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Novel aspects of a training program for research supervision

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Novel aspects of a training program for research supervision

Abstract

Introduction

- much of the cutting edge research developed in universities is conducted by Higher Degree Research (HDR) students

- but **institutional responses have been dominated by compliance-based metrics** like timely completions that are used as imperfect measures of quality of the research supervision practice (Cullen et al 1994)

- it is in the interests of both universities and government to increase the quantity and quality of research supervision (Latona and Browne 2001)- therefore **careful training of supervisors and attention to supervisory practices is paramount**

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Novel Aspects of a Training Program for Research Supervision



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Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Novel Aspects
 - 2.1 Communicative Theorisation of the Supervisory Process
 - 2.2 Guided Reflective Practice
 - 2.3 Representation Methods: Anonymising and Generalising
 - 2.4 Appropriate Supporting Technologies
3. Interested in Collaborating?

Introduction

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- much of the cutting edge research developed in universities is conducted by Higher Degree Research (HDR) students
- but *institutional responses have been dominated by compliance-based metrics* like timely completions that are used as imperfect measures of quality of the research supervision practice (Cullen et al 1994)
- it is in the interests of both universities and government to increase the quantity and quality of research supervision (Latona and Browne 2001)- therefore *careful training of supervisors and attention to supervisory practices is paramount*

Introduction

- during the early 2000s, Staffordshire University, UK recognised that there was *a need for explicit research supervisor training outside the informal mentoring that may or may not occur within the confines of the specific supervision teams*
- one of the authors (Clarke) took this course in 2002
 - this training was important, providing a venue in which potential principal supervisors could be exposed to as many examples of best supervisory practice as possible
 - without a venue for the exchange of experience, supervisors would simply re-enact what they knew, unaware of alternative and perhaps better approaches to supervisory practice

Introduction

UK Supervisory Module: Approach

- *Research supervision training programs are now mandated* by the UK HEFCE (2003) and *the research supervisor training developed at Staffordshire University was pioneering* (Times Higher Education Supplement 2003, Budd 2003)
 - its purpose was to ensure that the *experience of HDR supervision is shared and built upon in order to enhance the collective supervisory capability and quality*
 - its *assessments cycles used reflection on the supervisory process* and were *written up in the form of reflective practice journals*
- however, despite my (wonderful) experience of this training program, there were arguably some problematic design aspects...

Introduction

UK Supervisory Module: Critique

1. *no elicitation methods taught or used to assist in effective communication* within the supervisory team and HDR candidate,
2. most of the UK *cohort were both unfamiliar with and resistant to reflective practice* and unable to apply it in supervisory contexts,
3. *no methods were used to abstract and generalise cases* and so supervisor experiences uncovered during the course remained locked in private reflective practice journals that could never be released to or utilised by the Faculty, consequently
4. this also meant that a dissemination policy or platform was never a component for the Staffordshire Module (Adnett and Longhurst 2003) and its *benefits largely remained as the personal experiences of those who undertook it.*

Introduction

RSM at University of Wollongong

- this paper describes some of the novel aspects in a redesigned, localised version of this *UK HECFE National Program* in order to develop quality supervisors and to formalise and disseminate supervisory best practices- *Research Supervision Module (RSM)*
- builds on the successes of the current UK HEFCE's Research Supervisor Module while overcoming some perceived design issues:
 1. communicative theorisation of the supervisory process
 2. guided reflective practice
 3. representation methods: anonymisation, generalisation and
 4. appropriate use of supporting technologies

Communicative Theorisation of the Supervisory Process

Communicative Theorisation of the Supervisory Process ...

- RSM will look at the ongoing supervisory process from a communicative theorisation in two ways by:
 1. *using insights into Business and Management communications to consider issues like quality, timeliness and informational contents*- providing attributes of communication- static
 2. *using functional model of language (Systemic Functional Linguistics) to promote an understanding of the interactions within and between members in the supervisory team and between the team and the higher degree research student (Martin 1992)*- providing processual and semantic aspects of communication

Communicative Theorisation of the Supervisory Process

- completed acts of communication occur in specific situational and cultural contexts
- in particular we will employ communication resources in SFL that deal with *recurring patterns of communication (genres)* as the basis for a formal elicitation process applied to the supervisory process
 - these patterns of communication are associated with specific cultures- we will explore how a cultural understanding and social access to these semantic resources varies across different cultures and supervisory teams
 - one of the applicants has developed these ideas into a knowledge elicitation approach applied in studying organisations (Clarke 2006)

Guided Reflective Practice

Guided Reflective Practice

- to overcome resistance to and problems with standard reflective practice, *we advocate the use of guided reflective practice* (Donaghy and Moss 2000; Johns 2002)
 - *not all disciplinary backgrounds are equally experienced with or predisposed to reflective practice* of any kind
 - *to remove what some see as the 'confessional element' of reflection* and reduce the animosity to this approach
- *guided reflection* will offer candidate supervisors the confidence to analyse and confront their supervisory experiences and practices with a constructively critical team in a supportive and safe environment

Guided Reflective Practice

Genre Methods | Supporting Technologies

- use genre methods (see above) to *scaffold reflection and to stage their 'deliberative practices'*
 - genre theory in RSM is another form of guidance in reflection for candidate supervisors
 - as it turns out genre theory can be used to 'correct' poorly formed or unformulated stages in traditional reflective practice (see example next slide)
 - structuring its deliberative practices by means of its communicative processes
- *to explicitly instruct and support candidate supervisors in guided reflection using the supporting technologies* (see below)-
organising the communicative processes into institutionally endorsed communicative artefacts

Guided Reflective Practice

Considering Reflection using Genre Theory: An Example

- *Gibbs' Model of Reflection* (1988)- structured debriefing based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle:
 1. Description
 2. Feelings
 3. Evaluation
 4. Analysis
 5. Conclusions
 6. Action Plan
 - *genre theory* describes description as "what some particular thing is like" (Martin 1985, 15)
 - arguably a DESCRIPTION Genre could be used here- what Gibbs is talking about is in fact incorrect
 - *we should not use a pattern of communication which implies a non-Activity structured genre*
 - we should instead start with an Activity structured genre- a RECOUNT
- "What happened? Don't make judgements yet or try to draw conclusions; simply describe."

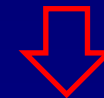
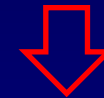
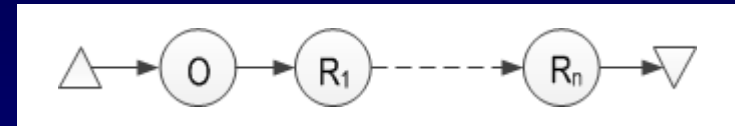
Guided Reflective Practice

From Genre Structure to Supporting Technology

- every genre has
 - a sequence of stages called *genre elements* that comprise it
 - a set of *probes* that can be used to elicit the specific genre, a set of *realigns* to focus onto the topic at hand, and repairs
- a Factual RECOUNT has :
 - *Orientation stage* provides information to understand the text (who, where, when),
 - followed by a set of events of steps arranged in a chronological order forming a *Record stage*

Johannesson, P.; Perjons, E. and I. Bider (2013) "What are the Siblings of Design Science Research?" *SIG Prag Workshop on IT Artefact Design & Workpractice Improvement*, 5 June, 2013, Tilburg, the Netherlands, 7pp.

- effectively this becomes a *design science exercise* (Johannesson, Perjons and Bider 2013)

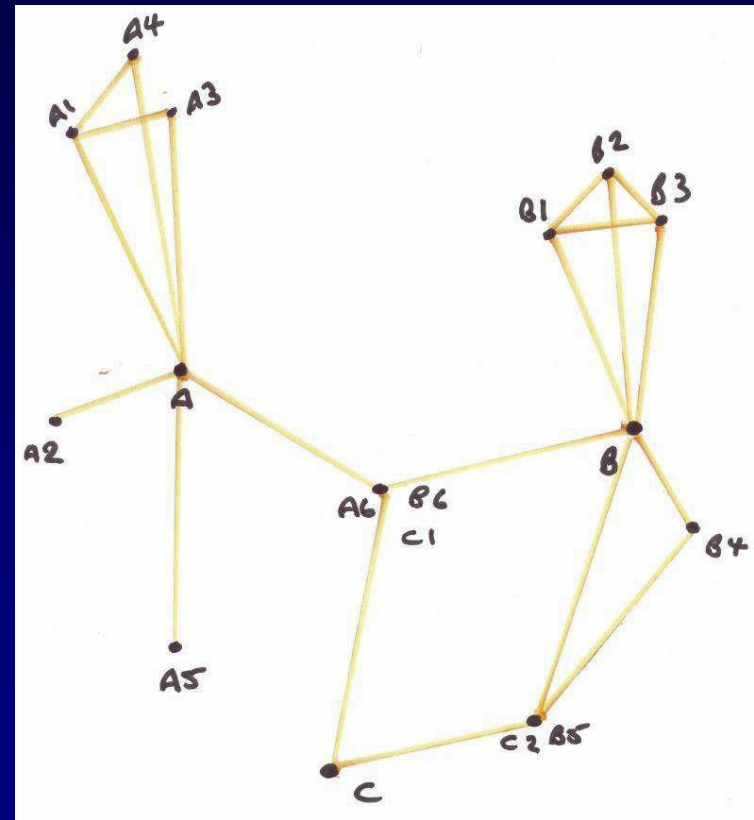


Representational Methods

Representational Methods

Anonymising and Generalising

- the guided reflective practice assessment cycles involve the production of co-produced *anonymised and generalised case studies*
- the use of *explicit methods for anonymising teams/students* like those advocated by Clark (2006)
- Example: model of hypothetical interconnected social networks for three individuals (A, B and C)

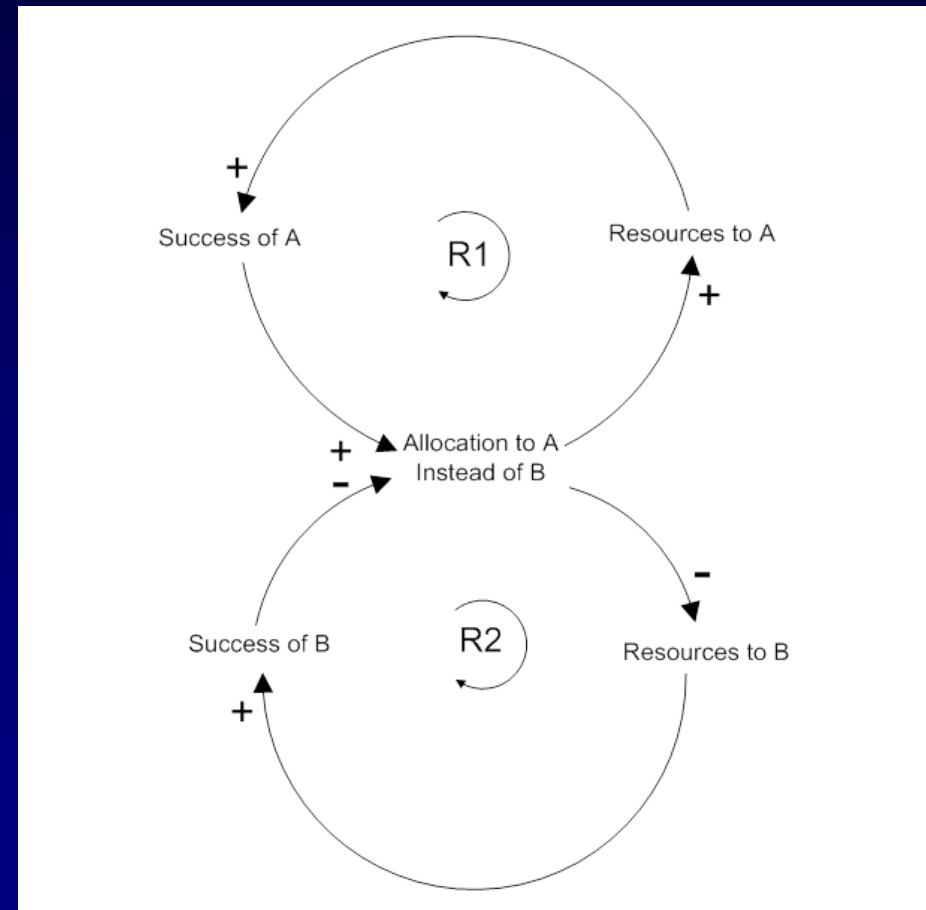


Clark, A. (2006) "Anonymising Research Data" Real Life Methods: A node of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods at the Universities of Manchester and Leeds Working Paper

Representational Methods

Anonymising and Generalising

- other techniques will be used to abstract the actual cases eg. *Causal Loop Diagramming or CLDs* (Maani and Cavarna 2007) to show the social processes at work during supervision
- *Example:* Favouritism (Success to the Successful) shown to one candidate over another by the same supervision team
 - the successful student becomes more successful
 - the unsuccessful student becomes less and less successful



Supporting Technologies

Supporting Technologies

Interactive Resource Development ...

- the actual complexity of some of these resources will be hidden by using *interactive role play resources* that enable supervisors (and students) to understand how communication works and can be improved in particular situations



Supporting Technologies

Incorporate into Faculty's Career Development

- using the *Moodle platform* (Williamson 2010), candidate supervisors will develop a personal *Mahara ePortfolio* (Murphy 2011) in order to undertake their reflective activities (Hughes 2010; Fisher et al 2007).
 - by using blog functions and critical incident diaries, candidates reflect on their supervisory experiences and learning
 - these reflections could describe, for example, how a supervisor or supervisory team dealt with a situation or problem- candidates will be encouraged to reflect on the experiences of other candidates
 - a significant benefit for candidates is that their evolving *Research Supervision ePortfolio* can then become part of their ongoing career development (this project will pilot this technology in the Faculty's career development workflows)

Supporting Technologies

Dissemination Strategy

- the platform will *support a virtual community of practice* (on the Faculty of Business home page) that ensures long-term dissemination of deliverables
- *the cases can be continually mined as new insights are developed* and as cases from later instances of the RSM are added
- the RSM, its methods, their supporting interactive multimedia resources will be described in on-line reports, conferences and peer reviewed journals and be available on the website

Interested in Collaborating with Us?

Collaboration Opportunity

OLT SEED Application Submitted | Pilot to Run Regardless

- this RSM project has been submitted as an *OLT SEED Application* describes a pilot project to adapt the UK HEFCE's Research Supervisor Module to local UOW Faculty of Business conditions
- the pilot will be one semester for a small number of candidates (5-10) identified by Heads of Postgraduate Studies (HPS) and School Research Directors (SRD) within the Faculty- 1st Semester next year
- the OLT SEED pilot will test the feasibility and utility of these novel approaches

Collaboration Opportunity

Faculty Support Ensured- the Pilot will Run!

- the project has fully engaged the faculty and knowledge leaders in all relevant areas at UoW to assess but more importantly engage the climate of readiness for change
- *RSM it will run regardless of OLT SEED success*- it has the support of the Faculty Executive and the interactive resources can be built using new Faculty Service Agreement with Centre for Academic Systems and Resources (CASR)
- if you are *interested in collaborating with us to develop a full OLT application with a sector-wide focus* then please contact us (Clarke/McCarthy) at UoW