Working with your Supervisor

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Overview

- The supervisors role
- The students role
- Where can the problems lie?
- Overcoming problems
  - The meeting
  - Communication
  - Assertiveness
• Managing your doctorate is difficult ...

• ... so maintaining a good relationship with your supervisor can make all the difference!

• Other benefits:
  • learn how to manage professional relationships for future work situations
  • should minimise research problems as you have an open honest dialogue
What students say

• “My supervisor is **very supportive**”.
• “Difficult to get hold of but always very **encouraging and full of good ideas**”.
• “She prompts to me to submit papers and attend conferences- it’s good to be pushed!”
• “... always **micro managing** my work”
• Each time I suggest an idea or poster for conference etc it’s always that word **no**.”
• “She **re-writes all my presentations** and posters. There is no room for my creativity.”
What does your supervisor do?
• Planning and preparing taught modules
• Teaching undergraduate and Masters students
• Marking coursework and exam questions
• Writing research proposals
• Carrying out and keeping up to date with research
• Attending department and university meetings
• Serving on university/external committees
• Attending and presenting at conferences
• Developing, leading, managing staff
• Managing their own office (email, etc)
• Social life, home and family time...plus much more...
What does your supervisor expect?
• Effective and timely communication
• Balancing advice and giving student space
• Clear responsibilities from the institution
• To mentor and develop students?
• To help student manage the project?
• Share experience with other supervisors
• Establish milestones and progress checks
• Help candidates succeed and get the PhD (on time and in budget!).
But what about you? What do you need form your supervisor?
Notice the similarities??
Where do problems lie?
What can go wrong with the relationship?

• Look at the problems arising from BOTH sides
• Number of hours spent in lab/field
• False expectations
• Failure to see whole picture
• Funding
• Authorship
• Other pressures
• Lack of communication

• In some cases the breakdown is due to personality clashes
• Your behaviour can improve the situation
• If you aren’t managing, turn to the support mechanisms e.g advisor/PGR Coordinator
Overcoming problems

• **Keep things in perspective**
  • supervisor is human
  • shares your long term goal (PhD success)
  • criticize your actions, not you

• **Be organised**
  • Organise FORMAL meetings if not happening
  • prepare for meetings with points for discussion
  • Report meeting summary with agreed action points and timescale

• **Be honest**
  • report any mistakes (before the grapevine)
  • report on difficulties whilst they are SMALL
Overcoming problems

• Be professional
  • take criticism
  • don’t expect to always get on with work colleagues
  • don’t bitch to colleagues or on social media!!

• Ask for feedback
  • don’t wait to be told what to do/read

• Show your enthusiasm

• Meet deadlines
What are your rights?

- Make decisions
- Ask for what you want
- An opinion
- Make mistakes
- Be successful
- Change your mind
- Be independent
- Respect
- Refuse
A word on assertiveness

A way of thinking where you stand up for your rights whilst acknowledging the rights of others.
I really appreciate you asking me to help out with these experiments……

…unfortunately I need to prioritise writing up my next chapter ………

…but I know Jane is working on developing this technique. Would you like me to show her how to do this so she can take this on?
Other Issues?

- Part-time working
- Intercultural
- Remote Working
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