DOCTORAL STUDENT RESEARCH ALLIANCE: UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES IN GROUP FORMATION

Tara Chavez, Grand Canyon University
John Wade, Grand Canyon University
Scott Greenberger, Grand Canyon University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this reflective practice is to explore the unexpected difficulty experienced by two student members, Tara and John, and their faculty mentor of the fledgling Doctoral Student Research Alliance (DSRA) at a university in the Southwestern United States. The identified problem is the unexpected difficulty in forming the DSRA group. The following are the proposed reasons for the problem: (a) program format, (b) family and professional obligations, (c) group dynamics, and (d) identifying a mentor. In evaluating the reasons, the issue of scheduling conflicts is identified as central to all of the reasons. The identification of imposter syndrome is one surprising insight from the reflective practice. Future research is recommended to explore the effect of imposter syndrome on doctoral student participation, specifically in participation on research teams; to examine more thoroughly the role of faculty mentors in doctoral student development, specifically as it relates to small group dynamics; and to investigate the effect of scheduling conflicts and other challenges on the longevity of mentor driven doctoral research groups.

Keywords: imposter syndrome, group dynamics, mentorship, scheduling conflicts

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this reflective practice was to explore the unexpected difficulty experienced by two student members, Tara and John, and their faculty mentor in developing the Doctoral Student Research Alliance (DSRA). The initial student membership was comprised of doctorate students enrolled part-time in a Doctorate of Education program at a university in the Southwestern United States. The following sections provide a summary of the approach each author took to reflect on the experience. Specifically, these personal reflections describe which theories of reflective practice informed each authors approach to the reflection and how this approach informed each author's thinking about the broader topic of collaborating to create a new doctoral student group.

Tara. My approach to this reflective practice was to realize how my own personal perseverance and determination contributed to the successful formation of DSRA. Through Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning model, I made sense of my experience developing this group, applying the concepts of discourse and social communication. I leveraged these foundations as a means of collaboration, enrichment, learning, and attainment of the desired traditional doctoral experience. Furthermore, I examined my own determination by informally measuring my passion and persistence (i.e., grit) for the goal of forming the DSRA group (Eskreis-Winkler, Duckworth, Shulman, & Beal, 2014). The competing priorities in my own life as a mother, wife, higher educational professional, and doctoral student collided in ways that I did not anticipate. The value of such an experience has led me to this reflection through the obstacles and challenges faced in the formation of the DSRA, but also the successes of the collaborative efforts of the group members and our faculty mentor.

John. In approaching a reflective process to

understand my evolving life as a doctoral student in a non-traditional program, I used my career as a registered nurse as a lens to make sense of my experience in the DSRA. Johns' (1995) model of reflection, while initially written for the nursing industry, is applicable for anyone using five cue questions. This lens requires a scholar to provide a description of the experience and significant factors, reflect and define potential achievements and consequences, and interpret how internal and external knowledge influenced decision-making.

Faculty mentor. The purpose of this reflection was to think about my experiences mentoring two doctoral students who were creating a new student-driven research group. According Dewey (1933; 1989) effective reflective thinking requires maintaining certain attitudes toward the object of thought, including open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility. Open-mindedness involves being open to new problems and ideas. Whole-heartedness involves being absorbed by an object of thought, and not being distracted. Responsibility involves regulating thinking to maintain a balance between staying focused and maintaining fidelity to the facts of events. Throughout this reflection, I strived to cultivate these attitudes to produce an accurate portrayal of the group interactions. I found that being open-minded to the challenges faced by the students helped me embrace the underlying challenges to our collaboration.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

We did not expect difficulty in creating this new research group, but scheduling conflicts and time management issues, among other factors, affected the early growth and cohesion of the group. The initial student membership was comprised of doctorate students enrolled part-time in a Doctorate of Education program at a university in the Southwestern United States. Traditional full-time doctoral programs have historically provided doctoral students with faculty mentorship, teaching assistantships, and research opportunities (Hall & Burns, 2009; Holder-Webb & Trompeter, 2016). However, in part-time practitioner focused Doctorate of Education programs, there tends to be less focus on formal research and more on practical application (Terry & Ghosh, 2015). Except for on-campus annual residency events, there were limited mentoring and

research opportunities for doctoral students prior to dissertation. There was a networking website for doctoral students and another student-driven group focused on professional development, but neither of these opportunities directly involved mentoring or direct engagement in research. Consequently, the student authors struggled to feel part of a larger research community.

The initial idea behind the DSRA was to create collaboration between doctoral students and faculty through a shared interest in research. Working adults often hold full-time jobs and attend classes in the evening, online, or both, which limits their time to engage in full-time research. The desire to receive faculty mentorship and engage in collaborative interaction led to the development of the DSRA.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction. We sought ways to have a traditional doctoral experience in a non-traditional setting. Moreover, we sought ways to develop our curriculum vitae through involvement in research. Specifically, we assumed participating in research projects would enhance our employability as faculty members and researchers upon graduation. Figure 1 depicts the flow of the formation of the group including obstacles and challenges.

Tara. My desire to have the traditional doctoral experience led me to pursue different paths to achieve this experience. These included inquiring about faculty shadowing, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and ultimately the formation of the Doctoral Student Research Alliance (DSRA). The university designed the doctoral program for working adults, so it did not allow for full-time study. In addition, a broader desire to feel like part of the university's academic community, peers, and faculty fueled the collaborative nature of the proposed group. Zahl (2015) found that doctoral students value a sense of community and belonging within their academic units. The formation of this group would, however, pose some collaborative challenges early on.

Already in my second year of doctoral study, I felt a sense of urgency to commence these experiences right away. Although the dissertation for this program is partly integrated into the coursework, the research commitment increases with the formation of the dissertation committee and beginning
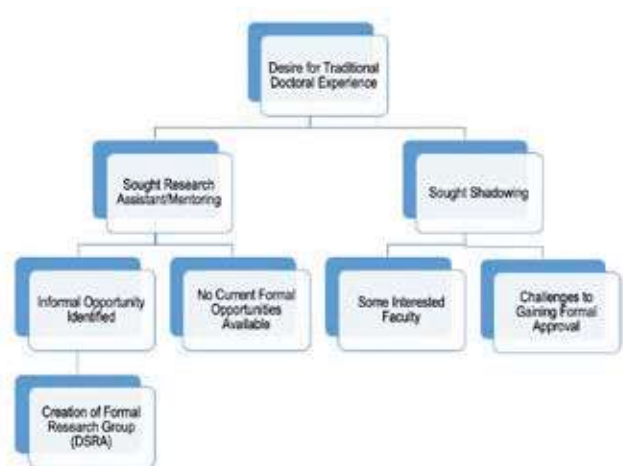
Figure 1. Decision Tree for Creating the DSRA.

of the formal proposal in the third year of study. During the second course in the program, I began to think of ways to create the traditional doctoral experience. First, I reached out to my first professor in the program. I inquired about whether I would be able to shadow him during one of his classes in the master's program. The professor agreed but needed to get college approval first. Unfortunately, we were not able to obtain college approval, as this was not a formal position, such as a teaching assistantship. Next, I contacted the program department chair, who met with me in person. He agreed that there were limited traditional opportunities to conduct research, so he first suggested I reach out to Career Services on campus to explore shadowing opportunities. After email correspondence with Career Services, I was not able to ascertain a clear path to shadowing on campus.

At this point, I began to feel discouraged about obtaining informal faculty mentoring and participating in research opportunities. Once again, I reached out to the program chair via email to inquire about research or teaching assistantship opportunities. The chair informed me that currently there were no assistantships available. The chair suggested I contact the on-campus research center to explore research opportunities. The chair then introduced me to the manager of research in the center, and we began email correspondence. I had no expectation for success at this point, but the research manager replied that he was interested in hearing more about my ideas.

Next, I had an idea on how to bridge the gap between faculty and doctoral students through the creation of a research-based student-led group that would foster faculty-student collaboration. The group, the DSRA, would provide opportunities for research, faculty mentorship, and collaboration with faculty and doctoral student peers. As Terry and Ghoshi (2015) stated, doctoral student success often depends upon multiple sources of mentoring. The origin of the word "alliance" in the name of the group came from the idea of forming an alliance between faculty and doctoral students with a shared interest in academic research. DSRA would serve doctoral students exclusively as a student group on campus. DSRA would not serve other student populations such as undergraduates or other graduate students; however, the group did discuss as to how/when DSRA would serve online doctoral students in the future.

When the idea for the group was presented to the faculty mentor, he expressed interest in discussing the idea further. This gave me hope of finding a solution to my problem. However, one of the challenges that presented itself was determining how to differentiate DSRA from other doctoral student groups. Although a doctoral student group was present on campus, its focus was on networking and professional development. DSRA, conversely, would focus on gaining practical experience in research, faculty mentorship, and collaboration. The hope was to create a more traditional doctoral experience for the non-traditional doctoral students.

The next challenge to creating the organization was student participation. The research manager, who will henceforth be referred to as "faculty mentor," scheduled a video conference for the first meeting. I had discussed the alliance with several of my doctoral student peers, and five doctoral students expressed interest to attend the first meeting. I was very motivated and attended the video conference call during my break at work in an empty conference room. The agenda for this first meeting included introductions, discussing group goals, and identifying the role of the faculty mentor. Although the first call felt like a success, we accomplished very little; we came away without clearly defined goals or a role for the faculty mentor. We did, however, schedule a second Zoom call, which we hoped would be more fruitful.

The second video conference call occurred about two weeks later, but the group had dwindled down to just three students. The students who

withdrew cited time commitment as their reason. Four months after the initial idea for the group, we were down to just two doctoral students—John and me. Our first task was to create a group goal and identify the role of our faculty mentor. The faculty mentor agreed to create the DSRA webpage for hosting of research materials and agenda. He also suggested that we conduct a reflective practice about our experiences creating the DSRA. The faculty mentor would provide guidance on creating the reflective practice, and we would collaboratively research and write the manuscript. This become our first goal.

However, as we began the process for collaboration, the group continued to face time commitment and scheduling conflicts, but I was determined to find a way to make it work. Unexpected events in the workplace for both John and I, occurred regularly. All three of us had other full-time responsibilities. I was employed at another university in a student services capacity and often had student issues that interfered with the ability to attend DSRA video conference meetings. Additionally, John was employed as nurse serving in a director position for a bustling hospital surgical department. The probability of unforeseen interruptions for both of us during the workday made it difficult to ensure that we could attend each meeting. Although the faculty mentor often worked with faculty and doctoral student researchers, his schedule was also regularly full, so taking on another mentoring role presented some challenges.

John: Like Tara, I, too, wanted to feel more like a traditional doctoral student in a non-traditional environment, which was my main motivation for joining the group. Tara approached me during class one night and explained her vision for the DSRA and the potential benefits. I was immediately onboard with joining the group. However, challenges presented themselves for Tara, our faculty mentor, and me. The ultimate challenges for me included simply finding the time during my unpredictable workday as a director of surgical services at a local Level 1 Trauma Center. I have seven departments and 120-plus employees who are under my leadership. Unfortunately, there were many times I was unable to make the video conference meetings.

Tara has an amazing work ethic, and I feel blessed to have traversed almost two years with her on this doctoral journey. Her determination to push ahead despite all of the challenges of maintaining a full-time job, family commitments, and student life has inspired me during my times of self-doubt and struggle to balance, work, relationships, school, and being a single father. Eventually Tara and I were able to coordinate workable video conference meeting times with our mentor, which allowed us to develop the DSRA and find the time to write this reflective manuscript.

Working with a faculty mentor and holding weekly video conference meetings has allowed me to grow and feel more like a traditional doctoral scholar. Further, I think the decision Tara and I made to attend a ground cohort program on campus has provided tangible benefits that online doctoral students simply cannot access. For example, multiple previous ground instructors have continued to be mentors for Tara and me, and we both routinely call upon them via text, phone, and email for feedback on both school and personal issues. Having attended the first in-person residency conference with a majority of online students, I felt like we had important advantages over our online peers due to our intensive interactions with faculty on campus.

The importance of an authentic and detailed understanding of non-traditional student populations and their doctoral experience, along with the scheduling issues non-traditional students face, should not be underestimated. Sometimes policies written for traditional programs are simply inadequate or not applicable to the non-traditional student experience (Petersen, 2014). I believe access to physical mentors on campus as found in a traditional doctoral setting has increased my sense of belonging as a scholar and allowed me to alleviate much self-doubt about my ability to complete doctoral level work.

Faculty mentor. When Tara inquired about forming the DSRA, I thought it was a wonderful idea. Part of my role in the research center is to collaborate with faculty, and sometimes students, on research projects. As such, acting as the faculty mentor for the group aligned well with my other responsibilities. Since I regularly receive requests from faculty and students to collaborate on research, I usually begin the process gradually to provide time for acclimation of the group members and to set clear goals. In my experience, only about

20% of the inquires for collaboration materialize as viable research projects. From my perspective, this is what made Tara and John's participation in this group so remarkable. Although they were not able to attend every meeting, often due to scheduling conflicts, they persevered.

I have accomplished several tasks in my role as mentor for this group. First, I suggested a recurring schedule of meetings to ensure consistency in our goals. Second, as shown in Figure 2, I created the DSRA webpage on the research center website. This gave the group a virtual presence and provided a group repository for research resources. Third, I suggested that the group consider completing a manageable project for our first research collaboration. Instead of conducting an empirical study, which would have required several approvals and months of work to initiate, I suggested completing a reflective practice manuscript about our experiences creating DSRA. From my perspective, this would allow the group to have an achievable goal that would likely support group cohesion. The culmination of these efforts resulted in the present manuscript.

REASONS FOR THE PROBLEM

We identified several possible reasons for the difficulty we experienced in creating the DSRA, including (a) program format, (b) family and professional obligations, (c) group dynamics, and (d) identifying a mentor.

Program format. The program format is hybrid consisting of online and on-campus evening courses. Evening courses meet once per week for eight weeks per course. Online courses also last eight weeks. Online courses and on campus courses do not overlap, which results in 8 to 16 week stretches of time when the cohort is not on campus at all. Often, the members of the DSRA expressed feeling like imposters because of not being able to connect regularly with peers and mentors on campus and frequently having to reschedule group video conference meetings. The phenomenon of imposter syndrome involves a person having a sense of not being able live up to the expectations of others (Qureshi et al., 2017).

Family and professional obligations. The external obligations of the members of the DSRA posed challenges in a couple of areas. First, scheduling conflicts arose due to conflicts with job responsibilities such as unforeseen events. In addition, family obligations such as children also played a role in scheduling conflicts. These competing responsibilities presented many

Figure 2. DSRA Webpage.

challenges for the group. In addition to scheduling issues, these competing responsibilities affected group members' self-esteem and motivation.

Group dynamics. Challenges inherent in the group formation included creating well-defined goals, creating a regular schedule that all members could attend, and attrition of members. Preliminary group goals were written by the founding member and emailed to the other members and to the faculty mentor for feedback. Next, the group encountered challenges with attendance to the scheduled Zoom sessions, which ultimately resulted in members leaving the group. Members who left the group cited time commitment as the major factor for leaving the group.

Identifying a mentor. In seeking opportunities for faculty mentorship, we had assumed that in being a doctoral student these opportunities would happen more organically. We found that we had to ask for mentorship and ask multiple faculty for the opportunity. Due to the part-time hybrid nature of the program, faculty-student mentoring was limited. Our experience with the DSRA faculty mentor occurred because (a) we shared an interest in research, (b) we reached out with an idea, and (c) our mentor was willing to work with us. Early on, we had some challenges identifying a mentor, but once he was identified we felt optimistic about the outcomes of the group.

EVALUATION OF REASONS FOR THE PROBLEM

We conjectured that four reasons contributed to the problem of creating DSRA: (a) program format, (b) family and professional obligations, (c) group dynamics, and (d) identifying a mentor. Due to the nature of non-traditional doctoral programs, students often struggle to find a sense of belonging (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012). The formation of DSRA stemmed from the desire to create a sense of doctoral identity and community within the part-time doctoral program. Chapman (2017) discussed imposter syndrome as a contributing factor to the lack of sense of belonging for doctoral students. Feelings of not belonging and seeming adequate (imposter syndrome) in the case of the DSRA students occurred because we were not engaged in full-time research like traditional doctoral programs.

Additionally, the hybrid nature of the program caused challenges to communication between DSRA members. Limited face-to-face interaction contributed to these challenges. Pillay and James (2015) discussed social exchange theory and intercultural competence, which postulates the challenges of maintaining cultural competency in the face of limited face-to-face interaction. Although universities are becoming increasingly diverse in terms students' age and background, the adjustment has not been made by institutions to accommodate this change (Pillay & James, 2015). The members of DSRA experienced a similar scenario. We struggled to find the time to participate in the formation of the group through virtual collaboration, while balancing competing priorities. Ultimately, the program demanded the same rigor as a non-traditional program without significant face-to-face social interaction on campus.

Next, the DSRA members encountered challenges with external obligations. Members experienced challenges juggling family, career, and coursework, which made it difficult to find time for the group to meet. At times, members were forced to miss meetings due to unexpected work events, extracurricular activities for children, and other obligations. Bowers and Bergman (2016) discovered that most adult learners who are mothers choose to spend more time with their children, and in addition, adult learners often struggle to find the time they need to devote to their studies. Both student members of DSRA have families. Therefore, time spent away from campus was often due to family obligations.

Competing priorities created obstacles in the effort to maintain flexibility with the group. As non-traditional doctoral students, group members sought to find ways to balance time while pursuing the desire to become emerging scholars. Qureshi et al. (2017) noted that imposter syndrome can lead to burnout phenomenon. Burnout was a realistic possibility for DSRA student members had they not carefully considered taking on additional responsibilities with DSRA and how taking on these new responsibilities could affect their existing responsibilities. Through the formation of DSRA, student members sought ways to combat impostor syndrome through collaboration and building a sense of community. The student members struggled with tightly packed schedules in which there was little time for study or other program related obligations.

Throughout the formation of the group, external obligations regularly affected group meetings and produced scheduling conflicts. DSRA experienced external challenges as a source of scheduling issues for the group. Bailey, Bogossian, and Akesson (2016) discussed the formation of their doctoral student group. The authors experienced a commonality in challenges with DSRA. For example, the authors cited time and personal interests as affecting group meetings and group dynamics. Although the group dynamic of DSRA eventually become consistent, there were some definite challenges early on.

For example, the DSRA members had to demonstrate how DSRA was different from other doctoral groups. Eventually, the student members were able to clearly identify group goals. In addition, the team dynamic of the group had to find its rhythm. For example, the team had to find how to best communicate (i.e., emails, video conferencing, calendar reminders). The student members of DSRA often met in person, while meetings with the faculty mentor were held via videoconferencing. Through trial and error, DSRA members found that calendar invites for meetings worked best. van den Hout, Gevers, Davis, and Weggeman (2017) noted passion, trust, and synergy as factors contributing to the success of teams. In addition to determination, these factors were present in the founding members of DSRA. Conversely, Rojas (2017) noted personality types and social tendencies, as some of the attributes possessed by team leaders. Unlike other teams, DSRA was a relatively small group and did not necessarily require the emergence of a leader. Although Tara, the founding member, served as the default leader of the group, John and the faculty mentor regularly took on this role when needed—being accountable and presenting a supportive attitude.

Moreover, Kozlowski and Chao (2018) discussed how clear alignment of team processes affect outcomes. Through collaborative in the formation of DSRA, adjustments in processes and alignments had to be made along the way. Kozlowski and Chao (2018) also described motivational aspects of team dynamics as a key indicator of team success. The motivation of the student members of DSRA drove the flexibility needed to adjust team processes (e.g., scheduling and meeting format). The willingness from the faculty mentor to remain flexible and committed to the collaborative efforts of DSRA contributed to the success of the overall team dynamics.

Another contributing factor that posed challenges inherent with group formation was physical space. The group had to consider the lack of time on campus and how it would affect the formation of the group. Physical space issues affect the manifestation and persistence of social connections (Arriaza & Rocha, 2016). The lack of physical space played a key role in communication and affected a sense of belonging for the student members of DSRA. Although the students did have some connection to campus as members of the ground cohort, the DSRA group met virtually. For example, the student members of DSRA were only on campus once a week for four hours, and this time was dedicated to classroom work, not DSRA collaboration. Video conferencing had to be scheduled at separate times off campus. The limited time spent on campus contributed to the slow formation of DSRA.

There were also other team dynamics and collaboration issues that affected group formation. The collaborative efforts in creating the group included (a) deciding on the goal of the group, (b) giving the group a name once the goal was established, (c) recruiting members for the group, and (d) creating initial goals for the group. The student members managed these efforts, but the faculty mentor provided guidance and oversight to complete the tasks. Beres and Dixon (2016) noted that faculty mentorship significantly contributes to the doctoral student experience, and it affects student retention. Faculty mentorship in DSRA definitely contributed to group cohesion.

Beyond the challenges faced by the group's student members, the faculty mentor had additional job responsibilities, which created a limited schedule for DSRA meeting times. Esposito et al. (2017) discussed their own perspectives as non-traditional doctoral students and expressed that the mentoring relationship was an essential component of the experience. As such, finding time for faculty-student interaction is central to student success. Ultimately, this interaction can contribute to students' feeling like researchers (Mantai, 2015; Starr & DeMartini, 2015). The first challenge that DSRA met was finding a faculty mentor to take on the group. The next challenge for the student

members of DSRA during the formation of the group was convincing the faculty mentor that the idea for DSRA was not only worthwhile, but that student members could commit to such a group. The student members of DSRA knew the importance of having faulty mentorship through the process of forming the group and in gaining crucial research experience, which is another reason why we persisted in the process.

In the case of DSRA, the faculty mentor participation made the students feel less like imposters and more like researchers. Mentorship has an important influence on doctoral student success, and we experienced this influence in DSRA. Narendorf, Small, Cardoso, Wagner, and Jennings (2016) found that publication and second authorship accomplished through mentoring can have long term implications for students, and Holder-Webb and Trompeter (2016) explained that mentoring opportunities such as writing conference papers helps doctoral students become stronger members of the academy. Doctoral level mentorship contributes to generalized career success for the mentees (Anafarta & Apaydin, 2016). Two primary goals for DSRA were research and academic writing, and although there were some challenges to accomplishing these goals, the existence of this reflective practice is evidence that these goals were at least partially achieved.

In exploring the literature, we were able to reflect more deeply on the reasons for the problem. We now have a better grasp of why the formation of the group was so challenging. Ultimately, the practical experience of the members was confirmed through the literature. Challenges inherent to the formation of the group can be attributed to several factors, including program format, family and professional obligations, group dynamics, and identifying a mentor. The literature supported common themes such as feeling like imposters and the effect of limited time spent on campus. The next section involves a discussion of the decision reached by the authors on which combination of reasons most contributed to the problem of creating and implementing the new DSRA organization.

DECISION

During the creation of DSRA, we struggled with scheduling conflicts due to external obligations. Additionally, the non-traditional, hybrid nature of the program did not allow for significant time on campus, which contributed to slow and unsteady formation of the new organization. After evaluating the reasons for the problem, it is clear that our practical experience in creating DSRA intersects with several common themes in the literature.

The part-time practitioner focused Doctorate of Education program serves working professionals. Time spent on campus is limited to one night per week, accompanied by online classes where no campus time is required. Due in part to the program format (part-time, hybrid, and practitioner focused) serving working adults, there were limited student teaching and research opportunities. Even with annual residency events held on campus, the program format limited the formal mentoring opportunities available, which indirectly affected group formation. Additionally, even when the mentor was identified and the group was formed, the lack of time on campus for the student members posed problems with meeting times.

The members of DSRA hold full-time jobs and do not have access to campus during the workday. Even with leveraging the video conference meeting schedule, external interruptions and unforeseen external responsibilities prevented members from attending meetings regularly. Conversely, the faculty mentor is on campus full time during the day and not on campus in the evening when doctoral students were most likely to be on campus. The scheduling misalignment caused delays in the initial formation of the group and lags in time of communication to all members.

The unexpected challenges around the format of the program, posed critical issues during the formation of the group. The student members of the group did not anticipate the effect of campus time on limiting the formation of social connections. Virtual meetings did provide significant support to ameliorate this problem, but the lack of time on campus did have some effect on the slow formation of the group.

In deciding on the combination of reasons that contributed to the challenges of forming the DSRA, based upon our practical experience and the literature, we had difficulty narrowing down the source. As shown in Figures 3, there were, however, several clear factors that affected group formation. The figure shows that program format, group dynamics, family and professional

obligations, and identifying a mentor were significant reasons for the problem. However, it became clear that scheduling conflicts were both central and germane to each of the reasons. As such, we concluded that the scheduling conflicts primarily contributed to the problem of group formation. Although we mitigated the effect of these conflicts through several means (for example, goal setting and virtual attendance), scheduling conflicts persisted as a central factor in all of the reasons for the problem.

Figure 3. Visual Representation of Reasons for the Problem.

REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

Through this process, we uncovered issues in our group formation that were not initially clear. For example, the hybrid nature of the program created challenges with meeting even though we utilized a virtual meeting tool. In addition, the student members of the group discovered through reflection, that we were experiencing imposter syndrome, which was also supported by the literature. Uncovering imposter syndrome as a backdrop to this experience was surprising. As both John and Tara are working professionals, it seemed our sense of identity was already established. Nonetheless, in working to become scholars, we initially felt like imposters.

Furthermore, and not surprising, we can see the immense value in faculty mentorship. Throughout the formation of DSRA, the faculty mentor served as a guide and anchor for the group. Although Tara and John were the driving force behind group formation, the mentor played a key role in group cohesion and development. Our challenges did not lie in group decision making. Rather, our issues were rooted in time and scheduling conflicts.

Subsequently, as we reflected on this activity, we felt that social exchange theory helps explain some of the outcomes. Each member of the group was participating for their own reason. John and Tara needed faculty mentorship to help guide the group. Group formation for the student members contributed to gaining research and writing experience, as well as in enhancing long term career opportunities in building our curriculum vitae, which is necessary for advancement in academia. In contrast, the faculty mentor benefited from the personal satisfaction of helping doctoral learners emerge as scholars, as well as participating in a collaborative research activity.

Recommendations. This reflection demonstrates how emerging scholars in a non-traditional program can struggle with and overcome challenges in group collaboration. Unknown factors in student group formation must be carefully considered, especially in non-traditional settings where these unique challenges can arise. Furthermore, practitioners should consider video conference for collaboration when creating or participating in a group for non-traditional doctoral students. Other virtual methods of communication can also be used and should be considered. Utilizing communication tools that are most effective for the group is important.

Doctoral students who do not have access to traditional doctoral experiences should ask for mentorship, guidance, and resources. In addition, students should be innovative and think outside-the-box when developing ideas for these experiences. Due to the nature of non-traditional doctoral programs, students must get creative on how they can fit traditional experiences into their busy lives. Recommendations for future research include (a) further exploring the effect of imposter syndrome has on doctoral student participation, specifically in participation on research teams; (b) deeper examination of the role of faculty mentors in doctoral student development, specifically as it relates to small group dynamics; (c) and the effect of scheduling conflicts and other challenges on the longevity of mentor driven doctoral research groups.

Tara's final thoughts. Through reflecting on this process, the overall formation of DSRA and the roadmap in which we used to get there was challenging but rewarding. My desire for having

a traditional doctoral student experience led me to collaborate with both faculty and my student peers in the creation of DSRA. The overwhelming sense of imposter syndrome affected the way that I saw myself as an emerging scholar. Through this process of reflection, I became increasingly uncomfortable with my abilities. After learning that this is the normal part of the process to becoming a scholar, I began feeling less like an imposter and more like a scholar. This manuscript is evidence of this transformation.

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