (Vitae, 2019) used at universities such as Oxford (Oxford Researcher Development Framework, 2017) and Manchester (University of Manchester, 2019), or the Citizen-Scholar model of the University of Western Sydney (University of Western Sydney, 2017), demonstrate valuable progress in extending the researcher role. However there is still a real need for fundamental reform that extends beyond researcher professional development and industry/research interface.

Reforming the way we educate our future tourism leaders is necessary to help navigate a world experiencing its fourth industrial revolution (as advances in technology drive wide-scale change), while simultaneously grappling with the impacts of climate change. Our future leaders need to be trained to manage effectively within the resulting economic/political climate, one that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (Llemaine & Bennett, 2014). It demands a rethink of strategies to continue to maximise all the benefits of travel (from health to economics) whilst minimising its footprint on our fragile earth. The central component will be to instill a common Knowledge Exchange (KE) mindset/skillset into the core curriculum. KE is an attitude that is characterised by a genuine sense of joint enterprise that appreciates real world knowledge and skills are as valuable as research knowledge. KE has emerged from growing evidence that successful dissemination, adoption and uptake of knowledge requires genuine, sustained interaction among research users, researchers, decision makers, and consumers (Nutley et a, 2007).

The shared KE attitude, and networked hub, permeating all careers spring-boarding from a tourism PhD is pivotal. It is pivotal because, although no one 'method, strategy or strategy *per se* has been convincingly shown to increase the exchange, or uptake of scientific evidence' (Contrandriopolous, 2012, p. 30), there is strong evidence that structures, culture and resources have a tremendous impact, and that leadership, and knowledge of the existing social network is critical (Contrandriopolous, 2012, p. 30, 33).

A KE centric PhD, designed for the contemporary diversity of tourism careers will build a core of networked professionals that is a power source for our future leaders. The training focus will emphasise "wicked" tourism problems and building networked solutions from policy, practice, research, technology and commercial perspectives.

The result will be a continuously expanding cadre of networked potential tourism leaders who use their PhD as a shared launch-pad for change.

Literature Review

Assumptions underpinning the PhD model remain largely unchanged since its development post WWII (Probert, 2014). The model is still primarily designed to build depth of knowledge to be shared with other academics though peer reviewed publications and conference presentations. Research is all too often conducted on people or organisations who are labelled as "end-users" or beneficiaries of information channelled through researcher driven curiosity.

Certainly, there are significant and powerful shifts, such as the channels for those electing entrepreneurial and/or commercialisation paths (e.g. the New Venture Institute at Flinders University) however, in the main, the model remains fundamentally unchanged, and thereby limiting its value for students planning a career outside academic teaching and research.

Tacking the so-called 'soft skills', such as personal effectiveness or skills in engagement and communication, onto the PhD process are all valuable add-ons but there is a need for fundamental change at the core.

Part of the challenge is developing a shared understanding of the place of academic research in the real world. Channelling our inner Foucault – it is worth considering that 'research' can never be a neutral activity, but, like its companions, 'knowledge' and 'evidence', is a privileged, socially situated, term that reflects perceptions of priorities and power (Nutley, 2007). Similarly, it is worth questioning assumptions that research is a 'transferable, factual product' when it can equally be regarded as a 'contested bundle of concepts subject to interpretation and tactical use' (Haynes et al, 2011, p. 1047), or even 'a complex deployment of both technical expertise and power, dressed up in the guise of rationality'. (Nutley, 2007, p. 25).

A KE mindset requires students to understand the power, privileges, limitations, and responsibilities of academic research. Students will be grounded in the economic, environmental and political implications of their research. They will understand who is funding their research, and why. They will scope out and engage with their potential audiences/partners/funders and be

trained to anticipate (and manage) likely levels of polarisation. Students will be exposed to the nuances influencing government policy; the intricacies of practice implementation; the power of community action, as much as the complexities of start-ups. They will be trained to identify and influence across systems. They will learn to value other forms of systematic and critical enquiry that increase knowledge plus build their own deeper conceptualisation of evidence that is more than just academic research findings.

And, while the KE attitude is pivotal, the students will learn the essential cultural understanding, and operational skills, to maximise their effectiveness - whether working in government policy, industry policy, operations or research.

Another part of the challenge is the large gap between research and practice. This is nothing new. An overwhelming proportion of research is isolated from mainstream thinking. It is sitting, unread, in academic journals – not shaping public debates or building competitive advantage. It has been estimated that an average journal article is read completely by no more than 10 people. Up to 1.5 million peer-reviewed articles are published annually, yet many are ignored, even within academic communities – 82% of articles published in humanities journals are not cited even once (Biswas & Kirchher, 2015). In health sciences, there is a well-known narrative, labelled the 17 year odyssey, that claims it can take 17 years to turn 14% of original research to the benefit of patient care (Green, 2008).

Explanations for this cascade of lost opportunities include changing priorities for research funding, unintended consequences of peer review of grants, academic appointment/promotion criteria and the criteria for research synthesis. Other explanations fall under the massive umbrella known as organisational culture: its often invisible tribal mores as much as the distinct languages and incentives, that define 'how we do things here' and thus can so effectively block, or facilitate, cross-system collaboration. In other words, researchers are separated from mainstream practice and policy.

The frustration at the massive societal, and economic, opportunity cost is evident at the political level. The tagline 'Forget publishing, deliver for Australians' summarises the arguments made by then Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham when launching the Engagement and Impact Assessment in 2016:

- 'ensure that taxpayer funds …[are] targeted at research and initiatives that would ultimately pay dividends for Australian young people, old people, mums and dads'

- 'it is about incentivising the smart and talented people working in our labs and universities to better focus on research that has wider economic and social benefit'

- 'testing about how we can measure the value of research against things that mean something, rather than only allocating funding to researchers who spend their time trying to get published in journals' (Matchett, 2016).

Even more pointed are comments from Bertil Andersson of Nanyang Technological University who states…. 'applied research is necessary for the survival of the race' (Andersson, 2015).

The most effective way to deliver applied research is to work together. The thinking behind such a model is not new. In his classic work for the WHO on the Unity of Health, to improve the performance of the health service delivery system, Charles Boelen outlined the value of 'mutually reinforcing links with other links and partners… as not only intellectually rewarding but strategically important for support, expansion and impact'. He outlined the strategic value of encouraging productive and sustainable partnerships between policy-makers, health managers, health professionals, communities, and academic institutions. Known as the Partnership Pentagon, this framework is designed to deliver a health system based on peoples' needs (Boelen, 2000, p. 2).

This multi-layered KE framework can be used just as effectively across tourism. It can be used to rework the PhD model from its origins as an isolated academic model to one that seeks integrated value from policy, practice, research, consumers and communities.

Networked tourism PhD graduates will be trained to think, and work, KE wherever their career takes them and utilise this as their contribution to sustainable tourism, and a return on the investment in their education.

Methodology

The reviewers correctly commented this paper is in early stages of reflection, and not suitable for an oral presentation in the traditional sense.

It is, however, a paper that raises issues that are most appropriate for discussion about the best ways to train our future professional leadership collective - locally, regionally and internationally. Such discussions would benefit not just from input from the academic audience of TTRA, but everyone who is concerned about the optimal ways of training, and connecting, the breadth of the future leadership (across industry as much as research) to manage the complexities of our current, and future, global tourism challenges.

As Allyson Hewitt, a recent Adelaide Thinker in Residence observed,

> *'Designing programs in ivory towers doesn't work. We have to think differently about how we do this work. Evidence is necessary but it is not sufficient. We need to create the ability within these institutions to receive and implement innovations. While we are building the supply of innovation (new ideas, programs, ventures, or services) we also have to understand the demand side – will these existing services be ready and able to adopt these new innovations? Our work is to ensure alignment between both the supply and demand side of the innovation equation.' (Hewitt, 2017 p. 18)*

Equally, discussions on upturning the conventional PhD, and designing the KE PhD cannot be done in an ivory tower. The supply of innovation needs to understand the demand side. It

requires engagement, sustained commitment, resources, leadership, and political support by a range of partners.

Potential contributors to the discussion could include:

Representatives bodies, e.g. Travel and Tourism Research Association;

Universities: preferably a local/regional collaboration of universities that grasp how a tourism KE leadership focus would be a major point of difference for marketing and student recruitment;

Major tourism industry operators;

University Councils of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies;

Funders: a multi-level university/tourism industry/government and major tourism private sector collaboration. Founding collaborators will be distinguished by their commitment to sustainable tourism plus their willingness to invest long-term to build systems wide research, policy and practice expertise in tourism in order to achieve substantive impact;

Federal and State Government Tourism Departments;

Federal Tertiary Education Departments.

Results

This is space where I am working: facilitating workshops designed to challenge the mindsets of PhD candidates, and their supervisors. It is part of a wider process to influence discussions on better ways to structure the contemporary PhD as a strategic, societal resource. As part of this process, I am using my radio program, *Travelling Life*, to expand ways people view tourism, and ultimately, fuel discussion on optimal strategies to train our future leadership collective.

The key results, however, will come from delegates at this Conference. This is the forum that has the potential to significantly challenge mindsets, to challenge assumptions about current educational models, and the value they deliver for the senior professional mix needed to shape contemporary, and future, tourism issues.

Conclusion and Discussion

The PhD is a major, and resource intensive, educational process that is currently centred on building researcher knowledge and skill.

It is an expensive way of training only one element of the professional mix that is required to shape contemporary, and future, tourism issues.

While effective operators develop a KE mindset, as well as the essential attitudinal and operational skills, over the length of their careers, these are not commonly taught nor widely supported by university educational incentives. This is why it is important to consider ways of

reforming the funding, incentives, training, and outputs of the whole PhD training process from one that traditionally reflects one-dimensional thinking.

It is timely to extend the model as a knowledge exchange platform and networked power hub for emerging leaders across all facets of tourism - from entrepreneurs to government policy analysts as well as researchers.

If we are to fully engage in global discussions on the future of tourism - we need to equip, train and network all our future leaders - the knowledge exchange PhD model is the way.

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