

# Exploring Doctorateness in Insider Action Research

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## **Abstract**

While debates about the nature of ‘doctorateness’ are prevalent in higher education, what this might mean in the context of insider action research, where action research is undertaken by members of an organisation or community, has not received any attention. This article explores how an insider action research engagement in a thesis and core project generates a synergy between the actions, a deep discipline knowledge, competence in research through first, second and third person processes, and competence in presentation can serve as a foundation for doctorateness. The dissemination contributes to a community of practice and inquiry.

**Keywords:** doctoral education; ‘doctorateness’; action research; insider action research; core and thesis projects, first, second and third person inquiry; communities of inquiry

## **Explorando el proceso de doctorado (*doctorateness*) en investigación acción interna**

### **Resumen**

Mientras que los debates sobre el carácter de intensidad y calidad en estudios doctorales (referido como ‘doctorateness’) son frecuentes en la educación superior, la investigación de acción interna, que se lleva a cabo por los miembros de una organización o comunidad, no ha recibido mucha atención. Este artículo explora cómo una investigación de acción interna genera una sinergia entre las acciones, el conocimiento profundo de la disciplina, la competencia en la investigación a través de los procesos de primera, segunda y tercera persona, y la competencia en la presentación, que sirve como base para el concepto de ‘doctorateness’. Las implicaciones de este artículo contribuyen a la práctica en la industria y a la investigación en el área de investigación de acción interna.

**Palabras claves:** educación doctoral; doctorateness; investigación acción; investigación acción privilegiada; base de tesis proyectos y, primero, segundo y tercero de la investigación; comunidades de investigación

## 1 Introduction

*At a viva voce for a doctorate undertaken through action research some time ago, one of the authors asked the doctoral candidate on what basis did he think he should be awarded a doctorate for his work. The candidate's spontaneous answer was that he had attended to the data within himself and with others, that he was in dialogue with the literature, was transparent about his conclusions, and that he was contributing something for others to build on.*

Reflecting on this response it can be seen that this researcher was implicitly describing the doctoral quality of his work in terms of engagement within himself, his co-inquiry with relevant others, and contribution to a broader audience. The practice of insider action research, whereby individuals undertake action research in an organisation or community in which they are employed or are a member, is becoming increasingly more common. In such settings doctoral candidates base their doctoral work on interventions in their own organisations (Hart, Kylan, Norrgren & Stymne 2004; Roth, Shani & Leary 2007; Williander & Styhre 2006; Coghlan, Shani, Roth & Sloyan 2014; Coghlan, Shani, & Roth 2016). The notion of 'doctorateness' is an emerging notion, and results from specific critical research features being present in a doctoral thesis (Trafford & Leshem 2008; 2009; Wellington 2013; Poole 2015). With the continuing development of doctoral research using action research, what might be meant by doctorateness in the insider action research setting? This article explores an answer to this question, and offers a framework for insider action research doctoral students, their supervisors and examiners. The article is structured as follows. First we explore the notion of doctorateness and doctoral "integrity". Second, we remind readers of the nature and practice of action research and insider action research, and we discuss how action research at doctoral level involves two current and intertwined projects, the *core* project and the *thesis* project (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry 2002). We review the three modes of inquiry that are well-established in action research which act as an integrating framework. These modes are first- second- and third-person practice. Third, we bring in insider action research in doctoral education, the core and thesis projects; modes of inquiry; quality together. Fourth, we articulate a framework of 'doctorateness' for insider action research, that integrates first- second- and third-person in the core and thesis projects and meets the quality requirements of action research.

## 2. What is 'doctorateness'?

The notion of 'doctorateness' is an emerging notion (Trafford & Leshem 2008; 2009). Wellington (2013) describes it in terms of five areas of activity: the purpose of doctoral study; the impact of doctorates; written regulations for the award of the doctorate; the examination process; and, the voices of those involved in doctoral study and examination. Wellington contends that the notion of doctorateness, as an inner essence, will never be found or accepted. In a rebuttal of Wellington (2013), Poole (2015) contends that progress towards a description of doctorateness has been made, citing Trafford and Leshem (2008; 2009). Poole advances the discussion by questioning whether or not doctorateness is a characteristic of the thesis document, the candidate or both.

For the purposes of this paper, we subscribe to the concept of doctorateness, proposed by Trafford and Leshem (2008: 51-2) who describe it as a ‘jigsaw puzzle that can only be fully appreciated when all the components are present and fitted together’. Such synergy in doctorateness is among specific critical research features which “form a mutually interdependent network system of parts that have practical relationships with the thesis” (Trafford & Leshem 2009: p. 308). These features begin with a stated gap in knowledge, which merits investigation through framing a question, conceptualising the problem, designing and implementing the research, gathering and analysing data, developing a theory-based argument, leading to an original contribution to knowledge. Graham-Cagney, Coughlan and Andrews (2012) grouped these individual features into three distinct but related sets: deep discipline knowledge, high levels of competence in research skills, and competence in presenting the argument or thesis. This grouping illustrates the research journey undertaken by doctoral students and recognises the synergistic nature of ‘doctorateness’ as a pathway to understanding, conceptualisation and researching within their domain. At the end point of the journey, the evidence of ‘doctorateness’ is in both the thesis document and the candidate.

Doctoral students have many choices as they design, develop and defend the thesis document. There are different models for this document: the traditional monograph, or the thesis by publication. The latter can include a number of published articles with an integrating paper. Common across all is a volume which is greater than a single journal article. The focal phenomenon and the associated research question are central. The philosophical perspective and the resulting methodological choices determine the nature of the research and the resulting contributions to theory and to practice. Without distinguishing between the notionally characterised research doctorate and the practitioner doctorate, some phenomena and questions present the researcher with the opportunity and need to engage more actively with practice and practitioners and, indeed, to intervene. Action research in its many variants is available to the researcher as an appropriate choice. So, how then might the notion of doctorateness be applied to the field of action research, and insider action research in particular, where the focus is on both action and knowledge generation?

### 3. Action Research

Within the wide variety of approaches to and definitions of action research that can be found within the field, we are working from a definition provided by Coughlan and Shani (2018: 4) that for us captures the essence of action research.

Action research may be defined as an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organisational knowledge and applied to address real organisational issues. It is simultaneously concerned with bringing about change in organisations, in developing self-help competencies in organisational members and adding to scientific knowledge. Finally, it is an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry.

There are four factors underpinning action research projects. As action research is localised, understanding the *context* of any action research initiative and contributing to that context is paramount. By context we mean understanding how the organisation and the action re-

search initiative is grounded in the challenges from an external and internal environment, and ultimately the initiative needs to deliver in terms of those challenges. The *quality of relationships* capturing the values of research *with* people enables the co-generation of actionable knowledge (Coghlan & Shani 2018). The wide variety of actors that engage in the action research process form a community of inquiry (Coghlan & Shani 2008). The community of inquiry's engagement in cycles of action and reflection remains the bedrock of the action research process, and taking action and concurrently inquiring into that action leads to the *dual outcomes of knowledge that is actionable* through the scholarship of practice. For action researchers enrolled in an academic education programme leading to a doctorate, these four factors act as a philosophical and practical backbone.

#### 4. Insider Action Research

Insider action researchers are those who conduct action research in an organisation or community in which they are employed or are a member. With the growth and development of doctoral education, where students may have a career in practice and wish to explore questions in that practice, doctoral students increasingly are also insiders. As doctoral students they become scholar-practitioners, who are not merely practitioners who do research, but rather that they integrate scholarship with their practice and generate actionable knowledge, that is, knowledge that is robust for scholars and actionable for practitioners (Coghlan 2013).

The challenges facing insider action researchers are fourfold (Coghlan 2019; Coghlan & Brannick 2014; Coghlan & Shani 2015). One challenge is pre-understanding, that is, how they explore the familiar and what may be tacit and taken for granted, and achieve critical distance. This challenge is pertinent as insider action researchers challenge existing assumptions and proposed solutions that emerge. A second challenge is how they manage role duality, that is, the researcher role alongside, and at times in conflict with the array of organisational roles they hold. The third challenge is how they manage organisational politics, i.e. be effective in enabling the change to occur and continuing their career in the organisation and in co-generating actionable knowledge. The fourth challenge is the actual formation of the community of inquiry and ways to establish that community. These challenges are recognizable to the experienced insider action researcher.

#### 5. Communities of Practice and of Inquiry

Action research activities trigger the involvement of a wide variety of actors that play a role in the project. The different actors that represent diverse individual agents, collective agents or communities of practice form a community of inquiry (Shani & Mohrman 2008). The simultaneous evolution of the actions, research tasks and the relationships in the community of inquiry affect the outcomes of the action research effort (Coghlan & Shani 2008).

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour (Wenger et al. 2002). The domain is de-

fined by a shared field of interest. Membership implies a commitment to the domain and a shared competence that distinguishes members from others. As members of a community of practice, members engage in joint activities, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable learning from each other. They seek to develop a shared repertoire of resources over time and with sustained interaction: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems.

A community of inquiry integrates a variety of communities of practice, such as communities of managers, researchers, functions, disciplines, and organic units within and outside a system (Shani & Docherty 2003). The action researcher shoulders the responsibility of establishing the community of inquiry. Initially, the community of inquiry can be loosely coupled, but as the action research project progresses, the community of inquiry might have to establish ways of organising, structures and processes, all of which centre on the true collaboration in addressing and pursuing the emerging action research effort. The quality of the community of inquiry has a great deal to do with its effectiveness in producing practical and scientific outcomes.

## 6. Three Modes of Inquiry/Practice

Enacting insider action research involves insider action researchers working with colleagues and relevant stakeholders in face-to-face interactions. These interactions are probably a primary activity within the organisation. Insider action researchers are also likely to work with a group that reflects on how the action project is progressing and which support the thesis inquiry. Insider action researchers are likely to find themselves personally and professionally challenged through these interactions, and consequently find themselves engaging in personal reflection and self-learning. At the same time the doctoral project is aiming to contribute actionable knowledge to a wider community beyond those directly involved. These three practices of working with others, engaging in self-learning and contributing to an impersonal community, are referred to as first, second and third person inquiry/practice.

- At its core *first person practice* involves insider action researchers attending to and inquiring into their own learning-in-action. Doctoral accounts of the *first person practice* demonstrate how the insiders present the challenges of how they managed the closeness to the system and demonstrated critical distance and inquiring- and learning-in-action throughout the project.
- *Second person* inquiry/practice addresses collaborative inquiry and work with others on issues of mutual concern, through face-to-face dialogue, conversation and ethical joint action and embedding change (Holian & Coghlan 2013). Doctoral accounts of *second person practice* need to show the quality of research *with*, that is, how the project was selected, how cycles of action and reflection were designed, implemented and evaluated collaboratively with systematic methodological reflection.
- *Third person* inquiry/practice aims to show how through the engagement of second and first person practice that the project is significant, how it has some implications beyond those who were involved directly in it, and how it had an explicit aim to elaborate or

develop theory as well as to be useful to the organisation. Third-person dissemination through publications, participation at conferences and workshops contributes to communities of practice and inquiry.

As action research is the fruit of all three modes then the thesis document needs to demonstrate explicitly how the third person contribution emerges from the first and second person engagements, the synergistic dynamics between them, and how theory informed the design and development of the actions. Anticipating a point for later discussion, this connection between the three modes points to doctorateness being a characteristic of the doctoral researcher, based upon the engagements, the theory and reflection, and the articulation of implications.

In Coghlan, Shani, Roth and Sloyan's (2014) account of insider doctoral work by two executives, one of the authors relates the outcome of his first-person practice in terms of learning to live with his own vulnerability, learning to overcome the fear of failure, and receiving self-insight into his personal credibility. Under second-person outcomes he describes how his team worked at developing collaborative research skills, built and supported teams throughout the organisation and created process of cross team knowledge sharing and learning. The third-person outcomes that he presents are that the organisation built learning mechanisms throughout the organisation, engaged in system-wide knowledge sharing, developed tools that were used on subsequent projects, and overall developed the ability to enact organisational change.

## 7. Core and Thesis Projects

When action researchers are enrolled in an academic education programme, such as one leading to a doctorate, it is useful to note that typically there are two action research projects co-existing in parallel (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry 2002). First there is the *core* action research project, which is the project on which the doctoral researcher is working within an organisation or community. This project has its own identity and may proceed, irrespective of whether or not it is being studied. As action research initiatives address real issues in organisations and are driven by organisational needs, they may represent an opportunity for the doctoral researcher to tap into an already active agenda for action and change. The project may also be funded externally, and carry with it a timescale and deliverables which are independent of the academic research programme. Second, there is also the *thesis* action research project. This project involves the action researcher's inquiry into the core project. This distinction is useful as it is the *thesis* project which will be submitted for examination, rather than the *core* project. While the *core* project may be successful or unsuccessful, it is the researcher's engagement in and inquiry into the process (rather than the outcome), and the associated contribution to domain knowledge which merits the academic award the doctoral researcher is pursuing. For the prospective researcher, the *core* project may be proceeding irrespective of their involvement. As the prospective researcher is an insider, the *core* project may form part of the "day job" with budget, relationships, deliverables and deadlines. In that context, the prospective researcher is a member of a community of practice. However, for the prospective researcher to decide to undertake *thesis* research is to

open up a new perspective on the opportunity presented by and for the core project. Framed more formally, the concern here is with the rationale for the research, and the related rationale for the *core* project. In that context, the prospective researcher is a member of a community of inquiry. Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007) elaborate the inter-relationship between the *core* action research and the *thesis* action research. The *core* action research project is a collaborative venture whereby the cycles of action and reflection are enacted in multiple successive and concurrent cycles in first and second person practice. The *thesis* research project involves the action researcher in independent work, at both ends of the entire process. Ultimately it is the individual who writes the *thesis* document and submits it for examination.

The four factors discussed above are useful in understanding the challenges of the *core* and *thesis* projects. For the action researcher, the context of *core* project lies in understanding its organisational world, i.e. where the project stands in relation to the position of the organisation in its industry and society. The context of the *thesis* project is the existing research of that particular domain and doctoral researchers need to demonstrate knowledge of the academic context of their research. Familiarity with this literature and knowledge of practice in that field are pre-requisites for engaging in the *thesis* action research based upon the *core* project. Research-based inquiry into the *core* project through action research (the *thesis* project) may be framed as cycles of action and reflection matching the *core* project as it develops iteratively. Engaging in such cycles places action at the heart of the research process, and thereby marks action research as fundamentally distinct from research approaches that are typically referred to as 'applied'. The insights generated by insider action researchers in such projects allow the organisation to learn continuously and change by embedding mechanisms that sustain learning in the community of practice. In action research, the members of the organisation (or some of them) and the thesis researcher are also co-researchers who form a community of inquiry. It is through the collaborative study of cycles of action and reflection undertaken by the community of practice, and guided by the community of inquiry, that the actionable knowledge from the core project is generated and thesis project develops.

In her insider action research doctoral work, Atienza (2017) identified the *core* action research project in terms of promoting the organisational identity of the organisation of which she was the founder, and the *thesis* project as developing a theory of building organisational identity.

Table 1. The *core* and *thesis* projects as action research

	Core AR Project	Thesis AR Project
<b>Context</b>	Real issue for real people with stakes for resolution Causal analysis of forces in external and internal context	Framing contribution in practical and theoretical contexts Causal analysis of forces in external and internal context
<b>Quality of relationships</b>	Community of inquiry Collaborative working relationships among key actors Managing political dynamics ethically	Community of inquiry *Developing modes of collaborative inquiry with co-researchers that engage with actionable knowledge cogeneration as well as project advancement
<b>Quality of AR process</b>	Collaborative engagement in cycles of context analysis, planning action, taking action, evaluating action and reflection on learning	Engagement with meta-learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Process</li> <li>• Premise</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	Relevant sustainable progress on the issue	Actionable knowledge

Table 1 juxtaposes the two projects with the four factors identified above. The *core* project unfolds in real time, and requires a clear rationale for action. The organisation may be clear in its own terms on why it needs to engage in the action or change initiative and why now. In preparation for that, action researchers need to become familiar with the environment in which the organisation operates. Just because it is necessary for the organisation to engage in the proposed action does not mean that it holds the potential to contribute new knowledge of value in *thesis* research terms. The complementary question is to return to the rationale for the research and, in particular, the rationale for the *thesis* action research project. For action researchers, evaluation involves reflecting on the outcomes of the core action, both intended and unintended, against the planned core purpose as a basis for a response to the underlying *thesis* research question. For action researchers, the initial formation of the community of inquiry takes a front stage. Beyond the academic advisor and/or supervisor, attention should be paid to the identification of organisational members that not only might be willing to join the community of inquiry, but also could provide the support and guidance needed. Dialogue within the community of inquiry can help shape either the *core* project or *thesis* research question. In the *thesis* project, reviews involve questioning what took place in the *core* project, how and what meanings the process and outcomes might have in terms of the research question and project.

Among the variants of action research, the researcher can have different relationships with the *core* project. Put simply, the researcher may come from the outside and engage with those who are inside in a process consulting role (Schein 1999). Alternatively, the researcher may be an insider already and, so, recognised and familiar with the context, engages in the core and thesis project from the platform of their organisational role (Coughlan 2019; Coughlan & Brannick 2014). As this latter role is the focus of the paper, we now discuss this specifically.

Table 2 juxtaposes the two projects with the three modes of inquiry/practice.



Table 2. First-, second- and third-person practice in the *core* and *thesis* projects

	<b>Core AR Project</b>	<b>Thesis AR Project</b>
<b>First Person</b>	Engaging in experiential learning about self through engagements	Showing how dealt with challenges of <i>preunderstanding</i> , <i>role duality</i> and <i>organisational politics and ethics</i> Showing that accounts of self-engagement and self-learning are trustworthy and consistent with the second person practice.
<b>Second Person</b>	Working with relevant others in project, design and management Teambuilding and maintenance	Showing the quality of <i>research with</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• project selection</li> <li>• how cycles of action and reflection were co-designed, co-implemented and co evaluated with scientific rigour and systematic method.</li> <li>• how data were co-generated, gathered, co-explored and co-evaluated with scientific rigour, through multiple action research cycles</li> </ul>
<b>Third Person</b>	Establishing learning mechanisms Implications beyond the project	Showing how through the engagement of second and first person practice that the project is significant and how has some implications beyond those who were involved directly in it. Showing explicit aim to elaborate or develop theory as well as to be useful to the organisation.

As introduced above, Coghlan and Shani (2018) present four factors as the basis of assessing quality in action research: context, quality of relationships, quality of the action research process itself and outcomes. Pasmore, Woodman, and Simmons (2008) postulate that action research needs to be *rigorous*, *reflective* and *relevant*. *Rigorous* in action research typically refers to how data are generated, gathered, explored and evaluated, how events are questioned and interpreted through multiple action research cycles. *Reflective* refers to the attentiveness to the actions and the thinking behind them, and the critical questions posed. Action research takes place in the present tense and therefore is full of choices. *Relevant* refers to how the *core* project of working on a real issue shapes the *thesis* project and challenges the inquiry to remain grounded in the actual demands of the *core* project. The explicit attention to these questions and to the issues of being rigorous, reflective and relevant, and to the quality of the collaboration takes action research beyond the mere narration of events, to rigorous and critical questioning of experience leading to actionable knowledge for both scholarly and practitioner communities. As Coghlan and Shani (2018) explore, quality involves discussing how these four factors are engaged rigorously, reflectively and relevantly.

## 8. Discussion

The question underpinning this paper is what might be meant by doctorateness in the insider action research setting. We have explored the notion of doctorateness in terms of the

synergy among competences in research, discipline knowledge and in the presentation of the thesis argument. Trafford and Leshem (2009) visualised their model of doctorateness and included a range of features of the thesis. Graham-Cagney et al. (2012) grouped these features in a way that exposed the synergies to be demonstrated among deep discipline knowledge, competence in research, and competence in presentation. We have explored also action research and the opportunities for the doctoral student as an insider action researcher. Insider action research challenges preunderstanding, role duality and organisational politics in a way which requires extended competences in the action researcher.

Figure 1 illustrates the essence of our explorations into doctorateness in insider action research where the doctoral student needs to demonstrate cross-disciplinary knowledge, and abilities to co-research and to defend the contribution of self in the development of the thesis argument. Research opportunities may not be located within the boundaries of a single discipline. For some approaches to research, the research question may be defined so as to locate and manage the research focus within a single discipline. In contrast, where the research opportunity arises within a community of practice, the boundaries between disciplines may not be avoidable in the same way and, so, require the researcher to adopt a cross-disciplinary perspective. In effect, opportunities or problems in practice do not map easily over academic disciplines and, so, the insider action researcher needs to have a competence which crosses disciplines.

Figure 1: Doctorateness in insider action research

Positioning of relevant issue in practice reflecting a gap in knowledge	Articulating a research question which can be investigated through engagement in action	Conceptual framing of the issue, constructs and associated relationships	Positioning of third person actionable contributions to theory and practice
Clear demonstration of first and second person inquiry/practice			Articulation of IAR challenges in both core and thesis projects
Reflective engagement with theory through cycles of action & reflection			Rigorous, relevant and reflective research design of core and thesis projects
Practical and conceptual defence of the actionable knowledge presented			Rigorous and reflective co-generation and gathering of relevant data
Third person conceptual and practical action-related conclusions	Research question answered with actionable knowledge	Clear presentation for second and third persons (academic and practitioner)	Clear demonstration of third person inquiry/practice from first and second person inquiry/practice

As illustrated, the thesis is located in (or between) disciplines. As such, insider action researchers need to show their understanding of the operational, organisational and academic context of the planned action and the research. They need to position the relevant issue in

practice reflecting a gap in knowledge. They need to articulate a research question which can be investigated through engagement in action. They need to be open to the potential for collaboration about the framing and reframing of the *core* and *thesis* projects. Finally, they need a competence in framing the issue conceptually, including identification of constructs and associated relationships. This framing supports ultimate positioning of third person actionable contributions to theory and practice.

Insider action researchers need to demonstrate competence in action research: how have they engaged in second person practice with the relevant stakeholders of the *core* project and the *thesis* project through a rigorous, reflective and relevant engagement on the purpose and rationale for the *core* action and the *thesis* research. They must describe how the methodology and methods of inquiry defined the roles played by the researchers and how they contracted with the organisation. They need to describe the collaborative process of the framing and re-framing of the *thesis* question as the project evolves. They need to show where the design of methods for data generation and collection informed the planning of cycles of action and reflection, and how collaborative relationships were built. Finally, they need to present a narrative of the events, including intended and unintended outcomes.

The above suggests that the essence of the insider action research project builds on the assumption that the *thesis* research question is not fixed. It is a point of departure for a dynamic inquiry process. The nature of the changing context of living systems is such that most field-based research requires agility, and the writing of projects needs to reflect the evolutionary nature of the research question (MacIntosh et al 2016). An insider action research that is in tuned with the context, an integral part of doctorateness requires the competence to facilitate and capture the evolvement of the *thesis* research question.

Competence in presentation of the research requires an ability to demonstrate clearly how second person inquiry/practice has challenged insider action researchers both personally and professionally. These challenges encourage the personal reflection and self-learning characteristic of first person inquiry/practice. So, insider action researchers need to demonstrate their first person practice, through showing how they reflected on their experience, and how they were challenged in their modes of thinking and engaging in the second person practice with others.

Competence in presentation requires also that the researcher can communicate the complexity of the *core* project simply. There needs also to be a competence in presenting the rigorous and relevant theory-based reflections and contributions, in ways that are understandable by practitioners and academics. The combination of second and first person inquiry/practice forms the basis for the contribution of actionable knowledge from the *thesis* project to a wider community of practitioners and academics beyond those directly involved. This third person inquiry/practice requires that the researcher identifies and accommodates the differing expectations and levels of pre-understanding of the groupings in this wider community.

In summary, doctorateness in insider action research requires that doctoral researchers need to demonstrate how they have engaged in first, second and third person inquiry/practice. It is the second person inquiry/practice that is central in the *core* project. Without the interaction with others, the basis for first or third person inquiry/practice is missing.

As they engage in first, second and third person inquiry/practice, doctoral students undertake a research journey to a research-based understanding of the issue in practice from within their discipline (or across the disciplines relevant to their research focus). The end point of the journey is a coherent thesis which demonstrates a synergy, as illustrated in figure 1. The dynamic nature of the journey means that there are differences in first-, second- and third-person inquiry/practice, among the cycles in the research and in the linkages among the cycles. There is also difficulty in predicting the point at which there might be a contribution, and there is always the potential for the late emergence of critical insights. The demands of quality requires that they need to demonstrate reflection on, and analysis of, the emerging narrative in the light of experience gained, judgements made, interactions and the theory. Finally they extrapolate to a broader context and articulate the proposed contributions to both theory and practice. It is in this synergistic and dynamic nature of the journey that difference from the traditional notion of doctorateness might be seen.

Doctorateness becomes apparent only when examiners and other readers can recognize contribution and synergy within a thesis. However, this synergy, illustrated in figure 1, is not a final fix associated with the notional “write-up”. Rather, the demonstration of competences in research, discipline knowledge and in the presentation of the thesis argument is built in as the research progresses and unfolds through second and first person inquiry/practice, and is undertaken with attention to rigour, reflection and relevance. As Coughlan (2007) argues, both the second- and first-person practice and learning are presented as integrating the entire work and giving it its integrity. This takes us back to the vignette at the outset of this article where the researcher demonstrated his doctorateness in these relatively simplistic terms. This demonstration, based on the thesis document and the viva, and the corresponding recognition by the examiners forms the basis for our response to Poole’s question (2015) as to whether doctorateness is a characteristic of the thesis document, the candidate or both. In our view, the construct of first/ second/third person inquiry/practice points clearly to doctorateness being characterised by both. As illustrated in Table 2, the thesis research column captures the engagement of the researcher with their own learning as candidate in the first person, with the community of practice as candidate in the second person, and with the framing of the emergent knowledge in the thesis document by the candidate in the third person.

## 9. Conclusions

As the doctoral research undertaken through insider action research proliferates, and as the action research community continues to develop its understanding of the theory and practice of insider action research, it is timely to offer a contribution as to what might constitute doctorateness in insider action research. The idea at the heart of this paper is the way in which insider action research can be understood to serve as a foundation for doctorateness and the tensions and dilemmas, as well as the opportunities that this presents for doctoral researchers. Exploring this idea is timely, not least because of the changing nature of doctorates internationally and the challenges that such changes present to the academic community, but also in the opportunities for doctoral candidates to research within communities of practice of which they are members.

In this article we have explored doctorateness in insider action research by grounding it in Zuber-Skerritt and Perry's notion of the parallel *core* and *thesis* projects. We have grounded our reflection on those projects in the core tenets of action research, communities of practice and of inquiry, and the three modes of inquiry. We have illustrated our conceptualisation in a framework which integrates prior thinking on the components of doctorateness with the specific characteristics of insider action research. We have concluded with a notion of a particular synergy among deep discipline knowledge, competence in research and competence in presentation as a basis for demonstrating doctorateness in insider action research. This article offers one lens for extending the framing of what doctorateness might mean and hopefully is a stimulus for further first, second and third person exploration.

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