



POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

EXAMINER'S REPORT

EXAMPLE 3: DOCTORAL THESIS

The manuscript submitted may serve as a model to doctoral thesis in all respects of the construction of this genre. The report of the study is fairly simply and conveniently structured; the thesis is stated in six chapters that start with the problem statement, proceed to literature review, methods of the study, presentation and analysis of results, and a synthesis of the findings. The argument of the thesis is sharply focused, with a concise statement of the problem (conveniently organized into five sub-problems that served to guide the research activities) and four hypotheses for the study.

One of the strengths of the thesis is that it stays focused according to the problem statement. The field of study is clearly delimited and well described in the literature review. The excellent literature review not only introduces the field of study but also serves to guide the intellectual interrogating of the empirical data collected in the study into a sound synthesis. The methods and procedures used are clearly described and scientifically motivated. The study's dual research goals, viz. to develop a measuring instrument and to apply it in assessing the effect of an educational intervention, require a complex research design.

The candidate's choice to follow an approach of triangulation in his/her research adds an additional demand in research design, and especially in the reporting of research findings. These were not only set out clearly but also combined and integrated into a model study. Sophisticated statistical analyses were chosen and applied to unravel a myriad of complex relationships among variables. Qualitative findings support and validate these analyses. This strong methodology leads to a detailed analysis of the data and a convincing synthesis and conclusion of the study.

The candidate chose to study one of the buzzwords of our time, empowerment. This concept is mostly appraised in normative, sometimes emotional terms, and seldom serves as a scientific topic of study. A real challenge therefore was not to fall into the trap of current literature and rhetoric about this concept. The candidate's approach is scientific throughout. If there is such a thing as empowerment, it should be possible to define it and to measure it. In order to measure it a clear definition should be available.

By avoiding a constructionist approach as a point of departure for developing a measuring instrument but using this approach as a validating procedure for the developed instrument, the candidate succeeds in blending quantitative and qualitative research perspectives into a successful design. I found definition and operationalization of empowerment a strong and real contribution to our current knowledge in this area. His/her study has constituted a benchmark for further study in this area.

It was necessary for the candidate to test the validity of the measuring instrument to a changing situation of empowerment. In order to do so, an experiment design using an educational intervention was used. This independent educational design for enhancing empowerment claims to do just that. The simple logic then was to design the study so that changes in the sophisticated measuring instrument were not only able to register changes, but to identify areas of change within empowerment. This should be noted as the second major contribution of study namely that he/she designed an instrument that is sensitive to distinguish the different areas of empowerment on different levels of social-psychological functioning of individuals.

The study of empowerment requires a multi-disciplinary approach. The theme of power, the lack thereof and acquiring it, its social and personal ramifications, the interventionist strategies for speeding up empowerment processes, and registering the processes that are happening while empowerment takes place, demand a hold on political science, sociology, psychology, education, social science methodology and statistics. The study succeeds in selecting and integrating various strands of knowledge together in a comprehensive but tight argument.

Because of this nature of the study the title of the thesis may be misleading. It is quite clear that the main challenge for the study is the conceptualization and operationalization of empowerment - in short, the measurement problem. This, in fact, is a methodological topic. What makes the study an educational treatise is the interventionist strategy used to enhance the empowerment status of adult workers. This is strongly motivated in the literature overview (where educational perspectives are introduced and discussed). What the study is not doing, and did not intend doing, was to compare different strategies in intervention to enhance empowerment. It did, however, make a strong and convincing case for educational interventions. To have a more true reflection of the contents of the study I recommend that the title be changed to the following (or similar) formulation: The conceptualization and measurement of the empowerment of workers from an educational perspective. The technical quality of the manuscript is impressive and nearly faultless. Typescript errors were observed on pages iii, iv and vii. On page 10 hypothesis 1.7 c should be reformulated to be clearer.

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Date