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Colleague supervision – "ignored and undervalued"? The views of students and supervisors in a new university

Introduction

This research has its starting point with Denicolo's assertion that colleague supervision was "a role relationship that has been largely ignored or undervalued by the administration" (2004, 693) and which deserved to be considered as a special case. Denicolo's definition of colleague supervision as, "the situation in which an academic has the formal support responsibility for a colleague undertaking a higher degree by research", (ibid) has been accepted.

The author is a research supervisor but also has had academic management responsibility for the education operations of a Faculty-size School. In this (now former) role and in a previous academic management appointment, he had observed that colleague students (staff who are undertaking a part-time study for a higher degree by research) often struggle to manage the roles of teacher, researcher, colleague and administrator. The aim of the research was to gain greater insight into the research journey of colleague students and to consider how their working lives may be better structured.

In order that universities can build their capacity for research and retain staff, these students are frequently supervised by colleague supervisors, usually employed

alongside them in the same Faculty or School. This is an arrangement of mutual convenience but, as Denicolo argues, it does have potential problems of conflicts of interests and power differentials between the supervisor and supervisee.

Literature Review

There is extensive literature on all aspects of research supervision. This has extended from the traditional PhD model to professional doctorates of all types, including those based on work. Increasingly it is focusing on online assessment (de Beer and Mason 2009, Crossouard 2008), flexible approaches (Evans 1997), styles and concepts of supervision (Deuchar 2008, Lee 2008, Malfoy 2005, Manathunga 2005, Pole and Sprokkereef 1997), supervision and assessment of supervisors (Emilsson and Johnson 2007, Lee and McKenzie 2011) and the use of innovative alternatives to the traditional thesis, such as the portfolio, (Maxwell and Kupczyk-Romanczuk 2009). Throughout literature on student supervision (Denicolo 2004, Deuchar 2008, Holligan 2005, Johnson 2005, Lee 2008, Mainhard et al 2009, Sambrook et al 2008), there is a continuing emphasis on the relationship between the supervisor and the student. Park (2005, 195) says supervision was:

> … traditionally viewed as a secret garden or an activity that takes place behind closed doors between consenting adults, [and] is now expected to be more transparent, most consistent and more appropriate to contemporary notions of what the PhD is and how it should be undertaken.

Factors for successful supervisory relationships include good interpersonal working relationships (Ives and Rowley 2005, Baum 1998) which recognise the value of one-

to-one or one student-to-two supervisors contact. Positive attributes of supervisors from the student outlook are reliability, engagement, encouragement, knowledge of the research field, listening skills and a desire to both debate and inform (Denicolo 2004). Wisker (2001) also notes that guidance and mentoring are the factors most sought by students. Delamont et al (1997, 33) comment that the level of personal friendship and commitment varies in supervisory relationships: “Some supervisors keep their students at arm’s length and restrict themselves to formal relationships. Others enjoy and encourage greater degrees of friendship and intimacy”. The close relationship of the full-time PhD student with supervisor(s) is not always evident for part-time students, especially those working off-campus and not part of a research centre or research culture. Baum (1998, 471) says they often “feel isolated and remote from their supervisory base” and must drive their personal research agenda with limited support from supervisors. Models, such as Gurr’s Supervisor/Student Alignment Model (2001), are used to discuss various types of supervision style. Gurr’s model for example, proposes that the student moves from relative dependency on the supervisor (“hands-on”) at the outset of studies to autonomy (“hands-off”) as submission is approached (Gurr 2001, 87). Halse and Malfoy (2010, 86) also identify that in addition to scholarly expertise, successful supervisors are “sustained by a passionate, personal pursuit of learning and knowledge for their own sakes” which benefits their students. Their model of the “learning alliance” (Halse and Malfoy 2010, 83) encapsulates this researcher's philosophical approach that the supervisor and student work together for a mutually satisfying goal.

> The learning alliance is the agreement between supervisor and student to work on a common goal, namely the production of a high quality doctorate. The

> learning alliance is a contract between the supervisor and student, and is akin to the collaborative 'therapeutic alliance' between a patient and clinician to work together to diagnose the illness, pursue a therapy and achieve recovery. (Halse and Malfoy 2010, 86)

This proposition, differs from Gurr's alignment model which weights the supervisory input at the outset of the doctoral studies, in that it posits the supervisory relationship as a continuum based on "mutual respect between student and supervisor, flexibility in accommodating each others' personal and professional circumstances, a firm commitment to collaborate on the attainment of a doctorate, clear communication, and explicit strategies for progressing towards their common goal" (Halse and Malfoy 2010, 83-84). There is no transition to "hands-off", as with Gurr (2001), as the alliance continues with a more even level.

Only Denicolo (2004), however, has focused on the supervisory relationship between colleagues. All other researchers either consider it as the same as other doctoral students or have failed to recognise the different dynamic. It is important to note the part-time nature of these colleague students, who fit their research around teaching and academic management workloads. Holligan (2005) has identified the stresses upon supervisors for research production which may impact upon the student's desire for autonomy in their research. Baum (1998) in his study of part-time doctoral students in the-then emerging tourism field found they were often distant from their supervisors both physically and in the higher level of knowledge. This study has investigated whether colleague students also endure the isolation of other part-timers or benefit from their immersion within the university research ambience and whether

they benefit from or are disadvantaged by the demands for greater research production which impact upon most UK universities.

Denicolo (2004, 706) found that "colleague students and colleague supervisors felt more vulnerable than they think other students/supervisors are". Her research identified issues such as conflicting time and workplace demands and the constant scrutiny of this relationship were different from other doctoral students. Denicolo also noted a feeling amongst colleague students that the amount of time given to them is much more restricted or contained, especially as some universities treat this supervision as normal academic activity because of its fee waiver status. These appeared to be disbenefits to colleague students and so this research considers Denicolo's assertion of a vulnerable relationship between colleague students and colleague supervisors and investigates the nature of the supervisory relationship at a single UK university.

Research aims and methodology

The research was undertaken in May, June and July 2009 amongst supervisors and doctoral candidates who all are employed at the same new (post 1992) university. Five supervisors and six students were interviewed, using a qualitative methodology. This approach has been widely used in research in education studies and the supervisory relationship (Crossouard 2008, Lee 2008, Malfoy 2005, Manathunga 2005, Pole and Sprokkereef 1997) and, notably, in relations to this study by Denicolo (2004) and Halse and Malfoy (2010).

The aims of the research were to:

- Investigate the phenomenon of supervision of research doctoral students by "colleagues" from the same university.
- Identify the benefits and disbenefits of that relationship.

The research investigated two propositions advanced in recent literature on research supervision, namely:

> "Colleague students and colleagues supervisors felt more vulnerable than they think other students/supervisors are" (Denicolo 2004, 706).

> That supervisors have three different supervisory styles – facilitator, director and critical friend (Deuchar 2008). Supervisors can undertake their role in a combination of all three or of two elements or of one.

These two propositions were used to engage the interviewees in a discussion of their experience and to describe its dimensions verbally and conceptually, using a qualitative methodology. The research was conducted by personal interview between the researcher and individual supervisors or students. This method was selected as "interviews are a useful form of data collection because they allow you to explore perspectives and perceptions of various stakeholders and publics" (Daymon and Holloway 2002, 166) and are valuable when "the issues under examination would benefit from development or clarification" (Hinds, in Wilkinson 2000, 47).

The interviewees were selected from data prepared by the university's Graduate School. Excluding supervisors and students from the researcher's own school to avoid any conflict of interest, 15 students and 14 supervisors were identified as offering a range of experiences across the university's other Schools from a total of 45 colleague students. The initial invitation to take part in the research was sent by internal email to the chosen sample. It set out the purpose of the research and its method, which was by recorded personal interview on a no name or positional description confidential basis. Interviewees were chosen on the basis of their availability to participate in the study and their inclination to do so. As far as possible, the research would have an equal number of supervisors and students for parity of responses. The interviews were undertaken in two clusters, late May/early June and early July. In only one situation were two supervisors (from the same School and discipline area) interviewed together as it was convenient to them. The research proposal was assessed and approved by the university's Graduate School ethics process, as it oversees research degrees, provides training for postgraduate research (PGR) students, and develops and monitors research degree supervisors. The research proposal, which provided for anonymous attribution of data collection and interviews, was accepted without amendment. The Graduate School, although providing data from which the researcher chose the invitations to participate, was not advised of the names of participants (PGRs and supervisors). Also, all participants in the study were not made aware of the names or Schools of other interviewees nor were any comments shared by the researcher with interviewees. Thus the data collection was completely anonymous, and all participants' interests protected.

The sample

Three male and three female colleague students were interviewed. Their ages ranged from mid-to-late 30s to late-50s. One had recently completed a PhD whilst another was only six months into the doctoral journey. Five were employed in academic posts (Lecturer or Senior Lecturer); one was in a research support role, having transferred on a short term appointment from an academic position. Two Schools were represented.

The students' teaching experience ranged from two years to 36 years. All had industry or professional experience before entering academic employment – engineering, hospitality (two), NHS/healthcare (two) and retailing. Three had non-HE teaching experience in further education or NHS/healthcare before coming to the university. Only one had held a previous academic appointment (shared post) with another UK university. All colleague doctoral students had been teaching for at least two years with experience likely to be less than ten years. Those with NHS clinical experience had trained others before changing to academic employment.

The five supervisors interviewed were two female and three male. They were drawn from two Schools. Three were professors, one is an associate professor and the fifth, a senior academic manager. All had supervised at least two colleague students to completion, with one having supervised as many as 12. Two of the completions were PhD by Publication; two others were professional doctorates undertaken in a group supervision situation in which colleague students had progressed together with other students as a cohort. All had current colleague doctoral students whom they were supervising.

Collection of data

For the research, a pro-forma set of questions was prepared by the interviewer with slight variations between the perspectives of supervisor and student. It comprised (a) information on the interviewee and motives for undertaking doctoral studies; (b) the two propositions from Denicolo (2004) and Deuchar (2008); (c) questions about the nature of the student-supervisor relationship for the individuals concerned and their perception of the general nature of colleague supervision vis-à-vis other supervisory relationships; and (d) final thoughts on the structure of supervisory relationships. Each interview lasted between 25 and 40 minutes and was recorded on a digital sound recorder. The interview files were transferred to computer hard drives and backed-up shortly after each interview in order that the data was retained securely. The responses from colleague students were coded as ST (i.e., student) and numbered 1 to 6, whilst supervisors were coded as CS (i.e. colleague supervisor) and numbered from 1 to 5. The students were not necessarily being supervised or had been supervised by the interviewed supervisors. Neither group was asked to identify their supervisor or their students, as the basis of the interviews was of unattributed reporting of data and comments.

Findings and analysis

As noted above, one aim of the research was "to investigate the phenomenon of staff research doctoral students by colleagues from the same university". Although the sample can only give an indication of the view of all students and supervisors at the university, none found colleague supervision to be an unsatisfactory relationship that either needed to be ended or radically altered. As will become evident, proposals for improvement and a greater recognition of this relationship within supervision training

follow. The responses to the penultimate interview question, “Is there a supervision structure that can better support colleague students than exists at present?” indicated that there was a level of fundamental satisfaction on which some extensions of best practices can be built.

The single strongest additional action for the development of supervision practices is that the group supervision practices undertaken in one School’s professional doctorate programme could be considered for all forms of colleague student supervision. This outcome may have been influenced by the participation of students and supervisors from that School who were strong advocates of this approach but there are aspects of group supervision which appear to support timely completion for part-time colleague students in a manner that is not offered elsewhere.

The two propositions drawn from the literature on doctoral supervision were either rejected (vulnerability) or considerably modified (supervisory descriptors). As noted earlier, Denicolo (2004, 706) had stated that “colleague students and colleague supervisors felt more vulnerable that they think other students/supervisors are.” With one exception, the interviewees did not agree with this but offered some insights into potentially problematic situations. The second proposition from Deuchar (2008) concerned three styles of supervision which were investigated in this specific supervisory situation. Although there was recognition of these, the majority of the interviewees suggested modifications of these styles that indicated that “friendly facilitator” was the most common hybrid, as opposed to Deuchar’s proffered “facilitator”, “director” and/or “critical friend” (Deuchar 2008, 489).

Research training

When students were asked whether they had been trained as researchers earlier in their academic careers through Bachelor- and Master-Level studies or through specific courses, there was a mixed response with half admitting to learning about research "on the hoof" (the term used in a question and by Denicolo (2004) and the other half had training in research either through a "low level diploma" (ST2) or as a healthcare professional (ST5 – "I'm a researcher by plan" as it was one of four elements of a non-medical practitioner consultant role). The majority had relied upon the university's Graduate School courses on specific research skills to support their development as academic researchers. This mixed picture matched with that of the supervisors who agreed that much of the students' research training had come after starting doctoral studies (CS2) – "They have been learning to research on their doctoral projects" and (CS5) - "More 'on the hoof' than not. Historically there has not been much formal training."

Motives

Having gained a descriptive understanding of the students and supervisors, the interviews next probed the motives for undertaking doctoral studies. Five of the six students indicated that there was implicit or explicit pressure on them to pursue this route. Only one had a more knowledge-seeking explanation (ST6 – "To gain greater insight into the innovation process"). The other students pointed to employment and progression imperatives:

> I have done it for career progression and sustainment. Otherwise, I wouldn't have done it in a million years. It will help protect my position and enables the opening of doors. (ST1)

> Need to progress further. It's a job necessity and came when I was appointed *X* years ago. (ST3)

> It's part of my contract when I was appointed that I had to work towards a doctorate. I'm keen to move forward my career progression. (ST4)

> It's expected from (the university). There's also a drive to get as many staff on doctoral positions as possible. There was enthusiastic pressure from my manager to start on it. (ST5)

The general tone of the interviewees was that they valued their doctoral studies as extending their knowledge and expertise but that there had been strong encouragement from management through personal advice or contractual conditions that drove them to enroll. Two of the interviewees said, in essence, that they feared for their jobs without the achievement of a doctoral qualification. Whether this constitutes 'vulnerability' as suggested by Denicolo (2004) can be considered in the review of responses to her proposition.

Vulnerability

As noted above, only one of the students (ST3) agreed with the application of "vulnerable" to her situation and related it to a supervisor whom she considered to be a 'friend'. She said:

> I like the term "vulnerable"; I agree with it. Particularly with the friend supervisor. Sometimes he can be a bit too hands-off. (There are) times when I would like to say "treat me as a student" but because I am a colleague he thinks "you're a big girl" and it's not like he'd treat his other PhD students.

The other students disagreed with the term as applying to their situation. ST1 said there was "a great relationship with supervisors. I trust them a lot." ST4 said: "I haven't felt vulnerable as I still see myself as a novice … I value what supervisors provide me with." Others suggested that relationships between students and supervisors from the same school *could* be fraught but that had not been their experience.

The view of supervisors was similar to that of students, namely that there were advantages in the colleague supervision relationship, rather than situations of vulnerability or conflict of interest. CS1 said:

> I would be blunter with a student than a colleague. We can be over-the-top on gentleness of criticism. There is a different relationship with staff. We can go to the coffee shop to discuss things. We are more sympathetic with the constraints on staff.

CS2 commented similarly that "there is potential for greater intimacy between student and supervisor in this situation." CS5 said, "my experience is that it has been a joy to supervise them." Three supervisors added that, in situations in which they may have been a influential manager but not a line manager, they and the students have been able to recognise the different roles that each is playing and have adapted compatibly. One gave an example of meeting a colleague on trade union matters one day and on teaching and research matters on other occasions. This change of roles was recognised as part of the normal working practices and, if exercised with care, would not in itself disadvantage colleague students.

"Friendly facilitator"

The style of supervision used in the colleague situation was explored through discussion of Deuchar's descriptors – facilitator, director and critical friend. Students had mixed views – ST1 disagreed with all the terms – "I direct my research project" whilst others sought a facilitator (ST4 and ST6) and agreed with some of the terms. There were suggestions for alternatives as being more relevant – supporter (ST5), partner, mentor, collaborator and guide (ST1). The term "friend" was seen as an outcome of the supervision relationship by most students, rather than being in operation from the outset. ST2 said that the "(supervisor)… became a friend through the doctoral process").

Supervisors commented that, like the range of roles discussed above, they changed their styles of supervision according to students' needs. "We (supervisors) are across all three. Knowing what goes into a PhD is what we offer; but I am less directorial on the direction of research but am a director in terms of the literature review and

analysis of numbers" (CS1). Response to the term "friend" was similar to the students' views and seen as an outcome. CS2 said "as we know them more, there is a greater friend element"; whilst CS4 commented that "there are friendly relationships rather than friends. Maybe (we should) call it an amenable relationship. I drink with my friends". He added that some students needed direction in order to guide them to completion – "some you have to tell. YY was off on a tangent and had to be brought back to focus. He needed more guidance. He needed pushing in the right direction." CS5 proposed the hybrid term of "friendly facilitator" as the most appropriate supervisory style for colleague supervision. "I'm a friendly person in the School who is interested in supporting a researcher." This supervisor said there had never been a situation in which a colleague student had needed strong direction. "I have, however, found tensions harder with studentship students and other full-time students."

The broad summary about supervisory style is that both students and supervisors are seeking a supportive supervisor as indicated by terms such as guide, mentor and "friendly facilitator". There appears to be consensus that these students have a clearer view of the aims and outcomes of their research than other doctoral students, and so the style of supervision should not need a directorial posture.

Supervisory relationships

The next section of the study focused on the structuring and management of relationships, notably as to whether there are power and resource differentials between students and supervisors. It explored rules about who can act as supervisors, confidentiality of performance, equality of treatment for students and supervisors and

the demands placed upon staff by colleague students. The aim of these questions was to identify the benefits and disbenefits of the colleague supervision relationship.

There were two types of response to the question, “Should there be clear rules as to whether those who are line or influential managers act as supervisors or not?” Only one student considered that there should be a declared limitation (ST3 - “I wouldn’t like my line manager acting as supervisor. It’s difficult to separate the roles”). Students and supervisors generally were opposed to such a rule yet considered that any appointment of a line manager as supervisor was not likely to be free of conflicts of interest. ST4’s comment was that “it would be quite difficult if your line manager was supervisor. [It] might be an advantage as he might be able to allow for time out on the doctorate.” Only ST1 was sanguine with this prospect and said, “There’s too much regulation in the world. It may be perfectly comfortable. In principle, I would have no problem with the supervisor being my line manager.” Supervisors were also wary of this relationship although they considered that there were situations where only a line manager may have the requisite expertise. CS3 argued that: “There should not be a rule against it. Part of it (the student doctoral experience) is the student choosing the supervisor. If they happen to choose a supervisor who is a line manager, it’s not a problem. But I can see a situation where it could be.” This view was corroborated by CS4 who said, “I don’t see this as a problem. It goes with the job. I supervised XX when I was her manager and there were no issues. If you are the leader of a section or department then people want to benefit from your expertise.” CS5 agreed with this opinion – “If there are two people working in a situation where it is working well, then allow it.” CS3 and CS4 said that they had established the supervisory relationship with the students whom they were line managing through

discussion and planning with the students and “then got going” (CS3). In summary, the issue of the line manager as supervisor can be best approached by discussion and agreement with the student, who should have been exercised his or her judgement in selecting the supervisor.

Confidentiality of performance

The next issue explored was the confidentiality of the student’s performance as a research student. This exposed an inherent conflict in management of two relationships – those of the staff colleague student with the supervisor and of the staff member with the line manager. Students were asked whether the confidentiality of their performance as a research student was protected whilst supervisors were questioned as to how the confidentiality of performance could be protected. The broad view was that although the relationship between the student and supervisor should remain confidential on progress towards milestones such as Initial Review, Transfer and Completion, there would inevitably be a discussion at annual appraisal on the staff member’s progress towards completion of doctoral studies. This almost certainly would be a target included in the appraisal process. ST1 had a differing view to others that as the doctoral studies “were being done in work’s time”, it was appropriate that they are discussed. All others – students and supervisors – considered that there should be confessional-type confidentiality, as supervisors should not be reporting on the student’s progress other than to a school or faculty research management committee or similar administrative body. There should not be a direct report to line managers.

Equality of treatment

Both groups were asked whether staff students got equal supervisory treatment as other students (including studentship, full-time and part-time) and whether supervisors received equal time recognition for staff student supervision. Answers to these questions brought forward the views, expressed earlier in the discussion of Denicolo's "vulnerability" proposition, that staff students might have an advantageous position compared with other students. They were insiders, with knowledge of the university systems and resources. Also, they were in frequent informal contact with their colleague supervisors, unlike the other categories who mostly made contact in a formal, scheduled manner. The one point of envy was that there were little or no resources to support research and conference attendance. ST1 – "Staff generally get an easier ride through viva and SRDC [school research committee]. At present I meet (supervisors) 'as and when'; it's no problem to meet them." ST2 concurred and added: "In some ways having colleagues as supervisors means that you could cut in and see them and not be intimidated. Others from outside the research culture can be intimidated." ST3, however, disagreed and felt that colleague students were "just expected to get on with it and not given extra time." This was a dissonant view amongst colleague students. Supervisors took the view that students of all types should have equal treatment and believed that this was the case, although it was easier for colleague students to discuss research issues informally.

Supervisory structures

A summarising question asked students and supervisors whether there was "a supervision structure that can better support colleague students than exists at present." The answers to this question were mainly positive about the current system but an area for further consideration was whether group supervision techniques operating in

one School could be extended to become a general 'best practice' model for the university. This School has an almost equal number of students enrolled on PhD and professional doctorate programmes. The latter group is organised in annual cohorts with a cohort manager in addition to individual supervisors. One student (ST1) exceptionally considered the supervision structure to be "perfect. I don't think it can be bettered. It's flexible to the needs of students." Others were more restrained. ST3 wanted more formality through the setting of milestones for progress. ST4 and ST6 both supported group supervision on professional doctorates as offering benefits of benchmarking of personal progress, a support network of fellow students, the cohort manager and the challenge of debating theory and research methods within the cohort. ST3 referred to experience at a previous university where a group of research students met regularly for classes on research and "we would move ahead together. It was much more social and I have found here that doesn't happen. … I don't feel I am part of a group of PhD students."

Some supervisors also suggested that group supervision be considered. CS1 – "Colleagues should require less formal supervision, but more direction and facilitation especially on number crunching. They could gain more from group supervision". CS5 took a similar stance: "I do wonder whether we should move to a group supervision model for academic staff … We have a group supervision model which is a three-hour [monthly] meeting with students." CS2 also identified the group supervision model for consideration, but the other two supervisors were supportive of the existing supervisory framework and had no proposals for change.

Limitations

This is a small-scale qualitative study using a limited sample (six students and five supervisors) from two schools in a UK university. Whilst rich in comment, it is a snapshot of current views. Future research would benefit from larger samples drawn from several universities and similar anglo-commonwealth academic cultures. Qualitative research can suffer from being too subjective, difficult to replicate, have problems of generalization and lack transparency (Brymon 2001), but this study offered the consistency of a pro-forma set of questions to guide discussion. It is replicable with a larger, more diverse sample which would lead to more generalisable outcomes. It is, however, in a tradition of small scale and exploratory studies of doctoral supervision practice (Burnett 1999, Crossouard 2008, Denicolo 2004, Deuchar 2008, Gurr 2001, Lee 2008, Malfoy 2005, Manathunga 2005, Sambrook et al 2008) and offers similar validity to those studies.

Discussion and conclusions

There was little evidence to support Denicolo (2004)'s assertion that the colleague supervision situation is one that could be vulnerable for students. The data from interviews are that, apart from one student (ST3), satisfaction is derived from colleague supervision and a broad belief that it offers advantages for colleague students. There appears to be a collegial atmosphere shown particularly by supervisors who take pleasure in supporting their colleagues to complete their doctoral studies and progress their academic careers. Both students and supervisors are aware of the role changes needed when they move from being teaching colleagues to the student:supervisor situation, and after an hour or two of meetings, back to the initial role. This is different from the "normal" (Denicolo 2004, 693)

student:supervisor relationship which is more formal and structured and, possibly as CS1 noted, conducted with a more directorial approach using blunter language.

However, where Denicolo's main case can be supported is the identification of colleague supervision as a "special case" (ibid, 693). She had found that "there are indeed some subtle and some more explicit differences between normal supervision and that involving peers" (ibid, 706). These were evident from this small sample in terms of benefits and disbenefits. There is undoubtedly a conflict for colleague students who often have to fit their doctoral studies around what one called "the day job" whilst supervisors have to manage a very different relationship to normal students with their colleagues. From summarising comments, a best practice development to specifically recognise that colleague supervision is not "normal" and to encourage its best operation. The use of risk analysis undertaken by the student and supervisory team at the outset of doctoral studies and at annual reviews would help identify stresses that need to be addressed. This could be included in university research degree monitoring processes or undertaken as a checklist-driven discussion.

For models like Gurr's Supervisor/Student Alignment Model (Gurr 2001) and Halse and Malfoy's 'learning alliance' (2010), which are based on the conventional supervisory relationship, there may need to be a third axis or weighted factor that recognises the teaching and research workloads that the academically-employed doctoral student carry. The "learning alliance" model which emphasises the mutuality of the effort for successful completion of doctoral studies, in particular, does not allow for this pragmatic factor. Gurr's model with its notion that supervisory support will reduce from "hands-on" to "hands-off" perhaps unintentionally allows for the

supervisory workload to ease over time. The "third factor" could be developed in future, larger-scale studies.

The second 'best practice' action is of a much larger scale. From some students and supervisors, there was strong interest in the introduction of group supervision or cohort supervision for colleague students. As practiced in one School, this is operated in addition to the normal, scheduled monthly or two-monthly meeting between student and supervisory team. This technique has supported progress to timely completion by creating a mutual support network (as described above). As many universities scramble to increase the percentage of total academic staff with doctoral qualifications, this development is worthy of early exploration where it does not exist already.

In conclusion, colleague supervision is a more robust arrangement than had been indicated by Denicolo (2004). Its benefits are in the development of research capacity, creation of collegiality and research networking and in retaining staff on an upwardly mobile academic career. There are, however, limits to the number of colleague students who can be supervised, as demand is greater than the supply of qualified supervisors. Hence, consideration may need to be given to the introduction of group supervision support (possibly as cohort groups).

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