

# Doctoral Research Work in Strategic Management: Perspectives for Executives & Part-time Candidates.

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*Doctoral research is one of the main sources for knowledge in the subject domain of Strategic Management (SM). There is increased incidence of working executives pursuing part-time doctoral program. Such candidates with experience in business strategy are valuable because they bring substantive strategy related insights in the process of research. Theory development would be more grounded to the realities in their dissertations. However, such candidates are often uncertain regarding the research process path to be undertaken. The author in this article sets a roadmap through figures and tables. This would help such doctoral candidates to comprehend what is expected of them and what they need to do to attain their doctoral research destination with process efficacy and efficiency.*

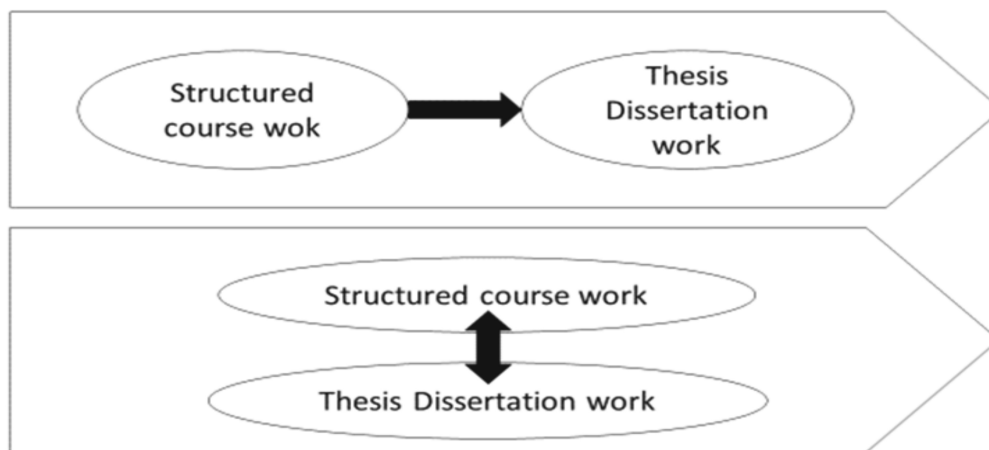
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## Introduction

Doctoral studies are unlike others like Under-Graduate (UG), Graduate (G) and Post -Graduate (PG) studies (Shambaugh, 2000; Bedeian, Cavazos, Hunt & Jauch, 2010). This stems from a number of factors such as UG /G /PG studies are structured and there is relatively restricted scope of theoretical or methodological self-exploration by the candidates (Lindsay, Breen & Jenkins, 2002; Balster, Pfund, Rediske & Branchaw, 2010). This is specially so at UG and graduate levels (Dong, 1998). Beyond UG, G and PG studies lies doctoral degree and at the doctoral level, there is both a phase of structured knowledge gathering as well as the subsequent phase of knowledge creation (Park, 2005). The knowledge creation part arrives post the knowledge reception stage (Hayton, 2015; Hasrati & Street, 2009). However, a doctoral program might vary (Kara, 2018; Robins & Kanowski, 2008) as depicted in fig.1.

What one needs to remember is that there are two parts in doctoral work;

Fig. 1 Structure of Doctoral Program



knowledge gathering and knowledge creation (Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007). This could be sequential or move in parallel in an iterative fashion (Heracleous & Mekkaoui, 2018; Hayton, 2015; Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007). However, independent of the structure of the doctoral program in management a new entrant is often confronted with the quest for seeking a path to go about the doctoral program (Grover, 2007; Heracleous & Mekkaoui, 2018; Kara, 2015). What is an appropriate mechanism of knowledge creation is a quest that is unknown to most candidates (Woodhouse, 2015; Hayton, 2015; Mewburn, 2012; Morrell, 2018).

### Context of Executives Undertaking Part-time Doctoral Research

Working professionals enrolling for doctoral program often have had a break from formal academic programs (UG/G/PG) because of their working life (Cross, 2014; Koehler, et al., 2013). Such students often feel much burdened (with the

impending study load) and very perplexed (regarding what is expected as outcome of doctoral program which is different from other programs) (Grover, 2007; Kara, 2015). Doctoral programs in Strategic Management (SM) are often pursued by working executives in many parts of the world (Cross, 2014; Koehler, et al., 2013). Working executive doctoral programs are good in the sense that the experiential knowledge (from the world of practice specially relating to SM) collide with theoretical knowledge base (Banerjee & Morley, 2013). This is a potent concoction for both theory development (inductively thinking) in the field of SM as well as for influencing SM practice (which management academics are often perceived to lack off) (Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007). Thus, a robust doctoral program on SM for work-

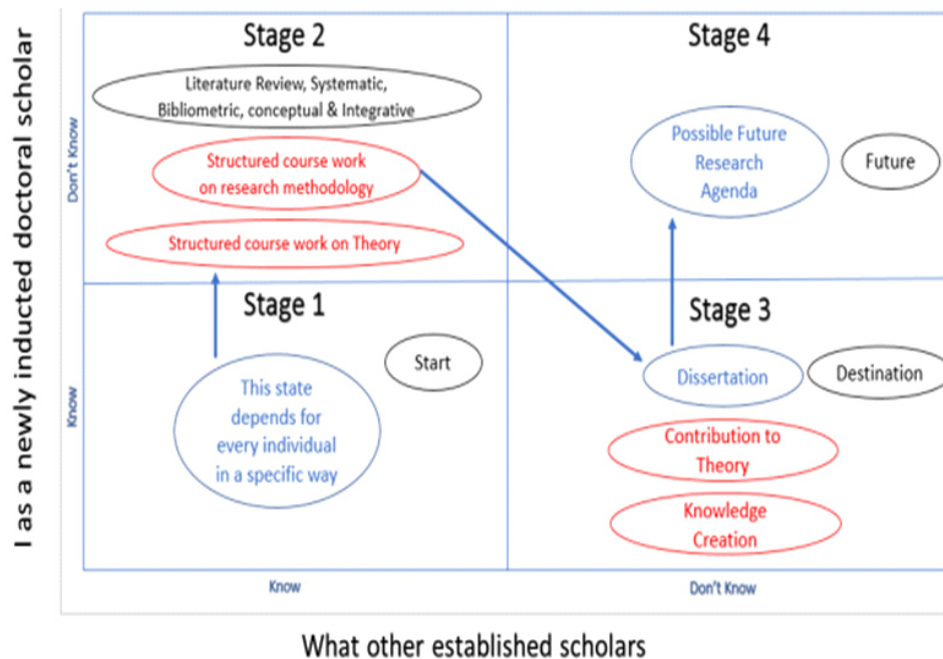
**A robust doctoral program on SM for working professionals is a necessity for healthy relevant knowledge creation in the field.**

ing professionals is a necessity for healthy relevant knowledge creation in the field (Tushman & O'Reilly III, 2007). For a good doctoral program on SM to progress in a wholesome manner, during the program initiation stage a roadmap needs to be provided (Cooper, Junginger & Lockwood, 2009). This perspective roadmap provided to doctoral students would help them to comprehend where they stand presently and where they are expected to move on to. The next section deliberates upon this aspect.

### Roadmap

Students admitted to a SM doctoral program carries with them some knowledge as an individual (Kara, 2018; Cross, 2014). This is a mix of theoretical knowledge in SM as well as professional experience in SM (Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007; Koehler, et al., 2013). To provide them a road map the author conceptualized a matrix depicted as fig.-2.

Fig. 2 Newly Inducted Strategic Management Studies Doctoral Scholar Road Map



In fig.-2, there are two dimensions on knowledge level in SM. These being the knowledge base of the newly inducted doctoral student and the knowledge base of the other (established) SM scholars. There are two phases, firstly, what is known, i.e. what candidate and/or what

others know. Secondly, what is unknown, i.e. what the candidate and/or what others don't know. This, thus, can be conceptualized in to a 2x2 matrix with four distinct states. State-I, the start phase is the beginning of the doctoral journey. At this stage the newly inducted doctoral

student carries with him or her a certain body of SM domain knowledge (known to self) (Kara, 2015; Cross, 2014). This of course had been created by other SM scholars in the domain of SM knowledge (Hayton, 2015; Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007). This is mostly based upon SM text books, reviews, empirical articles on SM, the new doctoral student had read during UG/G/PG courses on SM and related subjects (Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007; Boyd, Crook, Lê & Smith, 2019). For working executives this SM knowledge base of know-know (as we term it here) is a contextually relative affair (Mewburn, 2012; Morrell, 2018). Certain new doctoral scholars who had undergone master's program in management recently or specifically with concentration on SM (having undergone a large pool of elective subjects on SM), would probably be more exposed to the current state of knowledge in SM subject domain (Woodhouse, 2015; Hayton, 2015; Mewburn, 2012; Morrell, 2018; Kara, 2015). Whereas the ones who had a gap of 7-10 years subsequent to UG/G/PG courses would find themselves less conversant with the latest SM theoretical literature base (Cross, 2014; Koehler, et al., 2013). However, such doctoral newbies would be very well aware regarding the practicalities of SM practices (Banerjee & Morley, 2013; Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007). Thus, the insights would be pivotal in their doctoral level research journey (Boyd, Crook, Lê & Smith, 2019). In a nutshell, at state-I, every individual already is endowed with his or her own level of knowledge and understanding (Mewburn, 2012; Kara, 2015) of SM. The doctoral research pro-

gram can be viewed as filling a glass (individual) with water (knowledge) metaphorically speaking, thus the glass is thus prefilled with some amount of water (knowledge) (Brush et al., 2003; Kara, 2015; Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007).

In state-II, the journey of SM doctoral research is carried out. It consists of two stages namely structured and self-contribution (Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Kara, 2015). At the structured stage the doctoral candidate is provided with course work (Kim & Karau, 2009) in SM theory and SM extant literature. Further, doctoral candidates are also provided with inputs on research methodology applied in SM empirical research during this stage (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Malfroy, 2005; Baran, 2010). It is important for a doctoral candidate to assimilate as much knowledge (Woodhouse, 2015) as possible regarding various SM theories as well as the potency of the various research methodologies already applied in the domain of SM (Kwan, 2010; Jonker & Pennink, 2010). A sample representation of both the various SM theories as well as the varied SM research methodologies has been tabulated in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 2, is a synthesis of the works of prominent researchers in the field of SM (Hitt, Gimeno & Hoskisson, 1998; Dess, Ireland & Hitt, 1990; Molina-Azorin, 2012; Snow & Thomas, 1994; Hamilton & Nickerson, 2003; Hoskisson, Wan, Yiu & Hitt, 1999).

**Table 1 Illustrative List of Strategic Management Theories**

S.No	Theory	Prominent researchers
1	Resource Based View	Wernerfelt, 1984; Peteraf, 1993; Barney, 2001; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992
2	Dynamic Capabilities Perspective	Helfat & Peteraf, 2003; Winter, 2003; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece & Pisano, 2003
3	Knowledge Based View	Grant, 1996; Kraaijenbrink, Spender & Groen, 2010
4	Industrial Organization Theory	Porter, 1981; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993
5	Institutional Theory	Peng, 2003; Zhao, Fisher, Lounsbury & Miller, 2017
6	Transaction Cost Economies	Williamson, 1981; Lyons, 1995
7	Stakeholder Theory	Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, Wicks & Parmar, 2004
8	Agency Theory	Eisenhardt, 1989; Shapiro, 2005

**Table 2 Illustrative List of Research Methodologies in Strategic Management**

S.No	Methodology	Researchers
1	Grounded theory	Hitt, Gimeno, & Hoskisson, 1998; Dess,
2	Content analysis	Ireland & Hitt, 1990 ; Molina-Azorin, 2012 ;
3	Phenomenology	Snow & Thomas, 1994; Hamilton &
4	Narrative analysis	Nickerson, 2003; Hoskisson, Wan, Yiu, &
5	Case study research	Hitt , 1999)
6	Correlation and regression	
7	Model development	
8	Descriptive data analysis	
9	Multivariate data analysis	
10	Econometric methods	

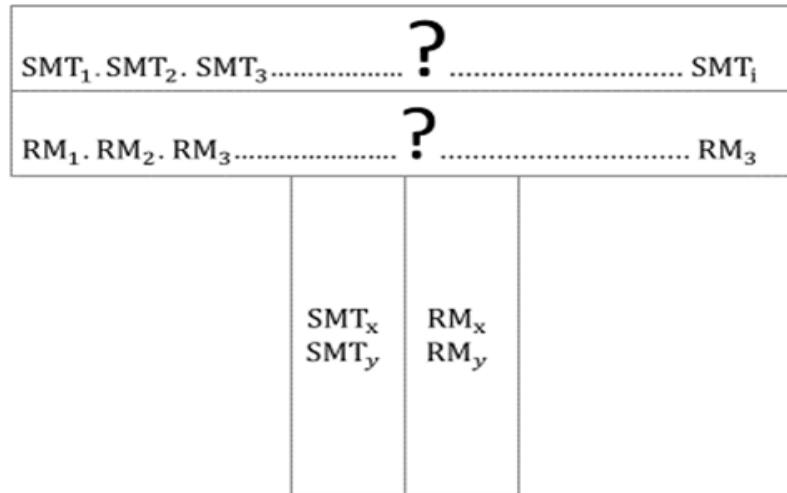
The more varied the knowledge regarding SM theories the doctoral scholar secures at the coursework stage, the more will be the bandwidth of SM knowledge s(he) would secure (Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007; Jonker & Pennink, 2010). This also holds true for research methodology applied in the field of SM (Boyd, Crook, Lê & Smith, 2019; Baran, 2010). Doctoral research in the field of SM is about in-depth knowledge as well as specific applications of research methodologies (Jonker & Pennink, 2010; Baran, 2010). Thus, the width of SM knowledge would help the student in identifying which SM theory and which

research methodology to apply (Boyd, Crook, Lê & Smith, 2019; Baran, 2010). This has been depicted in fig.3.

**The width of SM knowledge would help the student in identifying which SM theory and which research methodology to apply.**

In fig. 3, the various SM theories has been depicted as SMT1, SMT2.....SMTi while the various research methodologies has been depicted as RM1, RM2.....RMi. If a candidate is aware of a wide range of SM theories

Fig. 3 Discovery of Appropriate theory & Research Methodology



and applied SM research methodologies, then the candidate would find it easier to seek the most relevant SM theory and appropriate research methodology (Baran, 2010; Jonker & Pennink, 2010; Boyd, Crook, Lê & Smith, 2019). The self-propelled aspect of journey at state-II, entails that the doctoral scholar post completion of the course work undertakes a literature review (LR) to identify the researchable gaps still present (Hart, 2018). The scholar has to undertake a systematic literature review (SLR) (Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016; Jesson, Matheson & Lacey, 2011). At this state, the doctoral scholar is expected to undertake a bibliometric literature review to ascertain the number of research output over the years (articles, books and such others), prominent countries and institutions of research and such parameters (Hood & Wilson, 2001; Osareh, 1996). These could be analyzed and presented for trend analysis over the years (Harsanyi, 1993; Hood & Wilson, 2001). Further, to add a scientific dimension to

the literature review process, co-citation, citation, co-word and such analysis could be carried out (Osareh, 1996). The articles selected for analysis could be the ones listed in ‘Scopus’ or ‘Web of Science’ or such reputed journals to ascertain the contour of SM literature as well as the dominant schools representing the body of SM knowledge (Woodhouse, 2015; Cooper, 1984; Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016; Jesson, Matheson & Lacey, 2011). Further, a chronological analysis of the concepts provided by the dominant SM researchers in the field could be undertaken (Hart, 2018; Osareh, 1996; Hood & Wilson, 2001). The doctoral scholar by undertaking a conceptual literature review could describe and deliberate on the various theoretical concepts (Woodhouse, 2015; Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016; Jesson, Matheson & Lacey, 2011) on SM in extant literature. This would help the scholar to identify what could be the theoretical gaps present that could be pursued on for his or her research (Hart, 2018; Osareh,

1996; Hood & Wilson, 2001). Thus, conceptual literature review would help in ascertaining the research gaps available in SM domain (Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016; Jesson, Matheson & Lacey, 2011). The scholar could also undertake an integrative LR and this would be a synthesis of the various theoretical SM aspects present in extant literature with a holistic perspective (Cooper, 1984). This would help the doctoral student to not only look at the tress (sub fields of SM) but also at the forest (SM as nested in business and management literature) (Woodhouse, 2015; Cooper, 1984; Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016; Jesson, Matheson & Lacey, 2011). In other words, it is important to anchor the literature while moving towards the researchable gaps but while doing so, the position of the researchable gaps in the entire gamut of SM theoretical landscape has to be mapped (Cooper, 1984; Hart, 2018; Osareh, 1996). LR has to be undertaken not just regarding the theoretical dimension of SM but also regarding the research methods employed in the empirical studies on SM (Baran, 2010; Hart, 2018). The analysis of research methods would help the doctoral scholar to comprehend what would be the most appropriate RM for his or her research objectives in the doctoral dissertation (Jonker & Pennink, 2010; Baran, 2010). Thus, the systematic LR is not just regarding analyzing SM theories but also regarding research methodologies de-

ployed by researchers (Baran, 2010; Hart, 2018). Further for the doctoral student clarity regarding, the context of the study, appropriate unit of analysis, unit of observation, sampling, construct operationalization (Hallinger, 2011; Hayton 2015; Baran, 2010), appropriate data collection method and such other aspects could be expected post completion of LR (Baran, 2010). In-between state-II and state- III (named the Destination), there is the doctoral research routine activities from 'Data collection' to 'Data analyses (Heracleous & Mekkaoui, 2018; Woodhouse, 2015). Thus, post this process the doctoral student reaches state-III the 'Destination'. The doctoral scholar then reports the findings as the thesis or doctoral dissertation (Davis & Parker, 2000). In the thesis, the doctoral scholar weaves his or her findings with the extant SM literature conversation (Boyd, Crook, Lê & Smith, 2019; Mewburn, 2012). These findings and literature tapestry created, are the new knowledge creation (Morrell, 2018). A working executive is expected to contribute theoretically which is more grounded to practice (Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007). This is because a theoretical perspective is developed (either radically or incrementally) (Hayton 2015). Thus, contribution to knowledge occur and in essence this marks the destination for the doctoral dissertation (Morrell, 2018; Woodhouse, 2015; Jonker & Pennink, 2010).

There is the fourth quadrant of unknowns still (no knowledge for both the doctoral scholar as well as for all other researchers) (Heracleous & Mekkaoui, 2018; Woodhouse, 2015). This is the great

**It is important to anchor the literature while moving towards the researchable gaps.**

unknown which future researchers would attempt to push it to the other three quadrants (Hayton, 2015; Mewburn, 2012; Morrell, 2018; Kara, 2015). This is specially widely present for chaotic business environment (Bhattacharyya, Rangarajan & Vyas, 2011), demanding social landscape (Bhattacharyya, 2012) and emerging economies (Bhattacharyya, 2011). This piece of write up provides a general outline regarding how a new SM doctoral student should work on progressing the research. The journey was divided into four states namely (I- 'Start', II- 'Journey', III- 'Destination' and IV- 'Future'). The roadmap provided would help SM doctoral students to comprehend, plan and assess their progress well. Further, the journey outcomes regarding SM course work, SM literature review, SM research methodology studies and such aspects were highlighted. It is hoped that this piece would help new part-time working executive doctoral students to pursue their SM doctoral research with increased efficacy and efficiency.

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