WHY AM I DOING A PHD?
IMPACT OF
MOTIVATIONS, EXPECTATIONS & FEEDBACK
ON DOCTORAL JOURNEYS

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PLAN

Introduction (5 min)
Getting to know each other (5 min)
PART 1: Your Goals and Expectations (50 min)

COFFEE & CHOCOLATE BREAK (10 min)

PART 2: The Thesis and Supervisor Feedback (50 min)
WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

1. Become aware of your goals & expectations and of their influence on your overall doctoral journey

2. Reflect on how to make the most of your supervisors’ feedback

3. Create a sense of community with your peers
WHY AM I DOING A PHD?
WARM-UP: THE JOURNEY PLOT

- **Dec 2015**: Spent Christmas at university writing proposal for conference.
- **Jan 2015**: Abstract submitted.
- **February**: Super positive feedback (poster).
- **March**: Break-up.
- **April**: Struggling with analysis.
- **May**: Working on my thesis (writing & analysis).

**Emotions**

- **High**
- **Low**

**Timeline**

- **Dec 2015**
- **Jan 2015**
- **Feb 2015**
- **Mar 2015**
- **Apr 2015**
- **May 2015**
- **June 2015**
- **July 2015**
- **Aug 2015**
- **Sept 2015**
- **Oct 2015**
- **Nov 2015**
- **Today**
PART 1:
YOUR GOALS &
EXPECTATIONS

Activity 1: Retrospective reflection

Activity 2: Reflection upon your current situation
YOUR GOALS & EXPECTATIONS

Activity 1: Retrospective reflection

Individual exercise (10 min)
- Choose the picture that best represents your idea of a doctoral journey before you started
- Answer the reflective questions

Small group discussion (10 min)
RESEARCH FINDINGS
REASONS & MOTIVATIONS FOR UNDERTAKING DOCTORAL STUDIES

IDENTITY

- Personal development
- Self-actualisation
- Meeting family expectations
- Get the PhD title

INTELLECTUAL

- Intellectual challenge
- Exploring a particular topic in depth
- Analysing issues from one’s professional practice

PROFESSIONAL

- Developing professional skills
- Broadening career opportunities
- Get the “piece of paper”

YOUR GOALS & EXPECTATIONS

Activity 2: Reflection upon your current situation

Individual exercises (10 min)
- Choose the picture that best represents how you currently perceive your overall doctoral experience
- Answer the reflective questions

Small group discussion (10 min)
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Thank goodness it's Friday!
Oh wait, I'm a grad student.
PROGRESSING AND PERSISTING DESPITE DIFFICULTIES

TYPICAL DIFFICULTIES

- Emotional challenges
- Thesis production issues
- Work-life conflict
- Fuzzy rules/requirements
- Peer and efficiency pressure

WHY PERSISTING?

- Sense of duty
- Enjoyment of intellectual work
- Passion for research topic
- Effort & time already invested

References: Inouye & McAlpine, 2017; Levecque et al., 2017; McAlpine, 2018; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017; Skakni, 2018a; Sparkman & Dogram, 2019
CAREER PROSPECTS
PHD STUDENTS’ CAREER GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

THE IDEAL CAREER ➡️ Professorship at a research-oriented university

Finland 42%
Belgium 31%
The Netherlands < 30%
The United States 25%
The UK 19%
Canada 18.6%

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

References: Auriol, Misu & Freeman, 2013; Boosten et al., 2014; Skakni, 2018b; Desjardins & King, 2011; Haynes, Metcalfe & Yilmaz, 2016 Stephan, 2012
COFFEE & CHOCOLATE BREAK
PART 2: THE THESIS & SUPERVISOR FEEDBACK

I read the paper draft. You saved me, Tajel.
I must say, I'm disappointed.

Why didn't you include a discussion of previous work by Roth, et al.?
I did, but you told me last week to take it out.

Did I? Well, put it back.
Are you sure?
Yes.

Next week:
Take it out.
Aargh!!

www.phdcomics.com
SESSION OUTLINE

Activity 1: Approaches to the Thesis (20 min)
- Pairs (10 min)
- Large group (10 min)

Activity 2: Supervision & Supervisor Feedback (20 min)
- Pairs (10 min)
- Large group (10 min)
ACTIVITY 1: PAIR DISCUSSION

1. What do you believe makes a “successful” thesis?

2. What do you believe makes a successful PhD student?
WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

What is the purpose of the thesis? Of the PhD?

Thesis Characteristics:
• Clear contribution/stated gap in literature
• Engagement with theory
• Appropriate methodology...
• Clear argument
• Publishable?

“Doctorateness as property of the candidate or of the thesis?”
(Poole, 2015, p. 1518)

Student Characteristics:
• independent scholar
• research competence
• higher order thinking skills
ACTIVITY 2: PAIR DISCUSSION

1. How would you characterize your supervisory relationship?

2. What supervisor feedback is most useful? Least useful?

3. How does supervisor feedback influence how you shape your research?

What strategies do you use to further your research goals?
WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Student vs. Supervisor Expectations
- students identified research advice, emotional support, and feedback as essential aspects of supervision
- supervisors viewed their primary responsibilities as project management, provision of resources and funding, and quality assurance/gatekeeping

Characteristics of Good Supervisors:
- setting high expectations
- caring about student circumstances
- timely and constructive feedback
- open dialogue and collaboration
WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Qualities of Good Feedback & Feedback Preferences:
- Specific vs. general
- Stimulates reflection/raises issues/questions assumptions
- Focus argument, structure, conventions, language

Using Feedback
- Agency/Ownership
- Critical evaluation: Accepting or ignoring

**And remember, the supervisory relationship changes over time!**
WRAP UP

1. What are the common experiences or concerns, if any, that emerged from your small group discussions?

2. What strikes you the most about your discussions with your peers? Did anything in their experiences surprise you? Reassure you?

3. Think about how your goals and expectations influence your overall doctoral experience.

Don’t forget to recognize all you’ve accomplished, and acknowledge that a doctoral project is a journey involving both positive and negative experiences.
REFERENCES


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