

Supol's Doctorate

1. My Background

My academic track record and experience has been a source of personal pride and achievement. I had done well in high school as a result of hard work, good teachers and close friends. I did well enough in the national entrance examinations to win admission to Chulalongkorn University, which is recognizing as the premier undergraduate school in Thailand, comparable to Oxford University in the United Kingdom. In studying for my bachelor's degree, I did well enough eventually to receive a full scholarship. I completed my degree with honors and received my diploma in Electrical Engineering directly from the King of Thailand, which has been one of the greatest privileges of my life.

My undergraduate record enabled me to secure a position as a trainee in the international oil exploration business of Dresser Inc., a world leader in the field. In order to strengthen my English language and technical skills, I was initially assigned to Dresser's operations in Australia in 1986. My six months in Australia was a great experience in starting exploring and understanding the world.

After the training in Australia, I was sent to the United Kingdom. Having grown up in Thailand, it was a big shock to arrive in the middle of winter and it was the first time of my life to see the real snow. After arriving in London for a few days, I was sent to Aberdeen in Scotland to begin my real work in the North Sea.

The excellent training program at Dresser had kept me busy without time to think about anything else. Similar to a military boot camp, we were trained intensively (on average 12-16 hours a day including Saturdays for several months). I had to work extremely hard for a short time in order to qualify as a professional Dresser engineer. The work had helped me in forming a new attitude work, colleagues and business in a global context. It was an incredible experience.

Q 1 What opportunities are there for Supol in higher education?

Q 2 What value would postgraduate work have for him and his career?

2. The MBA experience

After about 4 years in the North Sea, I started thinking of my future career and life. After about a year of deliberation, I decided to enter the MBA program at the Asian Management School funded by a scholarship grant from the Government of the Netherlands.

My work experience in the United Kingdom proved to be a great asset in business school as it helped me to focus my time and priorities as well as to gain from my relationship with professors and student colleagues from Thailand and the rest of Asia. At graduation, I was awarded with the prize for the most outstanding academic performance in the history of the School. I was also offered a full scholarship to continue at AMS in the PhD program but decided not to accept and instead to enter the world of business instead. At that point, I thought that that was the end of my career as a student.

After graduation from AMS, I took a position as an investment banker for a local joint venture securities company between a Thai finance company and a UK merchant bank. While working full-time at the securities firm, I was also invited to speak as a guest lecturer for many local MBA schools, teaching on subjects related to Capital Markets and Financial Management. After I teaching in this way for several years, I began to think about entering a doctoral degree program in business. However, my banking career was still progressing very well and I

also had my family to support. As a result, gaining a doctoral degree was not a priority.

Q 1 Should Supol consider registering for a doctorate?

Q 2 If so, what characteristics would make such a degree attractive to him?

3. Starting Point for a Doctoral Degree

After about 5 years in the banking industry, I took a position in the Bangkok Branch of a Dutch bank as the Head of Capital Markets department. This was in 1997 at the height of the Asian Financial Crisis. The crisis hit Thailand financial sector, causing more than 100 financial institutions to close down. Despite the crisis, I was fortunate to keep my job and had the chance to participate in a number of milestone restructurings in cooperation with multilateral banks such as the Asian Development Bank and World Bank. However, given the uncertainties in the financial sector and how it would affect my own career prospects, I continued to think about pursuing a doctoral degree.

The other contributing factor to my decision to pursue doctoral study was activity as a part-time guest lecturer at various universities in Bangkok. I always felt that I needed more knowledge on the theoretical background in the financial management field to link with my practical experience.

Q 1 If asked for advice at this stage, what kind of doctorate would you suggest?

Q 2 Is there any reason for him to choose the UK?

4. Why a Doctoral Degree at Wessex in the United Kingdom?

After the big reorganization in the Dutch bank, I felt that my future career prospects were limited. With an encouragement from a good friend, I was invited to take a position to head the capital market division of a restructured local bank. I realized that my international experience would greatly help in building up a capable team as most international banks were cutting back or pulling out of Thailand and Asia to concentrate on core business closer to their home countries. As a result, the opportunity and timing was right to create a more sustainable career and stable life.

During I was working for the international bank in 1995, I had the opportunity to meet with a professor of finance from Wessex Management School through attending his seminar in the United Kingdom. I was able to fully appreciate the depth and breadth of his academic ability and skills after I had challenged him in the class on a topic related to financial management. The professor had an excellent knowledge and understanding in the topic. Over time, my professional respect and personal relationship with that individual grew through further contact, including an invitation for him to deliver special lecture for my MBA student during a subsequent visit to Bangkok.

At the same time, I met an old friend from a business school who had just completed her PhD. She strongly persuaded me to do a doctoral degree and helped me to explore the various options available to me at local universities in Thailand. At the same time, I had contacted my professor friend at Wessex who gave me excellent advice. I developed 3 choices. The first one would be doing a full time PhD at my previous MBA school for 3 years with a full scholarship provided by the Royal Thai Government. The second choice would be a part-time PhD for 2.5 years at a less reputable university at the cost about one-third comparing to Wessex. And the third choice would be part-time DBA for 4 years at Wessex.

Considering with my current and future career, including my international experiences, I felt that Wessex would be the best choice, as I felt I would gain a higher quality learning experience as well as be able to build a more international contact and network with the Wessex program. My contact in the Wessex faculty provided strong support for my decision and resolved any remaining doubts about entering a part-time DBA from abroad.

Q 1 Discuss Supol's choice

Q 2 What are the implications of this case for your institution?

5. Hard Work and Tough Time Ahead in Doing my DBA

So I applied to Wessex 6 months ago, was interviewed and accepted one month later and registered to start two months after that. Now, two months later I have just started work by attending a one week seminar at Wessex which has clarified in my mind what I have to do.

I have no doubts that achieving a DBA will not be an easy task. I continue to hold a full-time job and a young family to support. Juggling these various responsibilities will require focus, dedication and a lot of hard work, with little or no free time for the next several years. I will have to spend at least 20 hours a week on my studies. Fortunately, I have the full support of my family and friends.

The most difficult aspect of my DBA study is writing and communicating in English at a high level of fluency. To date, my training in English has been limited to the technical areas and business. I hope to overcome this through support from my supervisors and friends, and recognize that I need to work harder compared to native English speaking classmates. The other major problem would be in finding sufficient research material to support my area of concentration. I have elected to perform research in the area of Risk Management, which is a new field with limited works of scholarship available. I hope to overcome this through advice from my supervisors and discussion with

experts in the field. Fortunately, access to the internet should help me with these challenges.

I still do not know what I will face in the next four years. The experience will no doubt include some pain, frustration, as well as fun and stimulation. As many people have told me that “Doing a doctoral degree likes running for a marathon without knowing where the finish line is until you are standing on it”. Another of my supervisors told me that “it is like eating an elephant that you can only eat one spoonful a day”.

The Competency Development Plan, Thesis Critique, Working Paper and Research Proposal required by the School this year are the beginning of this journey. The more painful and enjoyable works will be on the full Research paper and viva exam. My study will not be an easy one but I think it will be one of the best investments of my life and I hope I will stand at the finish line with my colleagues in 4 years. Moreover, I also have the additional motivation of being the first Thai national to study and hopefully to complete a doctoral degree at Wessex and I wish to set a good and successful example for other to follow.

Q 1 Discuss Wessex’ requirements for the first year of a professional doctorate.

Q 2 What are the essential elements of an induction programme for international doctoral students?

Team task

Using the acetate/s provided list your main suggestions for

1. institutions

2. supervisors

3. new doctoral students

that arise in this case.