

# Educating Incarcerated Professionals: Challenges and Lessons from an Extreme PhD Context

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## Abstract

This essay outlines a unique set of challenges that we confronted as a PhD supervisor and candidate, drawing on a research project within a United States Federal Prison. We elicit the challenges that can be faced at different stages before, during, and after fieldwork, and share three lessons for others. First, exploring unique phenomena and processes often requires conducting research in extreme empirical contexts, which while challenging, helps to establish the boundaries within which other archetypes can be studied. Second, educating incarcerated individuals is a challenge and an opportunity, and requires creative approaches that can transcend work, family, and social boundaries. Finally, while it is tempting for supervisors and candidates to embark on PhDs for instrumental purposes, helping to support and develop each other should be the core motivation. We hope that others can learn from our experience and reflect on and share more widely their own experiences and practices.

## Keywords

qualitative research, reputation, management education

## Recruitment and Selection of PhD Candidates

A perennial challenge in business and management studies is the recruitment and selection of PhD candidates. After completing their undergraduate and master's degrees, most Business School students are ready to transition from studying to earning. At the same time, the entry requirements for doctoral programs are high. This means there is a relatively small pool of talent to recruit and select from, creating fierce global labor market competition for the best PhD candidates. Training and supervising PhD candidates is a long-term commitment that extends beyond the lifetime of the PhD, which has implications on a supervisor's time, resources, and reputation. It is also a major commitment for PhD candidates who are investing many additional years of training and a professional relationship with a supervisor, with no certainty of a job at the end and precarity within a job if they decide to embark on an academic career.

Given the competitive environment of recruiting and selecting PhD candidates as well as the risks involved for both PhD supervisors and students, our aim is to candidly show the different challenges and opportunities that both parties can face throughout the PhD journey. We illustrate the ups and downs of the PhD journey through an extreme case which have important lessons for other PhD supervisors and candidates.

## Our Story

In July 2016, William Harvey was approached by a potential PhD candidate, Navdeep Arora, to supervise him. At the time, the e-mail correspondence seemed to Harvey as typical of other correspondence with potential PhD candidates. For example, Arora shared his CV and proposal, which was followed by discussions around: Harvey's capacity to supervise, the merits and areas for improvement with Arora's proposal, if the application aligned with Harvey's research expertise, and discussions around the likelihood of the application meeting the standards expected for PhD admission at the University of Exeter Business School. As part of Harvey's own due diligence, he subsequently found that Arora had not revealed as part of their prior correspondence that he was being charged by the Federal Government of the United States for white collar crime. Arora was also slow to respond to e-mails, which Harvey questioned at the time in relation to his commitment to conduct his PhD. Harvey needed to make a choice between two options. First, the less risky option of politely withdrawing from a potential

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supervisory arrangement. Second, to risk continuing with the PhD arrangement, but raising with Arora his concerns and disappointment of not revealing his personal circumstances, particularly given the vital role of trust between PhD supervisors and candidates. Harvey made the decision to continue with the PhD arrangement, despite the risks.

This essay draws on a period of just under four years from when Arora decided to apply for a PhD at the University of Exeter and Harvey agreed to supervise him. Shortly after Arora's PhD application was formally accepted, he was sentenced to 18 months in a United States Federal Prison. The essay provides a candid account of the period from before, during, and after prison. Drawing on an extreme example, we provide a personal perspective from Harvey, as the PhD supervisor, and Arora, as the PhD candidate, to highlight that research can sometimes be effectively conducted in complex empirical contexts, despite their unique challenges and the personal dilemmas that can be faced by supervisors and candidates.

## **PhD Approval**

One of the first challenges Harvey faced was that the University of Exeter lacked a precedent for this kind of case. For example, at an administrative level in the PhD application form, there was a question of whether the PhD candidate had a criminal conviction. At the time of application, Arora had been charged but technically did not have a conviction, and Harvey and Arora did not feel ethically comfortable ticking "no" in the form, without having discussions with others, including the Director of PhDs, the Dean of the Business School and the University's research ethics and governance team. This led to multiple discussions around the risk and liability for the University, Business School and for Harvey. In particular, there were concerns that the circumstances surrounding Arora's legal case could be construed negatively by external stakeholders such as alumni, funders, partners, and the media. At the same time, given the Business School's strong emphasis on responsible business, leadership and governance, it was also seen as a positive step that the university was helping someone to rehabilitate. Ultimately, the university agreed to approve the PhD application with Arora being registered part-time given the logistical challenges of his circumstances.

## **Transitioning Into the Field**

Previously, Arora had a successful professional career until January 2016 when he was indicted for wire fraud in the US. He had served as a Senior Partner of McKinsey & Company for 16 years, Partner and Global Head of Insurance Strategy Practice at KPMG for 3 years, and a Product Manager for PepsiCo for 6 years. Physically separated from his family in the UK, crestfallen, and emotionally distraught, he faced the

dual challenge of fighting his indictment while staying professionally relevant and encouraged by working as an investor and advisor to venture capital firms and technology start-ups, and simultaneously exploring opportunities to pursue a PhD. This journey led Arora to approach Harvey during the middle of 2016. The stress of legal proceedings, personal circumstances, and resulting depression kept Arora from staying organized and focused on his PhD discussions with Harvey. Since he had still not been proven guilty, his legal counsel advised him not to disclose his circumstances, which complicated the integrity of his initial communications with Harvey. Arora eventually decided to plead guilty in the middle of 2017, made a full disclosure to Harvey, and finally proceeded to organize his efforts towards his PhD proposal with Harvey.

The stark realities of actual field work eventually set in after Arora's sentencing for 18 months in March 2018, when he realized the major limitations of a prison environment. With Harvey's support, Arora crafted a plan to work on his literature review and methodology during the 18-month prison term, followed by a plan of fieldwork upon his release. Adapting to the prison environment, and especially creating time, reflection, and capacity to work on the PhD turned out to be more challenging than expected. Four occupants to a room, no facilities for studying or reading, bunk beds, six hours of mandatory work teaching high school students each day, limited access to computers and telephones, and no access to the internet made the task of concentrating on his PhD arduous. This took a surprising turn when we decided to change the PhD focus, as we explain in more detail below. This meant re-orienting the research and workplan. Harvey helped Arora by sending the appropriate research materials in print through Arora's family and friends. Arora was lucky to have been working with a very aware, intelligent, and forward-thinking Education Officer who saw the value of the research topic at hand and readily approved his request for data collection. The data collection was fraught with the challenges of a highly restricted prison environment and engaging with participants at different stages of their sentence, which elicited a host of emotional reactions in the beginning, but eventually opened up unprecedented opportunities for learning. Arora had to rely upon Harvey's guidance throughout a very laborious, emotionally draining, and protracted data collection process.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

When Arora transferred to prison, this created several barriers to communication. First, he could only e-mail through a special system used by the US Federal Bureau of Prisons to allow inmates to communicate with the outside world. This system restricts e-mails to only rich text messages with the sender and receiver only able to communicate through the system. This meant that Harvey could not communicate with

Arora through his regular work e-mail account. Arora's ability to e-mail was limited to very specific time windows during the day. It also meant Harvey could not send Arora readings via attachments. Most content, therefore, had to be exchanged by post via family and friends. Second, Arora's telephone communications were limited to 300 minutes per month, with each call limited to 15 minutes followed by a 30-minute break. Arora was able to call Harvey on a registered number, but Harvey did not have the ability to call Arora. Third, Arora was permitted to have visitors on certain days of the week, but given the distance between the UK (where Harvey was working at the time) and the US (where Arora was serving his sentence), this meant that Harvey was only able to visit Arora in prison on two occasions during his 18-month sentence. Harvey was fortunate to combine his visits with two Academy of Management annual meetings in the US. The first of these visits in August, 2018, was the first time that Harvey and Arora had met in person, which was two years after their first correspondence and one year after Arora had commenced his PhD proposal. This was an important opportunity for much more detailed discussions about relevant personal circumstances and the PhD research, and an important inflection point in Harvey and Arora's supervisor-candidate relationship.

We found communicating truncated and laborious. Harvey spent significantly more time sending e-mails, having telephone calls, and liaising with family and friends of Arora in relation to sending reading materials compared to his contact with his other part-time PhD candidates. This was challenging for Harvey because he wanted to ensure that he was treating all of his PhD candidates fairly, was supporting Arora during a very challenging period, and was managing his own time carefully. Communicating was frustrating for Arora as occasionally he was unable to keep to his appointments and commitments because of institutional restrictions such as temporary lockdowns and inspections which were outside of his control. He was also acutely aware of the pressures he was placing on Harvey and others through this unusual supervisory circumstance.

During one of our 15-minute calls, when we were discussing the original PhD research project (building reputation within digital startups), Arora commented to Harvey that there were many other well-educated and previously successful professionals like him who were serving sentences for white collar crime. This triggered an idea in Harvey's mind that this was a unique and rare opportunity for Arora to use the time he had in prison to understand first, what caused others like him to act unethically and commit professional misconduct, and second, how they were thinking and planning to rebuild their identity, reputation, and lives. We discussed that this extreme case would be a rich setting to understand reputation loss and rebuilding and pivoted to this area of focus as the PhD research topic. This marked the start of a very productive period of data collection where Arora

spent many months interviewing 70 inmates on at least 2 and sometimes 3 occasions as well as hosting 20 focus groups with these inmates to encourage them to reflect on and discuss what caused them to act unethically and what were they doing now to rebuild their lives.

Arora had complete immersion in the field as he was spending 24 hours a day with the participants as a prison inmate. Not only did this enable additional time for informal listening, understanding, clarifying, and asking questions, similar to an ethnographic study, but it also helped build a level of relationship and trust that would have otherwise not been possible for an outside researcher. This relationship and trust resulted in multiple informal conversations and elicited deeper insights and provided greater details and texture to the data gathered through the interviews and focus groups, and afforded the opportunity for follow-up as both the interviewer and the interviewee had time to reflect on different responses and questions over time. This was a unique source of data and context which is not afforded to most researchers, and enabled us to not only collect rich data but also gave us greater confidence in the quality of data collected. We were also able to speak to the education officers in the prison to gain their insights around building reputation and recovering from reputation loss, based on their extensive experience of witnessing many hundreds of inmates who had committed white collar crimes entering and exiting the prison.

Our experience highlighted the importance of further education and capability building in the rehabilitation journey of incarcerated ex-professionals, the scarcity and limitations of the opportunities currently available in the highly restricted prison environment, and the potential future opportunity to create productive capacity through prison reforms and the use of emerging digital technology. Prisons today provide ample opportunities for education for inmates who lack high-school level education. However, advanced educational or vocational opportunities for rehabilitation are limited in three areas. First, the current guiding principles of punishment versus rehabilitation as well as the lack of resources and capabilities of prison systems. Second, the lack of outreach and infrastructure from higher education institutions to address the broader needs of society. Third, the unwillingness of investors to explore the opportunity to leverage the productive capacity and rehabilitation of professionals who have fallen from grace.

Gaining research ethics approval from the University of Exeter and the prison was inevitably extremely challenging given the unique fieldwork circumstances and the risks involved. To start with, the University of Exeter's research ethics application form was online, meaning that Arora was unable to complete it because of his restricted internet access. This meant that Harvey needed to request permission from the Director of Ethics for Arora to complete the form as a hard copy. It also meant that it took significant time for the application to be sent by hard copy, completed, and returned.

This was an ongoing challenge as the Research Ethics Committee requested changes to the application, for example around how data could be stored securely and how the safety and confidentiality of participants could be preserved. All participants received a list of the interview and focus group questions as well as a consent form to complete before the commencement of data collection. In summary, after several months of correspondence and discussions with officials from the University of Exeter and the prison, the PhD research received research ethics approval, which was a major relief given our significant prior investment in the PhD project.

### **Throwing in the Towel**

On many occasions during the PhD journey, we considered throwing in the towel. In the beginning, Arora was so distracted and depressed from his personal circumstances that he gave up on his plans to pursue a PhD after his initial discussions with Harvey. Arora felt caught in a vicious circle between his inability to focus and concentrate, his desire to continue, and his own disappointment at not being able to live up to his commitments to Harvey. Eventually, Arora opened up to Harvey and disclosed all the facts around his personal circumstances, which helped build a high level of trust and integrity in their supervisor–candidate relationship. Another source of frustration initially for Arora was his professional background as a strategy consultant and his style of thinking, problem-solving, and writing, which he realized were often not conducive to academic research, and required constant adapting, with help from Harvey. Eventually, we came to realize that Arora’s ability to view the situation from an impact-driven stakeholder lens and consistently asking the “so what,” combined with Harvey’s emphasis on rigor as a researcher and the ability to consistently challenge and ask the “how” and “why”, turned this collaboration into a source of strength and complementarity in their supervisor–candidate relationship.

Harvey questioned continuing the PhD arrangement on several occasions, including when Arora had not revealed his personal circumstances before he submitted his application, when Arora was indicted which escalated the reputation risk for Harvey as supervisor and for his university. He also found the hundreds of e-mails and short telephone calls extremely time consuming and a distraction from his other work, family, and social commitments. Previously, he had become accustomed to longer and less frequent interactions with his PhD candidates, whereas the supervisory arrangement with Arora necessitated shorter and much more frequent communications. In addition, Harvey felt he needed to have frequent conversations with his Head of Department, Dean, and other senior members of the university to ensure first, that they were aware of this supervisory arrangement as there was no precedent, and second, to protect himself in case the supervisory arrangement escalated into a

significant reputational risk for the university. Harvey was also challenged by his wife on several occasions around whether such frequent correspondence, often at antisocial times of the day, was a healthy and necessary supervisory arrangement. Notwithstanding the significant challenges and risks, which Harvey questioned at several stages, particularly during the 18 months when Arora was in prison, he felt an important sense of commitment to his PhD candidate whom he had agreed to support and develop at the start of the journey.

### **Transitioning Out of the Field**

As the three months up to Arora’s prison release date approached, there was a sense of urgency to collect any final data, as this would be the last opportunity to collect data, with an unviable option of any follow-up data collection. These last few months were focused on exploring any perceived gaps in the data, which required further explanation. This was also an opportunity to pursue further themes, based on the first two rounds of data analysis of the interview and focus group data.

Data collection was further complicated by the constant turnover of participants, and required a constant vigil and oversight over their release dates to ensure we had completed three rounds of interviews with them. The last three months also required building upon and sustaining relationships with the participants so we could communicate with them after release, while complying with the regulations of the Bureau of Prisons. As Arora was not allowed to speak to the Education Officers, who had been very helpful in enabling the data collection and sharing their perspectives, for a period of one year after his release, he had to ensure that the communication channels between the Education Officers and Harvey were well-established. Arora was not permitted to carry out any information or data collected on electronic media, and had to secure special permission to ship paper copies of research literature, computer print outs, and data to his home. Arora’s capacity to concentrate and focus for the three months following his release was further curtailed by his transition through a half-way house, and probationary limitations on his time and movements.

When Arora received his passport, we anticipated that his journey from the US to the UK would represent a positive transition in his life, but we came to realize that PhD progress, especially within an extreme context, is not always linear. We had hoped that after the intensity of the fieldwork, the data analysis and writing phases would be more straightforward. However, Arora’s personal challenges of settling back into the UK, managing family strife, and medical challenges during the coronavirus pandemic, meant that we found ourselves caught in the doldrums for six months. This had a knock-on effect on our ability to meet different academic commitments and on our professional relationship as our agreed deadlines kept slipping. These challenges related



**Table 1.** Challenges and Lessons for PhD Supervisors and Candidates.

Challenges	Lessons
Before embarking on the PhD: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exploring unique phenomena and processes requires conducting research in extreme empirical contexts, which while challenging, helps to establish the boundaries within which other archetypes can be studied.</li> <li>2. Educating and rehabilitating incarcerated individuals remains a challenge and an opportunity, and requires creative approaches that can transcend work, family, and social boundaries.</li> <li>3. While it is tempting for supervisors and candidates to consider PhDs through an instrumental lens, helping to support and develop others should be the core motivation.</li> </ol>
Transitioning into the field: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation</li> </ul>	
In the field: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges and opportunities</li> <li>• Throwing in the towel</li> </ul>	
Transitioning out of the field: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing to exit</li> </ul>	
Sharing data and insights: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outputs and engagement</li> </ul>	

not only to Arora's circumstances, but also to the nature of the extreme fieldwork, both of which Harvey should have been more mindful of. With the benefit of hindsight, we would suggest that anticipating the personal and psychological impact of such circumstances and the extreme nature of fieldwork, and preparing to respond to them, should be an important part of the agreed PhD work plan and timeline.

## Outputs and Engagement

At the time of writing, there were several positive outcomes that emerged from this challenging experience. In relation to research, as discussed above, Arora was able to collect a rich and unique dataset, which would be difficult for others to collect, given the challenge of gaining ethics approval to collect data in a prison and given Arora's own positionality (as an inmate serving a sentence in the same prison for white collar crime) in relation to the research participants. Arora was also fortunate enough to work with an Education Officer who saw the value in our research, and gave Arora the opportunity to share his findings with several professional organizations and academic institutions in the local community.

Harvey presented the research at several seminars and conference papers in 2019 and 2020, including seminars in Australia, France, and the UK, and presentations at the Academy of Management. Building on the PhD research and the presentations, we developed several working papers: first, a paper on understanding what causes professional misconduct; second, in contexts where individual suffer reputation, how can they rebuild their lives; and third, why and how do former inmates face different forms of stigma. The research has also been presented to undergraduate, postgraduate, MBA, EMBA students, and alumni as well as business leaders outside of the university, and the research was featured in the *Financial Times* in February, 2020 (Hill, 2020). In most cases, the above activities have been positive developments and show how academic and practitioner opportunities can emerge even from challenging circumstances. For example, when our research was featured in the *Financial Times*, we received a large volume of positive comments and

enquiries. At the same time, this also brought some unwanted exposure to Arora's previous status as an inmate and he received some unwelcome comments from old colleagues and business associates. While many of the research articles are at different stages of development, including under peer review, they represent an important body of research that stemmed from the primary data collection in prison and will directly contribute to the PhD manuscript, which is due for submission at the end of 2021.

## Lessons for PhD Supervisors and Candidates

We have shared some of our experiences and challenges as a PhD supervisor and candidate in a complex context during different stages, including: before embarking on the PhD (PhD approval), fieldwork preparation (transitioning into the field), in the field (challenges and opportunities; throwing in the towel), fieldwork exit (transitioning out of the field), and sharing data and insights (outputs and engagement). We elicit the wider challenges and opportunities presented at different stages before, during, and after fieldwork in complex and nontraditional field environments, and share three lessons from our experiences for other PhD supervisors and candidates (see Table 1).

Our first lesson is that exploring unique phenomena and processes requires conducting research in extreme empirical contexts, which while challenging, helps establish the boundaries within which other archetypes can be studied. Such unique empirical contexts are often fraught with challenges, but potentially offer unforeseen insights, as we experienced in our investigation. This builds on the findings of Pettigrew (1990) who argues that extreme contexts facilitate theory building through clearly visible dynamics. Similarly, Eisenhardt (1989) has suggested that extreme contexts can help to develop theories of success and failure. The challenges we highlight include considerations for PhD supervisors and candidates before embarking on the PhD, ethical concerns and approvals, confidentiality, data collection in a highly restricted environment, and limited abilities to

communicate internally as well as externally. Yet, this extreme context provided us with the opportunity to explore why and how well-educated and successful individuals commit professional misconduct, how they think about and plan to recover and rebuild their identities after major reputation damaging events, and the impact of perceived stigma on white-collar inmates.

We had the opportunity to gain insights on the above theoretical issues through the unique lens of 70 white-collar inmates reflecting on their past behaviors while in prison. The context of Arora being an inmate provided us with a positional advantage of him speaking among peers as an insider, which offered particular advantages (and challenges) compared to an outsider entering the field site. The issue of a researcher's positionality to research subjects as well as the subject matter and the field site has very important implications on the kind of data that can be collected (Mason-Bish, 2019). There are benefits of viewing the field as an outsider, but also risks that the researcher is viewed with suspicion and might lead to participants withholding information or even withdrawing from the research (Thorpe, 2014). One of the opportunities of conducting interviews and focus groups in prisons is sharing insights as a community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) where inmates can discuss, share, reflect, and redevelop their own tacit knowledge that can help to enhance and codify understanding of what motivates them to behave in particular ways (Pyrko et al., 2017). In our case, this is related to inmates sharing and discussing what caused them to act unethically, but the benefits could be applied to other motivations, behaviors, and contexts. Other scholars have provided rich empirical and theoretical insights from studying extreme contexts, including trust among firefighters (Pratt et al., 2019), psychological injury among a military medical team in Afghanistan (de Rond & Lok, 2016), team effectiveness among military special patrol teams (Kjærgaard et al., 2015), organizational ambidexterity in NASA (Heracleous et al., 2019), and strategic ambiguity in the mafia (Cappellaro et al., 2021).

Our second lesson is that educating and rehabilitating incarcerated individuals, especially previously successful and experienced professionals, remains a challenge and an opportunity, and requires creative approaches that can transcend work, family, and social boundaries. While the challenges of time zones, restrictions of a prison environment, and differences in background and styles appeared almost unsurmountable at the onset, they turned into unique research opportunities in ways that we had not anticipated. Fine and Deegan (1996) capture this sentiment through the notion of serendipity, which combines planned insight with unplanned events. Although our context is an extreme case, working across time zones, different work commitments and patterns as well as navigating the preferences of participants mean that PhD research cannot always occur within regimented times, which may require careful expectation and ethical management. We have shared experiences at all stages of

where there can be stumbling blocks and tensions between supervisors and candidates. From the supervisor's lens, it was the challenge of taking on, counselling, and coaching a crestfallen 51-year-old senior partner who had fallen from grace and was seeking redemption on a PhD project that was potentially fraught with logistical, ethical, and reputational risks. From the candidate's lens, it was digging himself out of a hole, fighting depression from extenuating personal circumstances, and anticipating perceived stigma in working with prison officials to seek permission for data collection, and living the PhD through the eyes of participants who were going through a very similar journey. We have not shared the tensions during the fieldwork between researchers and participants even though this was also highly challenging, as this is well-discussed elsewhere (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Benoit et al., 2019; Dundon & Ryan, 2010; Harvey, 2011; Thorpe, 2014). Importantly, our experience highlighted the limitations of current mindsets and the investment and infrastructure required to address the educational and rehabilitation needs of incarcerated professionals.

Our insights have wider implications for research collaboration among different groups (Amabile et al., 2001). We have discussed the challenges associated with working with nontraditional PhD candidates. In our case, Arora was significantly older, had more business experience, but less research experience than many students who enter a PhD program, having been exposed to research at undergraduate and master's level. Arora also had the restrictions of working within the confines of a prison, which on the one hand afforded him more time for reading, writing, collecting data, and reflection, but on the other hand created major challenges in relation to access to information, communication, and the benefits of being embedded within a research community. Collaborating with nontraditional groups such as inmates builds on previous research that highlights the importance and social value of educating inmates (Stevens & Ward, 1997). Ross et al. (2015) advocate for a team-based approach to help inmates in conducting scholarly research in pursuit of their educational goals. We extend this research by showing some of the practical challenges and opportunities of how a team-based approach may work between a PhD supervisor and candidate. We also build on the work of Rogers et al. (2017) who draw on the importance of inmates seeking to transition their identities to their new desired future selves through employment. The PhD experience of Arora represented an important personal journey of identity transition from inmate to PhD candidate following his prior identity loss from business leader to inmate. This recognizes the value of the PhD research as not only an investment in human capital, but also an opportunity for identity transition where individuals believe that they are an asset (rather than a liability) in society, as they seek to transform their lives through learning (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2020).

Our final lesson is that while it is tempting for supervisors and candidates to embark on PhDs for instrumental

purposes, helping to support and develop each other should be the core motivation. Every PhD has its own unique hurdles to jump over (relatively minor and shorter-term challenges to manage) and mountains to climb (relatively major and longer-term challenges to manage). We have given a nonexhaustive account of some of the physical, psychological, and logistical challenges that both of us faced at different stages of the PhD journey. While some but not all of these will resonate with others, each supervisor and candidate will face their own hurdles and mountains. For example, as Arora was previously a Senior Partner of McKinsey & Company and 17 years older than Harvey, this presented particular positionality (see Harvey, 2011) and academic-practitioner challenges (see Bartunek & Rynes, 2014) of collaborating that not only presented tensions, but also new perspectives and opportunities.

A potential PhD candidate can bring publication opportunities for supervisors, and PhD research can bring publication and employment opportunities for candidates. While important, this should not distract from the intrinsic motivation and reward of supporting and developing others. In our case, the opportunity to support someone's rehabilitation and career transition (Harvey), and provide an opportunity to provide a contribution to an important intellectual and practical topic (Arora) are valuable reminders of understanding the bigger picture of a PhD. We hope that this reflective essay has allowed readers to learn from our experience, and that it encourages them to reflect on and share their own experiences and practices more widely.

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