# Doctor of Business Administration

## Advanced Doctoral Project Acceptable Topics & Designs

## Purpose

This document outlines the theoretical orientations, topics, methods, and populations deemed appropriate and feasible for doctoral student projects within the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program and specializations.

While not an exhaustive listing, these theories, topics, methods, and approaches meet the criteria for both acceptable and feasible for doctoral projects within the DBA program and specializations listed below. Projects that lie *outside the scope* of these theories, topics, approaches, designs, and methods require approval by the Program Director.

## Program

Below are the program options in the DBA program.

**Program 1:** The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree program is designed for individuals who aspire to achieve career advancement, including senior level positions in management, strategy, or leadership: or for those interested in business consulting or education. The program is scholar-practitioner focused, technology-driven, and grounded in Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) content, enabling students to solve business problems using data, facts, and logic.

Students develop a professional brand to assist them with exceeding their economic, career, and personal goals. Graduates complete a capstone project, demonstrating their high-level of expertise, confidence, and strategic thinking to drive progress and change within a specific business or industry.

## Specializations

Below are the specialization options in the DBA program.

### Specialization 1: General Management

The DBA General Management specialization examines the scholarly and practitioner literature and emerging trends in the field of management. Students design projects which address the challenges and opportunities for improving ways to manage, organize, and structure organizations. The specialization allows students to analyze various aspects of management by selecting a composite of specialization courses in strategy and innovation, and organizational leadership before moving into more specific topic development. Students gain an understanding of decision-making using relevant data and methods; deciding how to incorporate supply chains into organizational planning; consideration of how mergers, acquisitions, or coopetition may assist organizational success; or rethinking the types of management styles or processes that are used to establish successful business operations. Current and relevant topics surrounding management will be central to the work done in the specialization.

## Specialization 2: Organizational Leadership and Development

The DBA Organizational Leadership and Development specialization analyzes the scholarly and practitioner literature and emerging trends in the leadership and human resources fields. Students design projects which address the challenges and opportunities for improving organizational effectiveness. The specialization helps students create their own leadership style using self-management techniques; cultivate skills to inspire, motivate, and mobilize their workplaces; and acquire the skills and knowledge to lead change and transform their organizations. Current and relevant topics surrounding leaders and human resources will be central to the work done in the specialization, including leadership theory and practices, high performance leadership, and positive change models.

## Specialization 3: Strategy and Innovation

The DBA Strategy and Innovation specialization analyzes the scholarly and practitioner literature and emerging trends in the fields of strategy and innovation. Students design projects which consider how visionary leaders use strategic and innovative methods to transform their organizational landscapes. The specialization helps students critically examine how company leaders increase their organizational agility, adaptability, identification of opportunities, and competitive advantages. Current and relevant topics surrounding strategy and innovation will be central to the work done in the specialization, including theorizing, crafting, and executing strategy and innovation; strategic digital transformation; and managing innovation, design, and creativity.

# Theoretical Foundation

The following is a list of possible theoretical foundations. This is not an exhaustive list. It is meant to provide examples of the types and complexity of appropriate theories to pursue.

- Agency theory
- Motivational theories
- HRM theory
- Social exchange theory
- Kotter's change theory
- Self-determination theory
- Expectancy theory
- Actor-network theory
- Resource-based view
- Transformational leadership theory
- Leader-member exchange theory
- Porter's competitive strategy
- Human capital theory
- Emotional intelligence theory
- Dynamic Capabilities theory
- Diffusion of innovations
- Disruptive innovation theory
- Personality theories

# Topic Selection

## Acceptable Doctoral Final Topic Areas

An acceptable advanced doctoral final project topic is aligned with your degree program and specialization, avoids significant participant risks, and is feasible. Capella University is committed to helping doctoral students identify potential challenges related to feasibility. An important consideration for topic selection is whether it is feasible to complete the proposed doctoral project within the timeframe of your degree. A feasible topic can reduce the amount of time and stress experienced during the research process, and it can lead to a more rewarding experience during the completion of your advanced doctoral project.

The following is a list of acceptable doctoral research topic areas for the DBA program and for each specialization area. This is a list of *examples*. It is not exhaustive.

### Program 1: DBA

- Strategic management and competitive advantage
- Supply chain optimization
- Value creation
- Virtual work
- Ethics in business
- Customer satisfaction
- Corporate compliance
- Emotional intelligence in business

### Specialization 1: General Management

- Team management
- Change management
- Project management
- Human resources or talent management
- Risk management
- Production or operations management

### Specialization 2: Organizational Leadership and Development

- Leadership in business
- Strategic leadership
- Organizational culture and leadership
- Succession planning
- Executive mentoring programs
- Leadership effectiveness and behavior impact
- Transformational leadership

### Specialization 3: Strategy and Innovation

- Strategy execution
- Artificial intelligence
- Digital transformation and emerging technologies
- Business model innovation
- Innovation culture and organizational agility
- Growth strategy and market expansion
- Strategic decision-making

## Unacceptable Topic Areas

*Avoid topics that focus on social, social justice, societal, public policy, clinical healthcare, public health, political, personal advocacy, legislative affairs, or non-business-related government topics. This is not an exhaustive list of topics to avoid.*

# Research Approaches and Designs

Below is a list of acceptable and unacceptable research approaches and designs.

## Acceptable Approaches and Designs

### Qualitative Approaches

- Generic qualitative inquiry

### Quantitative Designs

- Quantitative regression
- Quantitative correlation

## Unacceptable Approaches and Designs

### Qualitative Approaches

- Phenomenology
- Ethnography
- Case study
- Grounded theory

### Quantitative Designs

- Experimental
- Longitudinal

## Data Collection Guidelines

Qualitative: Generic Qualitative Inquiry: Interactive, real-time interviews with participants with a sample of approximately 10-12. The expectation is high-quality interviews lasting approximately 45-60 minutes

Quantitative Regression: linear, multiple linear, and logistic regression analysis. Validated survey(s) with an established and acceptable Cronbach's alpha reliability score. Properly validated and reliable secondary datasets can be used when the data aligns with the topic and are sufficient to allow the student to answer the project or research question. Requires a G*Power analysis to determine the appropriate sample size.

Quantitative Correlation: bivariate and multivariate analysis. Validated survey(s) with an established and acceptable Cronbach's alpha reliability score. Properly validated and reliable secondary datasets can be used when the data aligns with the topic and are sufficient to allow the student to answer the project or research question. Requires a G*Power analysis to determine the appropriate sample size.

## Participant Risks

When selecting a doctoral project topic, students should avoid topics involving significant participant risk, including those which might be considered highly sensitive or involve highly vulnerable populations. Certain topics are also prohibited at Capella University. Carefully review Assessing Participant Risk in Research to understand how to assess potential topics for risk and how to mitigate risk.

## Library Guides

Capella University Library has more than 70 specialized academic research databases, including 70,000+ licensed academic journals and 100,000+ scholarly ebooks. The collection is selected to meet program research needs. Licensed material isn't typically covered through free search or AI tools online, which focus mainly on open access journals. It is estimated that only 10-20% of journals publish open access.

- Doctoral Literature Consultations – use the calendar to set up an appointment with a subject specialist academic librarian
- Library Help – ongoing general support from Capella's academic librarians via chat, email or phone appointments

Doctoral Literature Guides & Tutorials Related to Methods

- Program Library Research Guides – Program guides are designed to support research for your individual program. You will see them frequently in your coursework and library assignments.
- Searching by Methodology – learn how to filter by methodology using database functions or keyword search strategy
- Researching Theory in the Capella Library – theory research can require separate search strategies
- Finding Tests & Measurement Instruments – useful strategies for quantitative research
- Sage Research Methods Database Guide - SAGE Research Methods is a comprehensive online platform that provides a vast collection of resources (books, articles, videos, datasets, and tools) to guide researchers through every stage of the research process, from designing studies to analyzing data and writing up findings. Note that not all sources are appropriate for Capella-approved methods.