AN ALIGNMENT MODEL FOR THE RESEARCH HIGHER DEGREE SUPERVISION PROCESS USING REPERTORY GRIDS

Dr. Guillermo Aranda-Mena
Problem definition

Supervisor / student / thesis

Gurr’s Supervisory Model (2001)

Personal Construct Psychology (PCP)

Gurr’s model in the light of PCP

Conclusions
Problem definition

- A survey by Harman (2002) of Australian research-intensive universities showed, “...low student satisfaction levels due to poor quality supervision...”.

- A survey of United Kingdom PhD students, reported in Haksever and Manisali (2000), found that 30% of the cases cited relating to non-completion of studies were due to problems with supervision.

- Other areas such as the final ‘writing up’ stage where it is critical that the student clearly communicates what they have done in the research. Hughes (1994) states that, for many students, the most daunting task is writing-up their work.
Supervisory style and assistance in research

Table 1. Supervisory styles (Cullen et al, 1993)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Close</th>
<th>Hands off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>Regular, frequent</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation to supervisor’s research:</td>
<td>Closely related</td>
<td>Unrelated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Publication:</td>
<td>The norm</td>
<td>Uncommon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship:</td>
<td>The norm</td>
<td>Rare</td>
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</table>

Figure 2. Supervisory assistance in research phases (Cullen, 1993).
The reasons for non-completion of PhDs
The reasons for non-completion of PhDs

- Problems of students
- Role of academic institutions
- Supervision
The reasons for non-completion of PhDs

- No effective appeal against examiners' decisions
- Standard of the PhD is rising
- Problems of students
- Students can find no remedy for poor supervision
The reasons for non-completion of PhDs

- Neglected, incomplete or ill-conceived supervision
- No instruction in research techniques
- Role of academic institutions
- Bad choice of research topic
The reasons for non-completion of PhDs

- Difficulties that arise from delayed completion
- Students' lack discipline
- Students' lack research flair
- Students' lack motivation
- Students' do not know what research involves
The reasons for non-completion of PhDs

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Supervision

Difficulties that arise from delayed completion

Students' lack discipline

Students' lack research flair

Students' lack motivation

Students' do not know what research involves

Problems of students

Role of academic institutions
Supervision a non-lineal process

- The more typical literature, including universities’ own guides, prove to be rigid and highly prescriptive about supervisor, supervisee and the thesis or object of study (Lawson, 2000).

- For example, Phillips and Pugh (1987) suggest steps and sequential timetables.

- However, in reality, the situation often proves to be a different one. The process of doing research is hardly one that goes from $a$ to $b$ to $c$. According to Grant (2003) the process is iterative, complex and unstable.
Supervision as a non-linear process

Student / supervisor / thesis relationship

Grant (2003)
Gurr’s (2001) dynamic alignment model.
Personal Construct Psychology

- Is a need to find and use a technique for this.

- Paper proposes the ‘Repertory Grid’ method (Denicolo and Pope, 2001).

- The repertory grid technique is based on the principles of ‘personal construct psychology’ (Kelly, 1955).

- The use of an alignment model in conjunction with repertory grids provides a means of judging the degree of, and framework for working towards, effective supervision.

- A repertory grid technique is proposed to facilitate the implementation of Gurr’s (2001) dynamic alignment model.
Repertory Grids: Bipolar Construct System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived as Effective</th>
<th>Perceived as Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Efficient communication</td>
<td>Distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly directed</td>
<td>Very little direct guidance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highly structured programme</td>
<td>Unstructured programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highly experienced supervision</td>
<td>Less experience in supervising</td>
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<td>Regular meetings</td>
<td>No formal/regular meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Befriends individuals</td>
<td>Distant/aloof to students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm progress taken seriously</td>
<td>No formal account of progress</td>
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<td>Encourage publication</td>
<td>Complete thesis first</td>
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Elements

- Elements are the **scenarios** to compared and contrasted

- The important thing is to provide a wide range of those “elements” e.g. various **supervisors** with different styles
Example of triad elicitation

Seven Elements = Supervisors
(with a wide range of supervisory styles)

Efficient communication

Regular meetings

Very little direct guidance

Distant

No formal / regular meetings

Highly directed
...resulting “bipolar construct system”

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System as a “Repertory Grid”: student’s view on supervisor

Perceived as Effective

- Efficient communication
- Highly directed
- Highly structured programme
- Highly experienced supervision
- Regular meetings
- Befriends individuals
- Midterm progress taken seriously
- Encourage publication

Student

- Distant
- Very little direct guidance
- Unstructured programme
- Less experience in supervising
- No formal/regular meetings
- Distant/alooof to students
- No formal account of progress
- Complete thesis first
System as a “Repertory Grid”: supervisor view about himself

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived as Effective</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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Grid Comparison: Student v Supervisor

**Perceived as Effective**

- Efficient communication
- Highly directed
- Highly structured programme
- Highly experienced supervision
- Regular meetings
- Befriends individuals
- Midterm progress taken seriously
- Encourage publication

**Student**

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Complete thesis first

Perceived as effective by:

Appropriate Support

Autonomy Generation
Further progress

Efficient communication
Highly directed
Highly structured programme
Highly experienced supervision
Regular meetings
Befriend individuals
Midterm progress taken seriously
Encourage publication

Distant
Very little direct guidance
Unstructured programme
Less experience in supervising
No formal/regular meetings
Distant/alooof to students
No formal account of progress
Complete thesis first

Perceived as effective by:

Supervisor

Student
Towards completion

Perceived as effective by:
- Supervisor
- Student

1. Efficient communication
2. Highly directed
3. Highly structured programme
4. Highly experienced supervision
5. Regular meetings
Efficient communication

Distant
Very little direct guidance
Unstructured programme
Less experience in supervising
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Complete thesis first

Appropriate Support

Autonomy Generation
Gurr’s (2001) dynamic alignment model.
Epistemology of Personal Construct Psychology

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Positivism vs</th>
<th>Constructivism</th>
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<tr>
<td>Science: nuggets of truth</td>
<td>alternativism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>truth is attainable</td>
<td>truth is open to question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>validity is based on statistical significance</td>
<td>validity is based on interpretation and consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem of scope (nomothetic)</td>
<td>problem of depth (ideographic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subjects of investigation</td>
<td>participative enquiry</td>
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To conclude

- This paper has put forward three main themes for consideration. The first describes the research process, which provides a “context” for consideration. Second, aspects in relation to research supervision are discussed. Then a model to assist in the understanding and facilitation of student – supervisor interaction is proffered.

- Given that the research process and the interactions and relationships between student and supervisor are complex.

- What are the new supervisory challenges?

Thank you! Guillermo + Rod