

# Modeling factors influencing postgraduate research supervision in higher education

Presented by Mabutho Sibanda  
Shelley Donnelly  
Farai Kwenda  
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# Structure of the presentation

1. Introduction
2. Aim of the study
3. A snapshot of supervision styles
4. Influences on supervision
5. Developing a conceptual framework
6. Concluding remarks

# Introduction

- High attrition rates at Masters and PhD level
  - Students opt for course masters instead of full research masters

Students want experienced supervisors.

- Who have you supervised?
- What is your research profile?



Supervisors tend to be selective in choosing students.

- Who do you supervise?
  - Background
  - Potential

# Introduction

- Foundational literature (Wisker 2003; Metcalfe et al 2002; Delamont et al at 1997; Moses 1984) identify the supervision process:
  - Learning
  - Personal interaction
  - Institutional regulations, context, interface

# Introduction

- Moses (1984) identified the following factors:
  - Personality Factors
    - Neglect by supervisor
    - Lack of contact
    - Clash of personalities
    - Barriers to communication arising from age, class, race, gender etc
    - Differences in approach to work

# Introduction

- Moses (1984) identified the following factors:
  - Professional factors
    - Misinformed supervisor (without sufficient knowledge in the area)
    - Supervisor with few genuine research interests
    - Excessive/ unrealistic expectations
    - Student ignoring supervisor guidance

# Introduction

- Moses (1984) identified the following factors:
  - Organizational factors
    - Supervisor having too many students
    - Supervisor too busy with admin work or life demands
    - Departmental facilities and arrangements isolating the student
    - Inadequate support services and equipment
    - Various hitches in the research process

# Introduction

- Contemporary literature on student-supervisor relationship
- Is it really contractual?
- Does it really matter?
  - Yes – developing ground rules and shared agendas and meeting at regular intervals leads to effective supervision (Wisker 2003)



# Introduction

- Dearth of literature that explains the interaction of factors influencing pg supervision
- Pressure to:
  - increase postgraduate student enrolment
  - Increase throughput
- Conflict between management and faculty
- What considerations should be taken into account in the supervision process?

# Aim

- Develop a conceptual framework that explains the factors influencing pg supervision in HE

# Supervision Styles

- research supervision process developed by Soliman (1999)
- supervisory management grid developed by Gatfield and Alpert (2002)
- supervisory blended model developed by De Beer and Mason (2009)
- knowledge management model for research supervision developed by Zhao (2003)
- theory of technology developed by Orlikowski (1992)

# Supervision Styles cont'd

- Unworth et al (2010) summarizes the main forms of student-supervisor relationship:
  - functional, where the aim is project management;
  - enculturation, where the aim is integration into academic community;
  - critical thinking, where the aim is analysis of the work;
  - emancipation, where the aim is student development; and
  - relationship development, where the aim is to inspire and care for the student

# Supervision Styles cont'd

- supervisors are expected to be ([Vilkinas, 2002](#)):
  - innovative;
  - creative problem solvers;
  - resource-oriented; work-focused;
  - technically expert;
  - decisive; and
  - dependable.

# Influences of supervision

- Massification, diversity and attrition
- Supervision pedagogy
- Government policy and sources of funding
- Distance learning, internationalization and technological advances
- Policies, institutions and governance
- Knowledge Sharing
- Workload and resource constraints

# Massification, diversity and attrition

- Zeegers and Barron (2012) - postgraduate supervision is the issue of diversification in a massification framework which leads to the deficit discourses
- deficit students are those “who drop out, who do not complete, or who do not complete on time, or who are required to resubmit, and so on”

# Supervision Pedagogy

- Main issues([McCallin & Nayar, 2012](#)):
  - quality of academic staff
  - student success
  - supervision pedagogy
  - models of supervision, are the main drivers of quality research in higher education



# Supervision Pedagogy cont'd

- In Australia for example, the government has a 'research training agenda' which seeks to enhance the supervisory skills of academics in higher degrees research.
- University of Sydney Postgraduate Supervision Development Programme which commenced in 1993 ([Brew & Peseta, 2004](#)).
  - This programme aims at “developing supervisors’ supervisory skills; developing supervisors’ ability to manage the supervisory process to ensure timely completion of theses; and ensuring supervisors are aware of University of Sydney policies for postgraduate research study”

# Government policy and sources of funding

- Growing pressure to produce more PhDs and research output worldwide
- University funding linked to research output and postgraduate output
- Research grants
- Recognition of research through research accounts

# Distance learning, internationalization and technological advances

- Distance learning growing fast
- Spurred by technological advances
  - Use of emails, Elluminate, Skype, MSN messenger and so onto communicate with distance research students ([Andrew, 2012](#))
- Internationalization of universities

# Distance learning, internationalization and technological advances

- According to de Beer and Mason (2009:224), “online supervision has resulted in a more meaningful interaction between student and supervisor where instructions and evaluations of supervisors and submissions by students are reduced to writing, leaving little room for misconceptions and misunderstandings. This has resulted in an improvement of research administration and record keeping”.

# Policies, institutions and governance

- formulated at institutional and national levels to improve quality of supervision ([Wright, 2003](#)).
- UKZN Research Policy II: Developing, retaining & rewarding researchers
- UKZN Guidelines on the Supervision of postgraduate degrees.
- Top down pressure

# Knowledge Sharing

- Knowledge sharing in the supervisory process is influenced by three factors which are individual, organizational, and technological factors ([Khosravi & Ahmad, 2013](#)).
- Cummings (2004) defines knowledge sharing “as information that is provided to help others work together to solve certain problems, develop new ideas and initiatives or implement policies or procedures”

# Knowledge Sharing

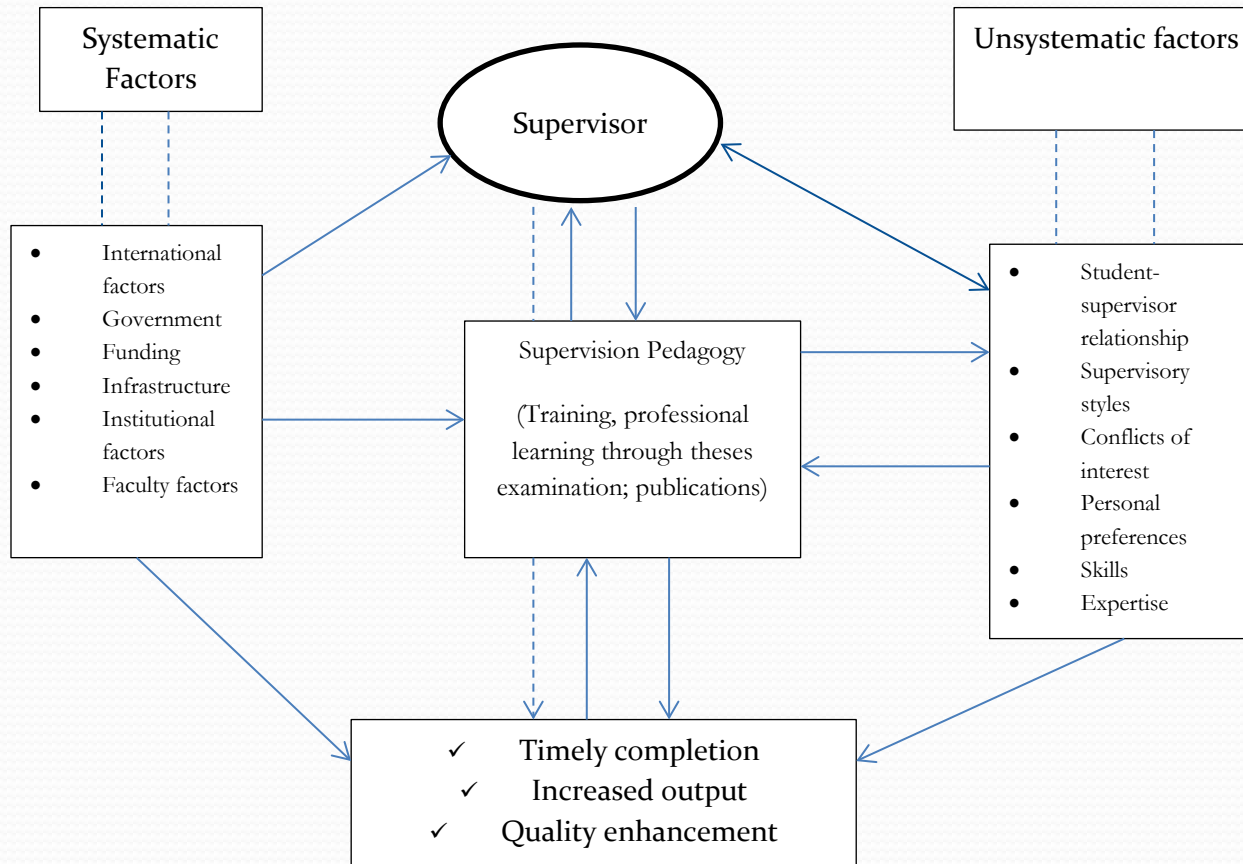
- knowledge sharing in the academic environment may take form of:
  - knowledge sharing committees;
  - knowledge sharing seminars;
  - written documentation;
  - Articles, and
  - using the portal system

# Workload and resource constraints

- Lecturers teach the required classes and then spend the greater part of their time doing either consultancy work or teaching in parallel programmes for more income ([Kilonzo & Magak, 2013](#)).
- Poor infrastructure
- No or little government support
- Publish or perish



# Graphical representation of supervision influences



# Concluding Remarks

- The student-supervisor relationship is found to be central to effective supervision
- Supervision pedagogy – New Zealand and Australia
- Supervision in the African context
- Publish or Perish