

A stylized sun graphic consisting of a solid black circle with four short, thick black lines radiating from its top-left edge, set against a green background. The sun is partially obscured by a large white semi-circle that frames the text.

Thesis Supervision

How to manage your supervisor....

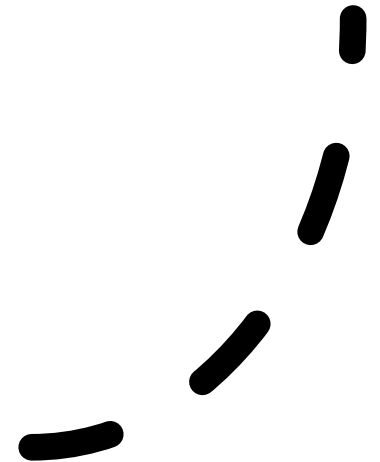
Emeritus Professor Anneke Fitzgerald



I respectfully acknowledge the Yugambeh people of the Gold Coast region as the traditional owners of the land from which we conduct our meeting today, and pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging.

Today we
will chat
about:

- The continuum of supervisors
- Prominent styles of supervision
- Backgrounding
- Good and poor supervisors
- The ideal supervisor
- Problem solving



The Catatonic supervisor



The Slave Driver

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"It's awful...I've got the boss from Earth."

Generally Tolerable Supervisors

- **The Assembly Line Manager**
 - “Cranks them out”, directs students into topics
- **The Good Buddy**
 - Supervises student in restaurants and pubs
- **The Absentee**
 - Usually overcommitted, sometimes actively hides
- **The Novice**
 - Conscientious, keen, ?knows enough
- **The Boffin**
 - Loves detail, gadgets, loses sight of big picture
- **The Lightweight**
 - Not a deep thinker, may not be able to recognise good ideas
- **The Zen-Master**
 - Little help with structure, give cryptic advice

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- What kind of supervisor would be your preference? And why?



The Idealized Supervisor

- Experience:
 - Excellence in research design, management and completion
 - Successful in attracting research funds and disseminates outcomes of research
 - Global networker, linking with industry bodies

The Idealized Supervisor

- Knowledge
 - Clear understanding of governance PG training: statutory and regulatory frameworks, institutional policies and procedures
 - Understanding of ethical and moral dimensions of research
 - Understanding pedagogy underlying research training and mentoring
 - Expert knowledge and demonstrated responsiveness to cultural diversity and motivations

The Idealized Supervisor

■ Skills:

- ❑ Excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- ❑ Excellent team-based project management skills
- ❑ Excellent time management skills
- ❑ Ability to reflect on own strengths and weaknesses, and admits when to seek help
- ❑ Ability to provide timely and constructive feedback
- ❑ Expert in technologies to assist the student with the project
- ❑ Ability to facilitate student's integration within a research culture
- ❑ Willingness to share knowledge and accept and acknowledge emergent scholars

Three
prominent
styles of
supervision

- Directive style
- Collaborative style
- Facilitative style

Which style meets your
needs? And when?



Backgrounding a supervisor

- What are the interests and expertise?
- What are the methodological and data analysis competencies?
- What is the dominant research paradigm? Does this fit?
- How many PG projects supervised? Read some of the thesis they supervised...
- Perhaps talk to past students.....

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- What are the characteristics of good supervisors?

Good supervisors

- Strengths in content and discipline
- all rounder in methodology and data analysis
- Open-mindedness with respect to other perspectives and paradigms
- Can work together, rather than in competition
- Open and frequent communication
- Acknowledge own weaknesses and skills deficit – refer to other resources

Good supervisors

- When they criticise your work they focus on your arguments, approaches and actions, rather than on you as a person
- They actively display the research is *your* project (not theirs)
- They demonstrate flexibility and willingness to change direction if something, even something based on their advice, doesn't work out

Poor supervisors

- Expect you to conform to *their* perspective
- Unwilling to communicate openly
- Are upset when you seek help from others
- Are personal in their critique, hurtful
- Are reluctant to change direction if something is not working out

Ideal Supervisor

- Works out an achievable *psychological* contract with their students, and regularly reviews this
- Understands the role of the supervisor and the role of the student *“it is not the supervisors contribution to knowledge that is assessed, but that of the student” (Sharp, 2002)*
- Avoids any supervisory problems by careful planning
- Recognises signs of distraction in self and student

Self sabotage



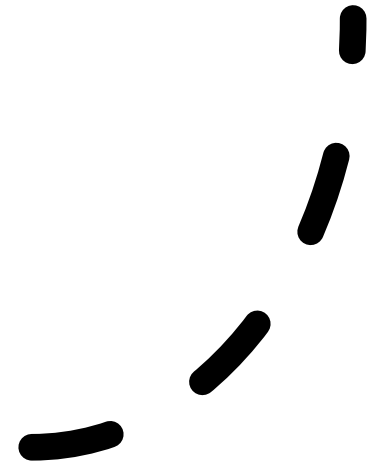
Setting expectations

- Milestones
- Nature of the research
- Writing and chapter turn-arounds
- Frequency and duration of meetings
- Extent of support you can expect from them
- Publishing and ownership of ideas

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- How can we maintain a healthy relationship with our supervisor(s)?

Maintaining a healthy relationship

- Style awareness – stages of the project
- Communication
- Inclusiveness of all supervisors
- Agreed deadlines
- Responsiveness
- Flexibility

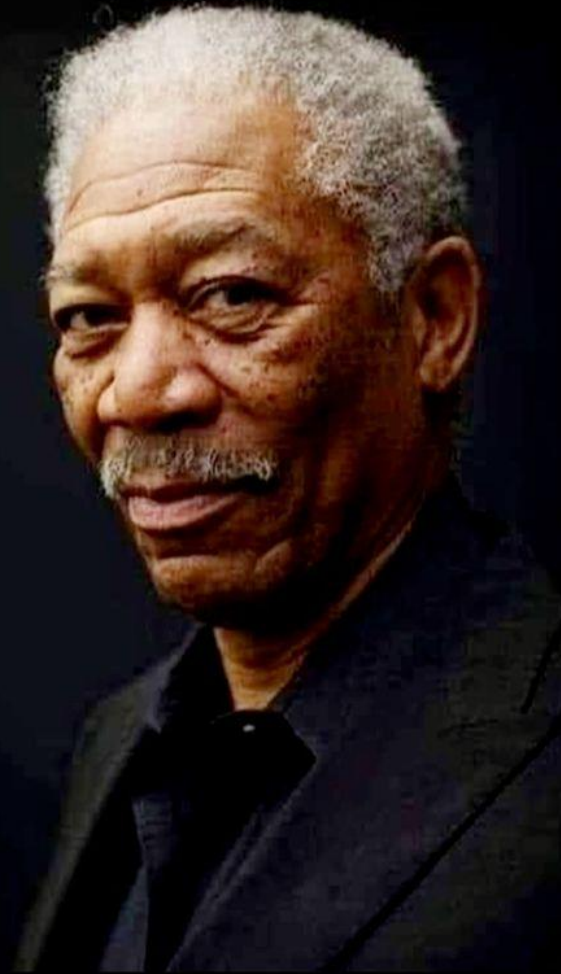


Problem solving

- Most issues are resolved by discussing them



Just because
I disagree
with you,
does not
mean that
I hate you.
We need to
relearn that in
our society.

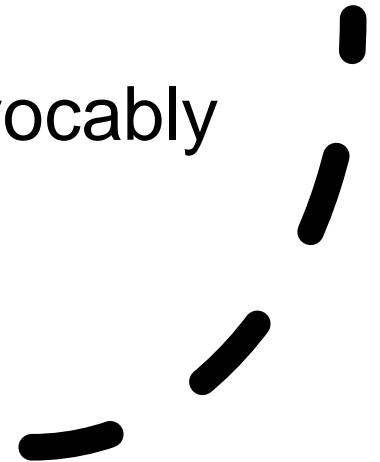


What can
I do if my
supervisor
gives me
incorrect
advice?

- Resolution by debate
- Bring someone else into the conversation to help provide a buffering influence – based on expertise
- PG association, Graduate School or Head of School
- Peer support network
- Replace the supervisor

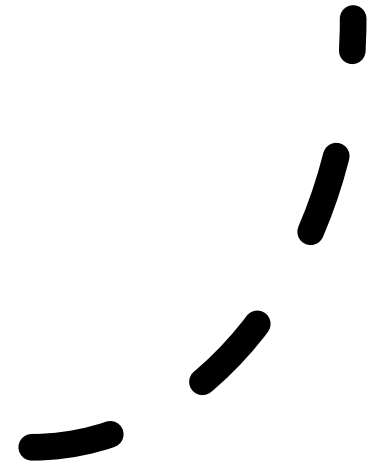
What if the
supervisory
team
doesn't get
along?

- Openly discuss academic differences of opinion with entire team (professionally)
- Works best if you principal supervisor and you are in accord
- The conversation should be about the needs of the HDR student
- You have the right to replace the supervisor if the relationship has irrevocably broken down



What to do
if the
supervisor is
making
unrealistic or
unacceptable
demands?

- Discuss, be assertive and explain why you think the demands are unrealistic or unacceptable
- Often just miscommunication
- Bring in third party to resolve



What to do when personal conflicts develop?

- Is there verbal, physical or emotional abuse experienced?
- EAP program
- Collect evidenced to back up claims
- Discuss with Head of School
- University grievance procedure
- You have the right to replace the supervisor
- Actions may need to be followed up



Summary

- Seek clarity on expectations
- It is your responsibility to keep communication open and engage the supervisor(s)
- Ask for feedback, take responsibility for own learning outcomes – feel free to prompt
- Be responsive to the feedback and recommendations
- If encountering difficulties, work from an informed basis and have an informed debate
- Avoid interpersonal conflicts by retaining a professional demeanour
- Seek help from councillor or student advocate, explore policies and procedures
- Present your grievance with supporting documentation
- Open, honest and frequent communication

Supervisors are also only human...



I'M NOT PERFECT.
I'M ONLY HUMAN.



*To err is human;
to admit it, superhuman.*

