



DOCTORATE HUB

EMPOWERING THE DOCTORAL RESEARCHER IN YOU

DOCTORATE HUB | 2020

WHITEPAPER

**A SOLUTION BIAS AND LACK OF PROBLEM  
UNDERSTANDING LETS DOCTORAL STUDENTS STRUGGLE.**





# DOCTORATE HUB

EMPOWERING THE DOCTORAL RESEARCHER IN YOU

## A SOLUTION BIAS AND LACK OF PROBLEM UNDERSTANDING LETS DOCTORAL STUDENTS STRUGGLE.

### IT`S ALL ABOUT THE FOCUS

We often see doctoral students struggle as they do not clearly understand what the focus of their doctoral research is actually about. This is notable for those who carry out their research within their work environment and is linked to a workplace-based problem.

This struggle often seems to stem from one of the following situations:

- (1) a research-problem, research-question, research outcome expectation miss-match,
- (2) a solution bias and lack of understanding of what constitutes a problem, or
- (3) the R&D dilemma.

All of the three appear to be inter-linked and are at their most dangerous for a students' progression once combined. In this whitepaper we discuss the solution bias and lack of understanding of what actually constitutes a problem to understand how it can inhibit a student's progression, and what students can do to resolve it.

We get it, you urgently need a fix. But have you ever heard of a research-solution?

You have an urgent problem that needs to be fixed. Thus, you are in (re)search of a solution. This is a standard situation that we often see at the starting point in the doctoral journey. There is a problem, there is a certain outcome expectation, and to reach that outcome expectation there is the need for a solution. As a result, we tend to head off (re)searching for a solution.

But, consider it from another perspective, have you ever heard about a research-solution? Likely not. Being you are on a doctoral journey, you will have definitely heard about a research-problem. There is a reason why it is called research-problem, and not research-solution. The reason for this is that it is geared towards the examination of a problem. It is as simple as that. Research is not about the random application of what could eventually be solutions to not that well understood problems. It is about the in-depth examination of a problem. And once that problem is fully understood, it will be clear to you what options are at hand.

But according to Google a "Solution Business" is a rock-solid thing, while a "Solution Bias" seems to be a typing error...

The "solution bias" is not only omnipresent in a students' mindsets, it is also present in any of the online sources that are available to students. To show the magnitude of this, in Figure 1 we undertook a simple Google search on the term "solution bias". Google returns an astonishing [low level] of 8,680 results. This [low level] prompted us to carry out two further queries, also in Figure 1, one searching for "business solution" and one for "solution business". While the first term made sense to us, the second term was meant to be a play with words. Though, as the search results suggest, a "Solution Business" in accordance to Google is a rock-solid thing.

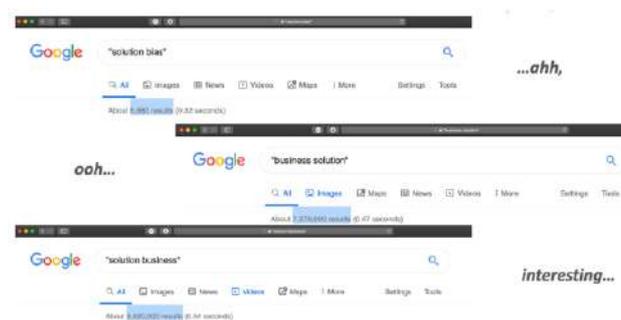


Figure 1 - Google's take on Problems and Solutions

It came at no surprise that there were 7,370,000 results for a "business solution", but it came as quite a surprise that "solution business" was producing 3,420,000 results. To me, as a native German, the term "solution business" does not make sense, nor does it leave much interpretation to what this could be about: A business that is producing solutions? Now, presumably all businesses produce some sort of solutions, so naming your business generically a "solution business" does not appear to make much sense...



# DOCTORATE HUB

EMPOWERING THE DOCTORAL RESEARCHER IN YOU

However, looking into the first ten results (Figure 2) that Google produced, it appears to be from credible sources, or showing some reasoning that could be understood. But looking into each of these results, none of them really appear to be rock-solid. They appear to be making no sense.

## Ooh, ah, interesting – wait... what actually is a “solution business”?

<p><b>Solution Business - Building a Platform for Organic Growth</b>   Kaj ...  <a href="https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319208756">https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319208756</a> *</p> <p>Success in solution business starts by identifying that solution business is a separate business model, not simply another product category or an extension of the ...</p>	<b>&lt;- Published credible research?!?</b>
<p><b>Solution business model – how to secure profitability?</b> - SlideShare  <a href="https://www.slideshare.net/TalbotPfeiffer/solution-business-model-salent-revlon-2013">https://www.slideshare.net/TalbotPfeiffer/solution-business-model-salent-revlon-2013</a> *</p> <p>Jul 10, 2013 - 1. Understand your customer's business and the customer's customer's business. 2. Drive for value in solution approach, solution for you might ...</p>	<b>&lt;- A business model?!?</b>
<p><b>What does a business solutions company do?</b> - Quora  <a href="https://www.quora.com/What-does-a-business-solutions-company-do">https://www.quora.com/What-does-a-business-solutions-company-do</a> *</p> <p>Dec 12, 2017 - What is the work of " Solution Business Department in any company" 558 Views - What is a technology solution company? 12,208 Views</p>	<b>&lt;- A department in a company?!?</b>
<p><b>Are solutions becoming a problem for your business?</b> - Kaj Storbicka  <a href="https://www.kajstorbicka.com/.../are-solutions-becoming-a-problem-for-your-business">https://www.kajstorbicka.com/.../are-solutions-becoming-a-problem-for-your-business</a> *</p> <p>Jul 20, 2018 - Creating business solutions is a solution business in its own right. Don't however and Kaj Storbicka say it needs a separate business ...</p>	<b>&lt;- A business branch?!?</b>
<p><b>Solution Business   Bridgestone Corporation</b>  <a href="https://www.bridgestone.com/solutions/">https://www.bridgestone.com/solutions/</a> *</p> <p>Solution Business. Bridgestone delivers a wide range of products to customers around the world, including tires, rubber and other diversified products.</p>	<b>&lt;- A market?!?</b>

Figure 1 - Google's take on the “solution business”

So how do I know that I am focused on the problem and not the solution?

Without going further into the “solution business” analytics, let us loop back the discussion on what this implies for the “solution bias”. Google returned an astonishing [low level] of 8,680 results to the search term “solution bias”. The point here being that wherever you look at, you will likely encounter a solution focus and often lack understanding of what a problem actually is. Let alone what the difference is between a problem as such and a problem to you. What simple advice can be offered for students to follow to ensure they stay focused on the problem side?

Staying on the Dark Side means staying at the Safe Side.

A problem is something that is not meant to be the way it is. It is something that is broken. Something that is bothersome. Something that does not go away, whatever you do. It is inconvenient and trying to tackle it can be pushing you out of your comfort zone. It is very much the opposite from how you would like the solution to be: working like charm, feeling well and being desirable, being cool and exciting, awesome. So, in the latter case we have the bright side while in the former case we are seeing the dark side of the situation.

Staying on the dark side? Aren't there more thorough instructions that could be provided?

There certainly are. The DoctorateHub runs a number of webinars and advanced training courses that allow you to clearly understand the nature of a problem, or the different type of problems that you might encounter, or what to do once you are confronted with wicked problems.

If you want to learn more about the solution bias and lack of understanding of what constitutes a problem, then please take a look at our webinar section where you can find a large array of webinar slide-decks and replays; or sign up to one of our Advanced Training Courses that are available for Free Self-Study as well as with expert tutor support for a fee.

## About the author

Dr. Andreas Meiszner, PhD is one of the Co-founders of the DoctorateHub and with a particular focus on strategy development and training development.

Since 2012, he has tutored, mentored and coached beyond 500 professional doctoral students with the University of Liverpool (UK) Management School's Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) program, and since 2016 also with the DoctorateHub.com. Andreas is also an active research fellow with more than two decades of global research experience in the areas of Innovation, ICT and the Internet, Education, Management, and Economics.

He has worked for leading academic institutions, such as the United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT), frequently ranked as one of the global top 3 institutes in its domain next to Harvard, MIT, Stanford and the London School of Economics. Andreas obtained his PhD in 2011 from The Open University (UK) for work carried out at the Institute of Educational Technologies and that is titled 'The Emergence of Free / Open Courses - Lessons from the Open Source Movement'.

He also holds three higher education degrees in management from universities in France, Germany and The Netherlands, and with majors in 'International Management' and in 'Human Resources and Organizational Management'.



# DOCTORATE HUB

EMPOWERING THE DOCTORAL RESEARCHER IN YOU

## **DOCTORATE HUB IS YOUR PARTNER DURING YOUR DOCTORATE JOURNEY AND BEYOND**

### WHAT DOCTORATE HUB CAN DO FOR YOU

DoctorateHub is an exclusive and thriving community of practitioners that are on their pathway to establish themselves as doctoral scholars.

It is the space for professional doctoral practitioners to connect and to meet up in the virtual and physical world thereby allowing overcoming one of the main challenges of the doctoral journey: being on one's own without a peer network with whom to connect.

The doctoral journey is long and lonely, and unlike undergraduate and graduate programs, the doctoral students largely struggle to find and engage with doctoral peers. The DoctorateHub attempts to address this and to provide complementary support to professional doctoral practitioners that work towards a doctorate.

### CONTACT US

**DoctorateHub**  
info@doctoratehub.com