

# Managing Your Supervisory Relationship

Melanie Ghoul

Wisdom

***‘All students are different. All projects are different. There are no golden rules.’***

# Agenda

- DPhil: student vs supervisor
  - Who are you?
  - Who is your supervisor?
  - Official guidance
- Toolbox:
  - Communication (feedback)
  - Meetings
  - Conflicts

Wisdom

***‘A PhD offers an amazing amount of freedom and potential help / resources. It sounds naff, but those that put the most in will get the most out, in terms of enjoyment, success and references.’***



# What makes a good relationship?

- Cooperation
- Trust
- Clear expectations (mutual)
- (some degree of) Independence
- *Understanding of who is part of the relationship*

Wisdom

***‘Encouraging independence is part of our responsibilities as supervisors and that sometimes means leaving you to work something out for yourself. You need room to make your own mistakes and learn from them. It is a common misconception among students that a good supervisor is one who protects you from this process.’***

# Exercise 1: understanding self

## Strengths and weaknesses

Professional

Strengths

# Who am I?

Weaknesses

Personal



## Wisdom

***‘Often it will just be the case that your supervisor is managing you in a way they found worked well in the past with someone else and they will welcome the chance to make adjustments before problems accumulate. Of course, it’s good to let off steam and get an outside perspective but don’t expect them to find out that you’re unhappy from someone else.’***

Professional

Strengths

# Who am I?

Weaknesses

Personal

How do I like to work?

What do I expect from my supervisor?

# Exercise 2: understanding your supervisor

## Who is my supervisor?

What are their objectives?

How do they interact with their students?

What do they expect from you?

# Exercise 3: Who owns your DPhil? And Why??

a. Your supervisor

b. The department

c. You

d. Someone else

Managing Your Supervisory Relationship

# **OFFICIAL GUIDANCE**

**(SEE HANDOUTS)**

Wisdom

***‘My biggest advice to students is that they have to take responsibility for their project. This includes both intellectual responsibility (thinking up of ideas, analyses etc.) And practical responsibility – ensuring that the project runs smoothly.’***

***“More haste means less speed”***

Managing Your Supervisory Relationship

# **COMMUNICATION**

## **Feedback and active listening**

### **Exercise 4**

# Feedback – giving DOs

- Ask whether you can deliver your feedback now.
- Give feedback in private - directly to the person concerned.
- Give feedback as soon after performance as possible, but not when the people are still emotionally engaged.
- Be specific and use concrete examples. Refer to a behaviour.
- Be clear about what you want to say.
- Include positive perceptions and feelings. If you can't find anything positive to say, it's time to look in the mirror. (Feedback does not equal criticism in the negative sense)
- Communicate perceptions as perceptions and feelings as feelings, not as facts.
- Formulate feedback as precise and possible and detailed enough.
- Ask questions for understanding summarize and express your support.
- Take ownership of the feedback you are giving – use 'I'.



# Feedback – giving DON'Ts

- Don't refer to the person as such, but to their behaviour and especially to behaviour that can be changed.
- Don't judge.
- Don't use words that indicate a generalization such as „all“, „always“, „never“ etc.
- Don't forget that it is you who is giving the feedback and hence you owe it: use „I“ statements.
- Don't sugar-coat negative feedback.
- Don't postpone/avoid the conversation until you've "had it up to here".
- Don't give positive feedback without specifics.
- Don't mistake valid reasons for excuses.
- Don't tell someone you know what's going on inside their head.
- Don't give feedback only when there is a problem. -> people will learn that after "you are a real team player, ...", you will follow with ", BUT ..."
- Don't use sarcasm to make a point.

# Giving feedback

- **Observation** – a concrete action you observe (that affects you)
- **Feeling** – how you feel in reaction to what you observe
- **Need / desire / value** – gives rise to your feeling
- **Recommendation** – a concrete action you request (in order to enrich your life)

*Based on Nonviolent Communication  
(Marshall Rosenberg)*

# Feedback – receiving DOs

- Listen, don't interrupt.
- Ask for clarifications if you feel you need any.
- Thank for the feedback.
- Evaluate feedback for yourself and follow up if needed.

# Feedback – receiving DON'Ts

- Get defensive.
- Prove them wrong.
- Feel you have to do something to change yourself.
- Give an answer to justify yourself.
- Dismiss the information.
- Feel helpless to do anything about what you heard.
- Change the focus and attack the speaker.
- Generalise the message and feel bad about everything/ think you're perfect in all aspects.

Managing Your Supervisory Relationship

# **MEETINGS**

Wisdom

***'Students should be proactive (but not pushy, we are busy) about telling us how much time they need. This will vary massively across the course of the year(s) so let us know what you want. However give us notice, and be respectful - it makes it easier to help!'***

# Exercise 5

## Meetings, objectives...

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-bound

# CONFLICTS

Do not fear conflict. It is normal

Do not avoid it, only leaves things unresolved and messier

Split in pairs:

Discuss type of conflict experienced

Why did conflict arise?

How was it resolved?

Understand your reactions

Return feedback



# Dealing with conflict

- More than one relationship: co-supervisor / supervisory team
- DGs / Head of Department /Graduate secretary/ Head of group / Departmental administrator
- MPLS Graduate Office
- College
- Student Union
- Cohort of peers
- University Counselling Service, Nightline
- Other academics
- Other networks
- Other service providers: Careers Service, Language Centre, IT Services.....

Wisdom

***‘All students are different. All projects are different. There are no golden rules.’***

# Dealing with conflict (internally)



Language of aggression



Language of compassion

# Revisit expectations and action planning

Plan for future with caveat of glitches

How would you learn to be independent and comfortable with self

What would you change in your relationship with your supervisor

How would you approach your goals differently

How would you deal with conflict differently

# Planning your DPhil : guidance notes for good practice

## **Looking after yourself**

Don't lose sight of the bigger picture

Build up a network of support

Plan, book and take holidays  
Work at your relationship with  
your supervisor

Take care of your profile

Keep up your other interests – sport, music, socialising.....

Develop and maintain awareness of different career options  
and choices for life after the DPhil