

# **Facilitating High-Achievers to Tell Their Stories of Professional Entrepreneurialism: Lessons from the Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Public Works**

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**Key Words: social entrepreneurship, therapy entrepreneurs, re-storying, achievement, impact, work-based learning**

## **Abstract**

The Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Public Works, a Middlesex University and Metanoia Institute joint programme, was launched in 2007 in response to demand from senior and accomplished practitioners in the fields of psychotherapy, counselling and psychology for a route to doctoral recognition of substantial contributions to therapeutic practice. The therapy professions are by nature complex, insecure, constantly changing and have, until recently, provided little formal post-doctoral structure or coherent CPD. The number and quality of applications to the programme evidences a felt need among such senior professionals for the opportunity to audit their achievements; candidates report that they greatly value being supported to find their 'voice' and tell their story.

The authors describe how the programme team has developed the existing Middlesex DProf model of a public works doctorate to enable these practitioners to tell their story. Academic advisers have been struck by misconceptions (from a professional doctorate perspective) of academic value. Since candidates entering the programme generally hold restrictive views of original contribution to knowledge, it has been important to find ways to encourage these highly-successful professionals to 're-story' their achievements. All demonstrate skills and outlooks characteristic of the entrepreneur and have considerably advanced in the entrepreneurial life cycle (Leadbeater). The programme team has found it necessary to draw on disciplines including work based learning and industrial sociology alongside psychotherapy, (including narrative therapy), to enable candidates to understand, organize and present a full picture of their achievements. The authors draw on 'case' material to illustrate how the team has found methods of synthesizing these different ways of conceptualizing 'achievement' congruent with the 'therapeutic entrepreneur' status of the doctoral candidates. They also suggest implications of their experience for our understanding of 'achievement' in the context of work-based learning.

## **Introduction**

The information in this paper is based on and extends the 'position paper' given by Dr Simon du Plock and Prof Derek Portwood at the Middlesex WBL Conference, in May 2008. As Head of Post-Qualification Doctorates Department at Metanoia Institute Dr du Plock collaborated with Prof Portwood and Prof Paul Barber to develop a variant

of the Middlesex Doctorate by Public Works to meet the needs of senior qualified psychotherapists, counsellors and psychologists. Derek has pioneered work-based learning at higher education level in the UK. Paul is a member of Metanoia Institute core faculty.

We are mindful in reporting on the development of the DPsych by Public Works of the ethical responsibilities of 'insider researchers' - researchers who undertake research in their own organizations (Costley & Gibbs, 2006). We have decided, given the relatively small numbers of candidates and their high profiles within the world of psychotherapy, to present brief and anonymized illustrations of issues and dilemmas experienced by candidates. These illustrations are intended to be indicative of general themes.

We (Simon and Derek) chose to take the opportunity of the conference to give a 'position paper' rather than a fully worked-up presentation because we wanted to adopt an interactive seminar style to optimize our engagement with colleagues and share with them our experience of developing ways for senior therapy professionals to audit their achievements. For us, the conference was timely, since it provided an opportunity for the programme team as a whole to reflect on the experience of working with the first nine candidates over the initial six months since their entry to the programme. This is the period of intensive orientation to the culture of the programme during which candidates prepare for registration for the doctoral award. Writing now, a further three months into the life of the programme, it is possible also for us (Simon and Paul) to reflect on the process of registration and the period during which candidates prepare for final submission for the award. In doing so we hope to share a sense of the steep learning curve which both team members and candidates have experienced, and to convey some initial insights regarding how high-achievers can be best supported to tell their stories

### **The Pedagogical Context**

The Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Professional Studies (DPsych) was first validated in 1998 as a joint programme offered by Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University through the National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships, now the Institute of Work Based Learning (IWBL). Over the past decade the programme has flourished and currently has approximately 40 graduates who have made considerable contributions to practice in psychotherapy and related fields. The programme team has been successful in developing a scholarly community within which these graduates and the candidate body (currently comprising approximately 70 researchers) are able to network and disseminate their work.

While the DPsych has attracted a stream of mid-career professionals who matched our target market, the programme team became increasingly aware of the appearance at briefing sessions of very senior therapists, often in the latter stages of their career and with strong research track records, who did not hold a doctorate. It was clear that undertaking a minimum of three years of doctoral research to obtain such an award was not an attractive, or indeed relevant, option for practitioners holding key clinical posts. Moreover, the majority of these individuals functioned at CEO or higher management level and so already evidenced the 'excellent practitioner' qualities

which the DPsych was designed to promote in candidates. While it might initially seem surprising that individuals were (and are) able to reach such key positions without a doctorate, it should be remembered that psychotherapy, counselling and even psychology, like other 'helping professions', have only recently obtained professional status. They are by nature complex, insecure, constantly changing and, until recently, provided little formal post-doctoral structure or coherent CPD. Consequently, the routes individuals have taken through the kaleidoscope of available trainings and professional validations have been idiosyncratic.

Relative lack of uniform structures have, paradoxically, provided opportunities for resourceful practitioners to achieve positions (both by acquiring them and creating them) which would not have been possible in a more formally-regulated environment. How the introduction of the Health Professions Council and increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice will impact on this situation remains to be seen.

It became clear to the programme team, in discussion with these senior practitioners, that what they sought was an opportunity to undertake an audit of existing achievements, rather than supervision to undertake new projects. We were interested to note that while these practitioners had often made significant contributions to the literature in their specialist area, they had not chosen to pursue the PhD by Publications route. We speculated that this might be because this route would discount their substantial impact in the field.

Given our awareness of the demand for an award which would acknowledge major existing achievement, we naturally looked to the Middlesex DProf since this appeared to provide a suitable vehicle for this group. Metanoia Institute was successful in negotiating with Middlesex University in its bid to offer the award of DPsych by Public Works and MProf by Public Works, as counter-parts to the University's DProf/MProf programme. The new awards were designed on the same principles as the Middlesex University DProf/MProf by Public Works and are assessed by the same criteria as the existing Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University DPsych/MProf awards.

### **From a Doctorate by Professional Studies to a Doctorate by Public Works**

The Metanoia team found that the philosophy of the DPsych provided an ideal platform from which to introduce variations to the generic DProf/MProf format in order to reflect the needs of senior therapists. That it provides such a platform is due to its distinctiveness among psychotherapy doctorates. The philosophy at the heart of the DPsych is the belief that professional practitioners should seek continuously to update and expand their application of theory, to evaluate their own practice and to critique their own assumptions with particular attention to current developments and research outcomes in the field. This work is not undertaken in isolation (as it is typically in the traditional PhD) but in regular collaboration with other interested parties. Candidates are required to produce a 'Final Product' - essentially a research and development enterprise as opposed to a research based thesis. The doctoral programme encourages practice based evidence in research. Successful candidates are expected to evidence:

1. Professional experience developed continuously through active and effective engagement with individuals and groups of clients in a wide range of contexts
2. Forms of research resulting in 'products' of demonstrable interest and usefulness to practitioners
3. Leadership qualities and skills whereby professionals are able to set up training, consultancy and organisations dedicated to psychotherapy provision

This focus promotes an ethos of research needing to be useful and active in the world, making a difference and positively influencing the systems in which we work and live.

The DPpsych is therefore designed not only to support candidates on a research journey which enables them to gain a D-level qualification; the programme team foster a personal and professional development journey which enables practitioners to situate themselves at the centre of their professional work to date, and to identify as 'excellent practitioners'. The team define the excellent practitioner as one who strives constantly to update and expand application of theory to practice, critiques their own assumptions with particular attention to current developments in the field, and makes useful contributions to practice and knowledge via research.

Programme publicity emphasizes it aims to nurture the mid-career professional. Many applicants are attracted by this ethos, and many graduates report that while they valued obtaining a doctorate they were particularly glad to do so in an environment which promoted personal and professional development.

Candidates are launched into this development work by undertaking a formal Review of Personal and Professional Learning, or RPPL, in which they review and critically reflect on the links between their past experiences, current position and future intentions on their doctoral journey. Such a reflection and the sense of agency which candidates obtain, parallels a therapeutic process in which clients may reflect and re-story. Explicit in this process is an understanding of the 'excellent practitioner' as professional 'mover and shaker' in their field.

The programme team have found it helpful to conceptualize the new Doctorate by Public Works as a vast RPPL. Our experience is that in the course of their journey through the DPpsych candidates increasingly re-story themselves as professionals who can, and actually via their Final Products do, make a difference to the way psychological therapies are conceived and delivered. The Doctorate by Public Works shares this focus on professional experience, products and leadership. It differs, though, in that candidates do not undertake new research to evidence these. Public Works candidates have already made a substantial contribution to psychological therapy through a range of publications and/or public works such as setting up and running a psychotherapy or counselling service, generating and applying policy documents, strategy plans, major organizational change, innovative and successful training programmes etc, which have been pivotal in the field and commended, reviewed and respected by peers. The challenge to these candidates is to make and substantiate a claim for the doctoral status of completed projects which are in the

public domain and can be shown to have had significant impact on the field of therapy.

### **Professional Entrepreneurialism**

It quickly became apparent to us that those therapists who approached us, interested to become candidates on the Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Public Works were, while quite distinct in many ways, united by their entrepreneurialism. This entrepreneurialism was, moreover, of a particular type which we came to conceptualize as ‘professional entrepreneurialism’. Entrepreneurialism, *per se*, is not a concept much met with in the psychotherapy literature. In its most frequent usage it seems to denote profit-driven individualism – a far cry from attending to the psychological needs of our fellow human beings. Notions of ‘social entrepreneurship’ which have emerged recently in the US and Britain appear less individualistic:

Entrepreneurship is the process of doing something new for the purpose of creating wealth for the individual and adding value to society.

(Kao, 2006, p. 69)

Kelly (1993), an American writer, uses the term social entrepreneurship to describe ‘conventional’ businesses that incorporate ‘social’ or ‘ethical’ aims into their mission and objectives. Roper & Cheney (2005) provide a useful critical perspective on the term.

Leadbeater, perhaps the most influential UK author in this field, conceptualizes social entrepreneurs as:

Entrepreneurial: they take under-utilized, discarded resources and spot ways of using them to satisfy unmet needs

Innovative: they create new services and products, new ways of dealing with problems, often by bringing together approaches that have traditionally been kept separate

Transformatory: they transform the institutions they are in charge of...Most importantly, they can transform the neighbourhoods and communities they serve by opening up possibilities for self-development

(Ibid, 1997, p. 53)

It was immediately obvious to the programme team that successful applicants were presenting completed projects which evidenced their ability to be entrepreneurial, innovative and transformatory in Leadbeater’s terms. Their projects mobilised often discarded resources – both human and physical – to engage with intractable social problems. They were both entrepreneurial and innovative in identifying and satisfying unmet needs. Our awareness of this characteristic of applicants may have been assisted by the fact that the culture of the Metanoia Institute itself is one of

entrepreneurship, given the founding and early development of the Institute by a small group of charismatic, innovative leaders.

Leadbeater proposes an entrepreneurial life cycle which is particularly relevant for making sense of the needs and aspirations of our Public Works candidates:

Successful social entrepreneurs create a cycle of development that goes through several stages. Social entrepreneurs start with an endowment of social capital in the form of a network of contacts and supporters. This gives them access to physical and financial capital, which they can use to develop the organization. The next step is the recruitment of further key people (human capital) to allow the organization to expand. If this phase is successful the organization can enjoy strong growth with the creation of a string of new products and services as well as an infrastructure of buildings. This infrastructure becomes the social dividend of the process and the basis for a further phase of investment.

(Ibid., p. 51).

Our applicants were considerably advanced in this entrepreneurial life cycle – in fact they had generally gone round this cycle several times in the process of developing successive public works. A crucial difference between them and Leadbeater’s social entrepreneurs, however, was that they did not consciously identify themselves as entrepreneurs. Two further differences seemed significant: they identified as both professional therapists and organizational leaders; they were more concerned about social change than personal wealth. It seemed to us that this group could accurately be described as ‘professional entrepreneurs’, since essentially, they were acting as entrepreneurs within the therapy professions.

### **The Relational Inter-face**

Advising cum supervising such doctoral candidates offers a unique challenge. These are individuals at the top of their profession, psychotherapists with a wealth of ‘unconscious competence’ who have embodied their trade, whose blind-spots often include the best of them – as their professional learning is embodied to the degree it is intuitively integrated within all they do. Practitioners at this level need a special kind of encouragement, plus extra support to face again the ‘conscious incompetence’ entry on the programme awakens. Because they have such rich a store of experiential wisdom, the challenge to put the non-verbal into words and bring the unconscious to light become primary aims of the supervisory relationship.

Candidates entering the programme generally held restrictive views of original contribution to knowledge, views which privileged traditional academic ‘products’ such as books and journal articles, and which largely ignored evidence of their impact on their specialist field. ‘Laura’, for instance, came to the programme riding upon the achievement of a single book, but oblivious to the international consultancy and change agency she had fostered in her career. The book, a more traditional academic

product was foremost to her mind, yet in dialogue this paled into insignificance as the hands-on building of international relationships, political impact and founding of training organisation in foreign climes began to surface. ‘Anne’, a leader in child psychotherapy, came to interview emphasizing her authorship of a major text book – yet in discussion with the team it emerged that her real passion was a series of short ‘picture books’ designed to be read by children experiencing psychological difficulties. In these, and in other cases, the traditional academic artefacts conveyed only part of the story of what made these people and their contribution so special. The programme team quickly learned that it was important to encourage candidates to re-story themselves in a way which did greater justice to their core passion – ‘passion’ was not only permissible, it was essential.

As for the deeper psychology, the programme team gained a sense that these high achievers often either forget to celebrate their gains before they move on to the next thing or they fail to integrate or internalise their success. They are not so much ‘driven’ as eager to create, and enthusiastic, in the manner of artists following their muse. In this light the service the Doctorate by Public Work provides to them in personal growth terms is immense: nothing short of reviewing and re-constellating the whole of their personal and professional lives, while reviewing the meaning of their life to date. Hindu mystics talk of the need for us to find our dharma or life’s purpose, the activity that makes our heart sing. High achievers are well upon this road.

Similar to those identified by Maslow (1967) as self actualisers, participants in the Doctorate by Public Works tend to demonstrate an ability to perceive reality efficiently; to tolerate uncertainty; to accept themselves and others for what they are; to be spontaneous in thought and behaviour; to maintain a good sense of humour; to be problem-centred rather than self-centred; to be highly creative; to be resistive to enculturation but not purposely unconventional; to demonstrate concern for the welfare of mankind; to be deeply appreciative of the basic experiences of life; to establish deep satisfying relationships; to look at life philosophically and objectively. Simply, alongside expert professional psychotherapeutic skills, they have also inculcated sound interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. This should not surprise us as these are also psychotherapy aims, and these individuals have usually experienced life-long therapy.

Our relationship with others and with ourselves is constantly monitored in psychotherapy, where supervision of the therapeutic relationship and our own psychological process is on-going. In a professional climate where our relationship with ourselves and our clients is subject to examination, it is little wonder development of ‘the person’ occurs, the more so when the quality of our ‘presence’ is core to professional practice. Add to the above the qualities of insight, intuition and empathy associated with therapists of excellence, and we begin to glean something of the nature of the programme’s clientele.

As may be imagined, supervision of recruits of this calibre set a real challenge for the programme team. Given their highly-attuned alertness to detecting bad faith and ‘psychobabble’ in their clients, and their commitment to their own personal development, it is necessary for the supervisor to strive at all times to be genuinely present and as authentic as possible. These candidates can be alarmingly honest, transparent with their feelings, sharing of their innermost processes, while inquiring

of your own. They will not usually play a conventional tutor-student game, but rather test you to the degree they test themselves. Simply they are less shackled by chains of the conventional social world and less amenable to the status quo and the 'world as it is culturally taught to be'. They demand your respect and respect you in turn. They are also busy people whose time is too precious to waste, and as quick learners expect you to get to the point and to pull no punches. Besides expecting the supervisor to be able to meet them where they are, with similar degrees of empathy, insight and clarity, they expect high levels of challenge. They have grown and developed professional through 'challenge' and have opted for the Doctorate in Public Works in search of one more mountain to climb.

But challenge alone is insufficient, for although they know themselves and readily share their emotional world, the unconscious competence they have professionally forged paradoxically leaves them unpractised at dealing with the feelings of incompetence and shame – things academia all too often re-stimulates. For instance, many have had unconventional educations and trodden a counter-cultural path, largely because they felt at odds with the systems of social control education evokes. A return to academia, in this light, is often one of completing unfinished business, the last great challenge left for them to rise to. For this they need genuine support to face whatever academic demons haunt their past and deeply hidden incompetence all over again, plus more of the same to contact and journey through phases of unconscious incompetence towards conscious incompetence.

So here we have the inkling of a model emerging of how best to motivate high achievers: high levels of support and challenge underpinned by relational authenticity. If we place these observations into a model of intervention analysis, such as the one described below (after Heron 1986) the following profile results:

<i>Prescriptive</i>	+ 10 9 8 <u>7</u> 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 - (Define tasks & prescribe behavioural objectives)	<i>Non-Prescriptive</i>
<i>Informative</i>	+ 10 9 8 <u>7</u> 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 - (Inform & attribute meaning)	<i>Non-Informative</i>
<i>Confronting</i>	+ 10 <u>9</u> 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 - (Raise awareness & challenge blind-spots)	<i>Non-Confronting</i>
<i>Cathartic</i>	+ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 <u>2</u> 1 0 - (Raise & express emotion)	<i>Non-Cathartic</i>
<i>Catalytic</i>	+ 10 9 <u>8</u> 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 - (Form boundaries & rules)	<i>Un-Catalytic</i>
<i>Supportive</i>	+ 10 <u>9</u> 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 - (Express our true self & values)	<i>Non-Supportive</i>

The above schema offers us a conceptual framework for mapping interpersonal relationships and profiling the range and nature of interactions available. 'Intervention', within this perspective, is defined as a verbal or non-verbal behaviour offered in service to a client, designed to address their current psychological needs and chosen to serve their best interests. As for how this schema arose, Heron after an

exhaustive review concluded there were six categories of intervention which fuelled two styles of facilitation – ‘authoritative’ and ‘facilitative’ (Heron 1989). In the authoritative style a facilitator is largely task-centred and primarily gives advice (prescribes), instructs and interprets (informs), challenges and gives direct feedback (confronts); while in the facilitative mode they are more person-centred and work to release emotional tension (cathartic), promote self-directed problem solving (catalytic) and to approve and affirm the worth of a client (supportive). In character, the ‘authoritative style’ speaks largely from a position of power, is task driven and has a tendency to be facilitator-centred in the style of mentorship and prescriptive coaching. By contrast the ‘facilitative style’ is client-centred and attends primarily to the emergent process of others. Both styles must be harnessed together if we are to address something approaching holistic facilitation. All these interventions are helpful; all are necessary.

### **Concluding Reflection**

The development of the Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Public Works has provided the programme team with some interesting challenges and an impetus to reflect on ways of conceptualizing how we can most effectively facilitate these candidates in their journey through the programme. Clearly, given the relatively recent launch of this doctorate, this work is only in its initial stages. It is, though, already evident that we have been able to identify ways of conceptualizing the challenges posed by this doctorate (both for supervisors and candidates) which make explicit themes which were only tangential or implicit in our work with candidates on the Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Professional Studies.

When we reflected on what we were asking candidates to do on the programme, we quickly realized that we were asking them to tell a story about what made them special and enabled them to make a profound impact on their specialist field in a way that other practitioners had not. It was helpful for the programme team to make use of the language of entrepreneurialism, and to conceptualize these candidates as *professional* entrepreneurs. We found that, without exception, our candidates were able to recognize themselves in this concept, and were able to use it to think about their achievements in creative ways.

Re-storying, a process most often discussed in the context of narrative therapy, was supported by supervisors working at a level of relational depth. The challenge of the new doctorate led us to reflect on styles of facilitation. Monitoring the tutorial relationship with participants of the Practitioner Doctorate appears to require more *directive, prescriptive* and *cathartic* interventions, while those upon the Doctorate by Public Works seem to solicit more *confronting, catalytic* and *disclosing* interventions. Perhaps this is because the former are more often than not in a conscious incompetence position, while the latter in the unconscious competence zone. Whatever the dynamic our Practitioner Doctorate learners seem happy to keep us in role as professional parents, while our Public Work candidates require us to walk alongside them as critical friends; simply, we are required to be more facilitative in our approach – hence the title of this paper.

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