

Effective Supervision

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Chapter overview

This chapter explores:

- the complexity of the supervision process
- what makes a good supervisor
- themes and elements of good supervision
- new challenges for supervision
- the supervisor as navigator

Introduction

Academic supervision is a complex and multi-layered process that operates at a variety of academic levels and within a variety of learning spaces, the purpose of which is to support learners along a path of sustained, independent work. At its core, the driver of the process, is an interpersonal relationship that has the potential to enable and validate learning or, conversely, to hinder and subdue it.

Typically, those who occupy the role of academic supervisor either acquire it as a general academic duty or, in the worst cases, may simply have had the role thrust upon them. Either way, the practice of supervision

is far more complex than the generic guidance commonly found in ‘supervisor’s handbooks’ could ever hope to support.

This chapter outlines what this complexity means for the practice and process of academic supervision, explores some new perspectives on the different elements that constitute the process and suggests some practical responses to the many challenges generated by the complexity of supervision today. It will be particularly useful if you are new to the supervision role, although experienced supervisors are also invited to read what follows and engage in some reflection on their own relationship to the supervision process.

Questions for reflection

From your own understanding and experience of academic supervision:

- How does it feel for a student to be meeting a supervisor for the very first time?
- Do you think that feeling would be different if the student was preparing for an undergraduate or Master’s dissertation, or for a doctoral thesis? If so, in what way would it be different?
- As a supervisor, would you prepare differently if the student you were meeting was preparing for an undergraduate or Master’s dissertation, or for a doctoral thesis? What would you do differently?
- Would it make any difference to your preparation if you knew the student was an international student?

When asked to think about supervision, the model that springs most readily to mind is likely to be the one-to-one and face-to-face relationship between an academic member of staff and a student who is undertaking some substantial piece of research work generally leading to the award of a PhD. This ‘Oxbridge’ or ‘British’ model of the supervision relationship (Kiley, 2009: 294; Leonard et al., 2005: 136) is, of course, a stereotype and one that is becoming increasingly outmoded as newer approaches to the supervision relationship are being crafted such as online, communities-of-practice, coaching, mentoring and combinations of those approaches (Manek, 2004; Dysthe et al., 2006; Crossouard, 2008; de Beer and Mason, 2009). As Johnson (2007: 259) says, these are approaches and relationships that are ‘connected, collaborative, and increasingly reciprocal[ly] developmental’.

If the nature of the supervisory relationship is changing, then so too is the idea that the expected product of research work for which supervision is required is a doctorate taken on a full-time basis. These days, student-focused, largely independent and sustained work, of which there is often a 'substantial research component' (Todd et al., 2004), is now a feature of many undergraduate and Masters' degree programmes (Healey et al., 2013; Boud and Costley, 2007; Anderson et al., 2006; Dysthe et al., 2006). These extended pieces of independent work (Boud and Costley, 2007: 120), often known as 'dissertations' or 'projects', nevertheless require some element of academic supervision which is 'now a ... pervasive aspect of academic work in virtually every department' (Delamont et al., 2004: 6).

While these pieces of work may not involve the kind of protracted time-scale imposed by the completion of a PhD, they often mirror many of the intellectual and emotional challenges inherent in higher degree research work. They also represent, for the student, the opportunity to engage in what Kamler and Thomson refer to as 'identity work' (2006: 56). Through their studies, students engage in processes of meaning creation and sense-making that serve to reshape their beliefs, values and sense of 'self'. In this way, they often 'undergo a change in the way they understand their learning and themselves as learners ... which can be a challenging experience ... as they transform their ways of viewing knowledge and themselves' (Kiley, 2009: 293, Noble, 2011: 2), for 'as in any creative endeavour, the work of research is transformative – of the researcher as of the work itself' (Salmon, 1992: 9–10). The support of this kind of personal and professional development is also a feature of the domain of supervision.

So a new supervision landscape is emerging, one within which entirely novel forms of practice are developing. There is a reshaping taking place in the logistical processes of research as supervisors are also being required to 'service' their students, squaring their supervision practices with a variety of technical and resource demands to do with 'matters of accountability, performativity, and instrumental rationality. [wherein] there is debate about completion rates ... financial assistance and other forms of support, infrastructural provision, ethics, examination protocols and procedures' (Green and Lee, 1995: 40).

What once seemed a relatively simple role that could be learned experientially (Halse, 2011), a role that was played within a 'secret garden' (Park, 2007: 28–9) or 'private space' (Manathunga, 2005), has now become a highly complex set of roles that must be learned quickly and then played out within a multi-featured landscape that is also patrolled and moulded by a variety of influential close and distant stakeholders. Anyone undertaking such a role (or roles) should be prepared for a bumpy ride!

In search of the good supervisor

However, if there is no easy ride, it may be of some comfort for you to know that the single, most consistent finding of research is that it is the *quality* of systems, structures and processes of academic supervision that is central to the achievement of agreed and intended outcomes (Abiddin, 2007; Armitage, 2006; Deuchar, 2008; Vilkinas, 2008). What is less comforting may be that the role of ‘good supervisor’ ‘has also been compared to other roles ranging from God to mum, shaman, master craftsman [and] counsellor’ (Wisker et al., 2003b). Yet to be a good and effective supervisor, you need to possess and exhibit ‘quality’. The only problem is that there are many and different views as to what constitutes that ‘quality’, and needless to say it is complicated, as explained below,

The implied student (Ulriksen, 2009) at the heart of much research into the supervision process has been the doctoral student and so it has been ‘predicated upon a stereotype of research students as young people, with little work experience, who study full time’ (Leonard et al., 2005: 136).

As outlined earlier, such early career researchers are now no longer the norm when it comes to the requirement for academic supervision of work. The recipients of supervision these days are just as likely to be mature, part-time, first-degree students with considerable work experience and domestic or personal relationship responsibilities who, for the greater part of their supervised work, may be off-site and possibly remote from the institution through which they receive supervision. As Murphy et al. illustrate:

The more traditional supervisory model was once relatively easily adapted from the full-time to the part-time student’s needs. However, when part time supervision takes place at a distance (perhaps overseas), maybe electronically, perhaps within the workplace or within a complex collaborative arrangement, both the operational and the pedagogical aspects need to be reconsidered to ensure that they are fit for purpose. (2007: 14)

This has had inevitable consequences for academic staff who may be asked to take on a supervisory role focused on these less traditional kinds of student, particularly when they have had little by way of preparation for that role, other than a memory of how they themselves were supervised.

Consequently, academic staff these days are likely to find themselves supervising participants at all levels, in a variety of settings, aiming to be that ‘good’ supervisor who enables each and every student to achieve what they intend to achieve. Finally, they have to marry that with what the academic department, institution, professional body, employer or other stakeholders wants them to achieve, and all within disciplinary and national quality standards.

Taking stock

Given that the territory of supervision is this complex, what should our response be to that complexity which we, as supervisors, are required to manage? Perhaps we could begin to orientate to the question by taking a look at some very different attitudes towards 'good supervision' and the purpose of supervision generally.

Questions for reflection

Here are three perspectives on supervision:

- a The Dean of a Business Faculty nominated 12 supervisors who were classified as being 'excellent' in their supervisory skills because they achieved high completion rates; had candidates submit within the normally expected time frame; engaged in multiple supervisions; and received excellent supervisory reports. (Adapted from Gatfield, 2005: 319)
- b '[T]he outcome of supervision is not only to teach the student skills but to teach the student how to be someone - a researcher, a scholar, an academic.' (Grant, 2003: 180)
- c '[There is a] need for a dynamic alignment of supervisory style with the student's degree of development ... as a student undergoes academic growth during candidature, the supervisory style needs to be adjusted to a more hands-off approach in order to allow competent autonomy to be developed.' (Gurr, 2001: 81, 86).
 - Which, if any, of those attitudes towards supervision most appeals to you - and why?
 - What do you see as the key differences between those points of view?
 - Do you think that the type of 'home discipline' (such as science, arts, humanities) might influence what is considered to be good supervision?

The quotations in the box above represent some of the more common approaches to managing the complexity of supervision. A difficulty when engaging with complex processes is that to take any one perspective is to miss the substance of others and, consequently, the benefits

that the ‘bigger picture’ brings. The trick is to see what, if anything, the different approaches might have in common or what may either underpin them or connect them in some way, bearing in mind that for staff and students ‘the single word “supervision” obscures a great and sometimes troublesome diversity in values, beliefs, assumptions and practices’ (Grant, 2005: 2).

From research there are some themes that run through a variety of approaches and Tables 9.1–9.4 set out, in more detail, just some of those key themes:-

Themes and key elements of approaches to supervision

Table 9.1 Differing expectations of supervisor and student



Supervisor  pected to:	
Woolhouse, 2002: 139–40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the student knows the timeframe act as general advisor make sure students are clear about what they are doing give guidance on e.g., timescale, feasibility, what to read, correct structure read student work well in advance of tutorial be available when needed be constructively critical have good knowledge of research area take sufficient interest in research to put more information in student’s path be sufficiently involved in their success to help get a good job at the end
Vilkinas, 2008: 298 – summarising a range of research by other authors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have research knowledge and related skills possess management and interpersonal skills be able to coordinate the activities of the research programme mentor the students develop supportive relationships among the research students themselves
Student  pected to:	
Woolhouse, 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be independent even though some aspects demand conformity
Phillips and Pugh, 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produce written work that is not just a first draft be honest when reporting on their progress follow the advice [supervisors] give, especially when it has been given at the request of the student be excited about their work, able to surprise [their supervisor] and [be] fun to be with!

Table 9.2 Roles and styles of supervisors and students

Supervisor as, for example:

Polonsky et al., 2011	information source educator motivator evaluator methodology expert process expert business manager
Deuchar, 2008	facilitator director critical friend
Hasrati, 2005: 558	more knowledgeable other (MKO)
Brown et al., 1986: 120	director (determining topic and method, providing ideas) facilitator (providing access to resources or expertise, arranging field-work) adviser (helping to resolve technical problems, suggesting alternatives) teacher (of research techniques) guide (suggesting timetable for writing up, giving feedback on progress, identifying critical path for data collection) critic (of design of enquiry, of draft chapters, of interpretations or data) freedom giver (authorises student to make decisions, supports student's decisions) supporter (gives encouragement, shows interest, discusses student's ideas) friend (extends interest and concern to non-academic aspects of student's life) manager (checks progress, monitors study, gives systematic feedback, plans work)

Student as:-

Armitage, 2006	'hare' - self-reliant students 'tortoise' - supervisor-directed and support-seeking students 'ostrich' - students who lose contact with their supervisor
Lee and Green, 2009: 622-5	author disciple apprentice

Table 9.3 Supervision as a dynamic process

Armitage, 2006	starting out – relationship forming: establishing the 'supervisory/student contract' keep going – relationship norming: managing the 'supervisory/student contract' the end is nigh – relationship maturing: advancing the 'supervisory/student contract'
Anderson et al., 2006	clarifying the objectives of the project coming up with an appropriate, detailed and practicable research design maintaining an appropriate conceptual direction, within overall aims of the project analysis and writing up

(Continued)

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Table 9.3 (Continued)

Malfroy and Webb, 2000	from unstructured to semi-structured, to structured
Cullen et al., 2009	helping the student choose a viable topic and initiate data collection (intensive) monitoring student progress (less intensive) terminating data collection and writing up (intensive)

Table 9.4 Relationship and attitudes to supervision

Grant, 2005	technical rationality vs negotiated process/order (and/or professional artistry)
Acker et al., 1994: 485	
Hasrati, 2005); Dysthe et al., 2006: 303	supervision as situated learning (legitimate peripheral participation)
Murphy et al., 2007	<i>thesis orientation</i> : the focus of the supervisor is on helping students produce their theses in an efficient and scholarly manner <i>professional orientation</i> : supervisors see the process as a kind of apprenticeship for induction into academic life <i>person orientation</i> : the supervisor's focus is on the whole person, being sympathetic and supportive of academic and non-academic aspects of the students' lives
Lee, 2007: 691	functional enculturation critical thinking emancipation relationship development

These perspectives, approaches and orientations to the supervision process are simply attempts to theorise the specific, individual elements. While each of them holds valuable 'truths' about particular supervision instances, what is needed now is a model or framework of, and for, the practice of supervision that is able to deal with the kind of complexity outlined earlier.

When faced with complexity the solution is not to take any particular perspective or adopt one fixed position, for it is certain that no single perspective will ever offer a comprehensive solution. A better approach is to have available for practice a framework that envisages, and supports the use of, navigation through and around different, theorised, perspectives of the kind outlined in the Tables above. This is a flexible framework that can accommodate elements of expectation, style, phases and differing orientations to, or conceptions of, academic supervision. Such a framework, given the weight of research on the point, should also have the

supervisory relationship at its core, and, by extension, no matter what the form of relationship envisaged (one-to-one, group supervision, online supervision etc.), supervision being a human encounter, have dialogue and dialogic processes as the central dynamic. Clearly, this will place the major responsibility on supervisors to be the navigators of such individualised pathways through their supervisory encounters.

Creating good supervision – the challenges

Light and Cox make the point that

supervision ... is essentially about dialogue. There is a need for constant adjustment to what each participant is saying and the balance between giving and taking, listening and talking is crucial ... the dialogue is not simply a friendly conversation ... There is a more active, searching process involved whereby you become clearer about what the other is saying but also about the hidden assumptions and misconceptions. It is essentially an exploratory process ... [that] involves a wider involvement in the student's personal and social life. (2001: 143)

Questions for reflection

- What do you think of the quotation from Light and Cox above, does it tally or conflict with any of your ideas about supervision?
- If you think that supervision is 'an exploratory process ... [that] involves a wider involvement in the student's personal and social life', do you think any boundaries should be set for that involvement and if so, what might those boundaries be?

This suggests some new possibilities for how supervisors might approach the navigation task. Take the following, for example: 'successful supervision depends to a significant extent on relationships that are founded in trust, warmth and honest collaboration' (Armstrong, 2004: 601). It is also absolutely clear from research that the presence of empathy in an academic supervision relationship builds such foundations (Emilsson and Johnsson, 2007: 171; Robinson, 2011: 221–2; Kilminster et al., 2007: 2). As Hampes (2001: 241) says, 'developing empathy with someone makes it easier to trust them since you are more likely to know what to expect from them emotionally and otherwise.' Unfortunately, there are very few definitions of

what is meant by 'empathy' in an academic supervision context but most people would understand it as 'the ability to communicate understanding of another person's experience from that person's perspective' (BACP, 2013: 3). So empathy is not just a cognitive appreciation of someone else's experience, being able to take their perspective, it is also an appreciation of how it *feels* to 'stand in their shoes'. The importance of this definition is that it also includes communication of that understanding, back to the person whose experience is being understood, in such a way that the recipient senses it is an accurate understanding.

Now if anyone is concerned that by use of the definition above we are straying into the territory of counselling or therapy, you need not be concerned, supervision is neither. However, as Daniel Goleman (2007), famous for his work on emotional intelligence, suggests 'empathic concern' is a key social relationship skill and particularly important for anyone in supervisory roles, whether in business or in academia. Empathic concern, he says, is not 'living the feelings of another' but rather the supervisor (in this case) being able to accurately evaluate how someone else is perceiving or experiencing a situation, so that appropriate action can be agreed. That thoughtful and practical use of empathy is certainly what this context requires.

In previous sections, the importance of dialogue has also been flagged as foundational to good academic supervision. Light and Cox (2001) suggest that supervision is 'essentially dialogue' and others, notably Wisker et al. (2003a) and Dysthe et al. (2006), develop that notion further. Yet the term 'dialogue', as will be seen elsewhere in this book, implies more than good communication or discussion; it also entrains notions of mutuality, reciprocity, equality of voice and, to allow that to take place, particular attitudes towards the relationship itself. So, it is not just that dialogue takes place, what is important is the kind and quality of dialogue. Who, for example defines the topic, the field, the extent and form of the research and the responsibilities of the participants in the research? Who 'authorises' what is discussed, written or published. How does dialogue take place, face to face, online, in supervised groups and peer groups, and what is the quality of that dialogue, formal or informal, supportive or dismissive, directive or non-directive? Each of those elements – and the list is not exhaustive – has implications for the kind of relationship that is established and for the resulting impact of the supervision process.

Finally, the research summarised in Tables 9.1–9.4 also demonstrates the differences in attitude to the supervision task that generate 'tensions', characterised as 'technical rational' versus 'professional artistry', or 'negotiated order'. The term 'technical rationality' comes from the work of

Donald Schön, who characterised it as an attitude that places a value on instrumental problem solving (1983: 21), in this context ‘the supervisor acts as a manager or director and the student is a passive recipient’ (Acker et al., 1994: 485). This attitude is also characterised by a supervision process determined by ‘milestone reports, public confirmations of candidature sessions, biannual progress reports, annual oral presentations of research and – in some universities ... a form that must be signed off at the conclusion of every supervisory meeting’ (Brabazon, 2013).

By contrast, ‘professional artistry’ in supervision is an attitude that values: ‘creativity, innovation and exploration of alternative and sometimes contradictory perspectives ... It thus sees quantity and quality indicators as more than a technical exercise; more than a set of defined regulations and procedures and, above all, more than the sum of its definable parts. It accepts that it is not possible to know everything’ (Gore et al., 2000: 77).

Similarly, ‘negotiated order’ is a model of supervision, ‘where the expectations between supervisor and student are open to change’ (Acker et al., 1994).

This is a contrast that presents supervision in the same dichotomous, tension-generating, ‘either/or’ way, and it is very clear that supervision in this time of complexity requires supervisors to confront challenges that arise from the kind of technical aspects of research outlined by Brabazon above and the kinds of challenge thrown up by needing to orientate students from taught programmes or professional practice (Watts, 2009) to the research environment, where different rules apply.

Technical and Adaptive Challenges

Heifetz talks about the complex challenges faced by business leaders (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002; Parks, 2005) and in so doing he makes a distinction between what he calls ‘technical challenges’ and ‘adaptive challenges’. Technical challenges can be solved by the application of routine, known solutions, formats, procedures and processes whereas adaptive challenges are those, for example, where it becomes obvious, gradually or suddenly, that new and different sets of skills, knowledge and understanding, new mental models, are required in order to meet them. In supervision, an example of a technical challenge might be how the supervisee gets access to the specialist databases and instruments which are necessary for the conduct of the project. An adaptive challenge might be how well the supervisee adapts to a research environment when all or most of their experience has been as a ‘taught’ student. Another distinction he makes (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002) is that while technical challenges can be

resolved by individuals who have particular expertise and particular knowledge, adaptive challenges can only be resolved through collaborative exploration, to coin a phrase, where solutions are not in people's heads but in a collaborative space 'between their noses'.

Academic supervision crosses and re-crosses each and both of those kinds of challenge, and consequently a good supervisor is also someone who can distinguish between them and know that, as Heifetz (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002) goes on to suggest, applying technical forms of solution to adaptive challenges can only lead to failure.

Key phases of the supervision landscape

Lee and Green (2009), in their article 'Supervision as metaphor', enumerate the many ways in which the supervision process has been characterised. One of the most-used metaphors is that of a journey or a learning journey (Wisker et al., 2007: 305; Jackson et al., 2009: 89; Heinze and Heinze, 2009: 295) characterised by a number of 'stages' or 'phases', where different 'thresholds' are encountered and need to be crossed:

'[Y]ou will go through different phases of feeling confident ... I do see that I've been climbing you know, a mountain and I've got past base camp and I have got to some of the other earlier camps up the hill ... and I do actually feel so different than I did at the start I do see, understand and believe in that sense of working at different thresholds ... trying to get to that peak!' (Student 'Julie' quoted in Wisker and Savin-Baden, 2009: 244)

Other pieces of research (see Tables 9.1–9.4) suggest that projects have a 'lifecycle' where the stages or phases are marked by changes of activity or changes in focus. These phases may be determined by administrative or award requirements, by the nature of the project and its research methods, by the nature of the discipline, by the requirements of the institution, by the mode of participation (e.g., part-time, full-time or distance learning) or even by the temperament of individual supervisors. If we were to consider process phases in a project then there is broad agreement that in undertaking most academic projects there are 'starting-off/exploring' processes, 'understanding/agreeing/getting started' processes, 'carrying-on/maintaining' processes and 'finishing-off' processes.

There is no real agreement on names for the phases so, in keeping with the generic processes identified above, they will be referred to here as 'contracting' (an orientation phase), 'establishing', 'sustaining' and 'concluding' as set out in Figure 9.1.

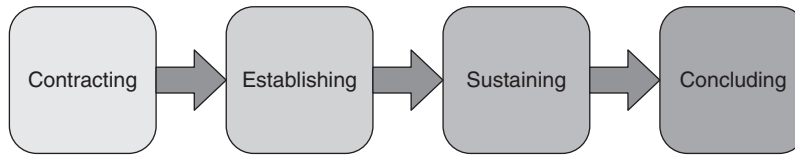


Figure 9.1 Meeting the challenges of complex supervision – the supervisor as navigator

Navigating the complex landscape of supervision requires supervisors to have an effective mental map, a set of flexible intelligences – cognitive, emotional and behavioural – and an open mind so that they can ‘have’ frames of mind but not be ‘had’ (dominated) by them (Kegan and Lahey, 2002). They need to have the ability not only to maintain student-centredness but also to develop different kinds of conversation across the lifecycle and know when particular kinds of conversation are required, depending on the phase of the project. For example, stretching and challenging the supervisee with motivating goals can only take place if the supervisee has already developed basic capability in the ‘establishing’ phase.

Table 9.1 sets out just some of the aspects of this navigation task by combining examples from the research and the good supervision ‘frames’ developed in earlier sections.

Conclusion

Academic supervision is a complex process offering considerable challenge to those involved in the supervisory relationship and new forms of supervision are evolving to meet the demands of that complexity. The ability to create empathic, dialogue-focused relationships while simultaneously supporting students in balancing technical and adaptive challenges across the project lifecycle represents just one, but the most crucial, of the new elements that need to be integrated into the supervisor’s repertoire.

Those elements are, of course, not new to anyone who may be familiar with the form of supervision that is enjoyed and employed by professionals in counselling, social work, nursing and other forms of health and social care, in what might be called ‘professional practice’ supervision. Those models and frameworks need some adaptation and adjustment for a higher education (HE) context since supervision in those fields is designed for quite a different purpose. Nevertheless, there are a number of process principles that inform this field of ‘professional practice’ supervision that are clearly applicable to the new academic supervision landscape.

Table 9.5 Challenges and possible actions in the different phases of the supervision process

Phase	Challenges (for example)	Possible actions/supervisory conversations
Contracting	<p><i>Technical challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration /understanding Requirements • Timescales/deadlines • Resources (e.g. funding) <p><i>Adaptive challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing experience (supervisor and supervisee) • Cognitive development of supervisee • Support/conflict between current supervisee physical/social environment and project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreeing responsibilities • Setting boundaries (especially supervisor availability) • Connecting/integrating supervisee/project/environment • Project guidelines (institution) • Building relationship – active listening • Discussing expectations of each other – how you will work together • How will disagreements/conflicts be handled • Summarising • Agreeing direction of project (initial – scoping)
Establishing	<p><i>Technical challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design/format of project • Firming scope of project • Indicative content and research skill acquisition • First deadlines/indicators of progress <p><i>Adaptive challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting to research/write (when, how, what) • ‘Progressing’ • Sensemaking- research/researcher/ researching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreeing direction of project (exploring scope/establishing) • Goal-setting • Modelling (supervisor being a model for, and helping supervisee create own mental models of, research/researcher/researching) • Reflecting for learning • Giving feedback/being critical friend – being none-directive • Supporting • ‘Scaffolding’ • Enabling networks for supervisee (introduction to peers/academic colleagues/external networks)

Phase	Challenges (for example)	Possible actions/supervisory conversations
Sustaining	<p><i>Technical challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transferring MPhil to PhD (where appropriate) • Building drafts into structure/keeping writing • Organising teaching for supervisee • Research skill widening/deepening <p><i>Adaptive challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying focused • Staying motivated • Balancing tensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating plus goal-setting and feedback • Challenging plus goal-setting and feedback • Formative assessment and evaluation – with feedback • Tension regulating/balancing for supervisee • Connecting with peer-based project/personal development resources, e.g. peer-supervision groups or Action Learning sets • Being more directive • External networking/conferences/forums for supervisee • Being an advocate for the project
Concluding	<p><i>Technical challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting external/internal examiners (where appropriate) • Preparing final version of project • Arranging Viva (where appropriate) • Assessing work <p><i>Adaptive challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finishing writing (concluding) • Preparing for Viva (where appropriate) • Letting go • Moving on and out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who should examine? • When/how/why of finishing writing • Preparing for assessment • Dissemination of research • Next moves, job-hunting/career development

Academic supervision is clearly at a point where it needs to acknowledge the many changes taking place in HE and the complexity of the process as it has been outlined in earlier parts of this chapter. It is, in fact, beginning to experience its own set of adaptive challenges and there is some evidence that new and appropriate responses are beginning to emerge. Based on the growing recognition that supervision needs to become more process-orientated and less product- or problem-orientated, these new approaches view reflection and 'generative reactivity' (Johnson, 2007: 259) rather than 'direction' as the core dynamic of the process. There is the coaching approach (or 'attitude') to supervision – which is process-orientated and has, at its core, both empathic concern and mutuality (Manek, 2004; Robinson, 2011). Similarly, in an attempt to introduce peer voices into the supervision process and include elements of social learning, academic supervision is beginning to embrace action learning (AL). AL is essentially facilitated (or self-facilitated) group-based learning based on participants' self-nominated projects. It has a long pedigree as a developmental tool in business and in education.

The nature of academic institutions and ways in which ~~be~~ knowledge may be represented is also changing and other new elements with which some supervisors may now be confronted include learning to work with students in locations remote from the supervisor – which could also be complicated by needing to communicate across different time-zones – or learning to work with projects in different modalities other than text – web-based or video-based, for example.

Finally, however, while it is clear that academic supervision demands a far more diverse set of abilities than required in previous years, an additional and, perhaps, ultimate ability is (as Boud and Costley, 2007: 129 suggest) for supervisors to acquire the capacity not only to identify when the supervision process is not being effective but also the flexibility to act on that observation.

Questions for reflective practice and professional development

- 1 What are the most challenging things that you face as a supervisor? How would you match them against the 'technical' or 'adaptive' category descriptions in the chapter?
- 2 If you had to draw a 'map' of the supervision process from your own perspective, would you add anything and would you remove anything from the elements in Table 9.5?

- 3 After reading this chapter, how would you describe the purpose(s) of academic supervision to a student that you will shortly be supervising?
- 4 If, after reading the chapter or from your reflections on Question 1 above, you were now to assess your strengths as a supervisor, what would you say they were? What would you say you need to develop? Would you be prepared to receive feedback from a colleague or a student on your supervision and if so, how would you go about doing that?

Further reading

Carnell, E., MacDonald, J. and Askew S. (2006) *Coaching and Mentoring in Higher Education: A learning-centred approach*. London: The Institute of Education, University of London.

This is an excellent resource on the coaching approach to supervision.
Brockbank, A. and McGill, I. (2013) *Coaching with Empathy*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

On a similar theme, of developing a learning relationship through dialogue. While it is not HE centred, both authors have extensive experience of working with HE audiences – both staff and student.

Action learning (AL)

There are a number of good references on the use of AL in HE settings, but these are particularly useful:

Bourner, T. and Frost, P. (1996) 'In their own words: The experience of action learning in higher education', *Education & Training*, 38: 22–31.

Coghlan, D. and Pedler, M. (2006) 'Action learning dissertations: Structure, supervision and examination', *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 3: 127–39.

Brockbank, A. and McGill I., (2003) *The Action Learning Handbook: Powerful techniques for education, professional development and training*. London: Routledge.

More information about the relationship between such psychological growth and academic learning can be found in:

Baxter Magolda, M. B. and King, P. (2004) *Learning Partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

- Chickering, A. W. and Reisser, L. (1993) *Education and Identity* (2nd edn). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
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