

Maria Björklund
Linköping University

Leveraging the Strengths and Addressing the Challenges of Externally Employed PhD Students

In Sweden, there are two main paths to a PhD degree: students admitted and employed by the university,

and students admitted to the university, but employed by an external organization. The latter, often a significant portion of Swedish PhD students, is here referred to as “organizational PhD students”.

Studies highlight the importance and benefits of university-company collaborations through PhD studies as a crucial way to enhance knowledge creation (Santos et al., 2020). Also, Marie Skłodowska-Curie promotes industry-university collaboration in PhD studies.

However, the complex situation and challenges faced by organizational PhD students are less researched. Nowotny et al. (2001) state that the conventional knowledge creation process is not the same for Industry- Conventional PhD-studies. The benefits of Industry-University PhD studies may not be immediately apparent (Siegel et al., 2003). Santos et al. (2020) found it challenging to hire and retain PhD students capable of working in both sectors. From a Swedish perspective, this form of education risks taking longer time.

This study aims to enhance understanding of the benefits and strengths of PhD education involving organizational PhD students and to identify strategies to handle these challenges and fully leverage the strengths.

Data was collected from administrative research coordinators providing data on current and former organizational PhD students and their supervisors, focus group meetings with the responsible for three research areas, supervisors, respondents from the involved organizations, and the PhD students.

Challenges and strengths were identified throughout the process, from candidate identification and contract agreements to PhD courses and internal and external seminars. A narrow focus on the product (the dissertation) risks negatively impacting the process, i.e., the learning journey. Conversely, an overly narrow focus on the learning journey can lead to difficulties in succeeding in the academic environment. At the heart of this tension are the supervisors and research projects that must strike a balance between these two perspectives.

- 1. Nowotny, H., Scott, P., Gibbons, M., & Scott, P. B.** (2001). *Re-thinking Science: Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty*. SciELO Argentina
- 2. Santos, P., Veloso, L., & Urze, P.** (2021). *Students matter: The role of doctoral students in university- industry collaborations*. **Higher Education Research & Development**, 40(7), 1530-1545
- 3. Siegel, D. S., Waldman, D. A., Atwater, L. E., & Link, A. N.** (2003). *Commercial knowledge transfers from universities to firms: Improving the effectiveness of university-industry collaboration*. *The Journal of High Technology*