

INVESTIGATING ETHICAL DIMENSIONS IN SUPERVISOR-SUPERVISEE RELATIONSHIPS: INSIGHTS FROM DOCTORAL SUPERVISORS

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Received: 05 February, 2024

Revised: 05 March, 2024

Accepted: 22 March, 2024

Published: 31 March, 2024

ABSTRACT

This research delves into the ethical dynamics within the supervisor-supervisee relationship in doctoral education. By using a Likert scale survey, we explored supervisors' perceptions of various ethical aspects, aiming to highlight both the strengths and areas needing improvement in this vital relationship. The findings revealed a strong respect for autonomy, transparency, integrity, professionalism, and support, showcasing positive elements of the supervisor-supervisee interaction. However, some discrepancies emerged in fairness, equity, and power dynamics, indicating areas that could benefit from further attention. By addressing these issues, institutions can work towards creating a more supportive, equitable, and ethically sound environment that enhances the success and well-being of both supervisors and supervisees.

Keywords: Supervisor-supervisee relationship, Doctoral education, Moral theory, Ethics, Trust, Communication, Power dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Doctoral education is a profound journey characterized by intellectual growth, scholarly inquiry, and professional advancement. Central to this journey is the bond between doctoral supervisors and their students. This relationship significantly shapes students' academic progress, personal growth, and future careers. Yet, it's not just about transactions; ethical considerations and moral responsibilities are deeply intertwined.

Recognized as a cornerstone of doctoral education, the supervisor-supervisee relationship profoundly impacts students' academic and personal development. This complex connection involves mentorship, communication patterns, and ethical principles, all guiding students' educational paths.

Ethical dimensions are crucial, forming the foundation of trust, fairness, and integrity between supervisors and students.

Scholarship increasingly stresses the importance of examining and addressing these ethical dimensions for effective doctoral programs. Despite this recognition, there's still a gap in understanding supervisors' perceptions of these dimensions in their relationships with students.

This study aims to bridge that gap by using a Likert scale survey to gather supervisors' views on ethical aspects in their interactions with students. By exploring these perceptions, we seek to uncover strengths and areas for improvement in the

supervisor-supervisee relationship, ultimately enhancing doctoral education practices.

Based on empirical data and contemporary theories, this study aims to shed light on the nuanced dynamics of this relationship from an ethical perspective. By understanding supervisors' views on ethical dimensions, we hope to inform evidence-based interventions and strategies that nurture a supportive, fair, and ethically robust learning environment for doctoral students.

Background of the Research Article

According to Blau (1964), Social Exchange Theory suggests that relationships are essentially about exchanging resources, where individuals seek rewards while minimizing costs. Applied to supervisor-supervisee relationships, this theory indicates that both parties exchange knowledge, support, and guidance. Understanding this theory can offer insights into the motivations and dynamics underlying interactions in this relationship.

Biddle (1979) emphasizes Role Theory, which focuses on the roles individuals play in social interactions and how these roles influence behavior. In doctoral education, supervisors and supervisees have distinct roles with specific expectations and responsibilities. Role Theory helps clarify these expectations and boundaries and how they change over time.

Emerson (1962) explores Power Dynamics Theory, which examines the unequal distribution of power within social relationships and its impact. In the supervisor-supervisee relationship, supervisors typically hold more power due to their authority and expertise. Understanding power dynamics can shed light on challenges related to authority and autonomy and guide efforts to promote fairness and equity.

Attachment Theory, proposed by Bowlby (1969), highlights the bonds individuals form with significant others and how attachment styles affect their relationships. Applied to supervisor-supervisee relationships, this theory can explain emotional dynamics and support-seeking behaviors of supervisees and how supervisors respond. This understanding can help promote secure attachments and emotional well-being.

Ethical Leadership Theory, as outlined by Brown and Treviño (2006), underscores the importance of ethical conduct, integrity, and fairness in leadership. In doctoral supervision, ethical leadership involves

upholding ethical standards, respecting autonomy, and creating a supportive and inclusive environment. This theory offers a framework for examining the ethical dimensions of the supervisor-supervisee relationship and guiding ethical decision-making.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer valuable insights into the ethical aspects of the supervisor-supervisee relationship in doctoral education. By exploring supervisors' views on ethical considerations, this research aims to fill a notable gap in the literature and shine a light on an area that hasn't received as much attention.

Understanding supervisors' perspectives on ethical dimensions is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it gives us a glimpse into the ethical standards upheld by supervisors, helping to shape best practices and guidelines for ethical behavior in doctoral supervision. Secondly, it allows us to pinpoint areas where ethical challenges may arise, enabling us to take proactive steps to address and mitigate these issues.

Moreover, by uncovering the ethical dynamics within the supervisor-supervisee relationship, this study has the potential to guide interventions and strategies aimed at fostering a supportive, fair, and ethically sound learning environment for doctoral students. Such initiatives are vital for fostering positive outcomes for both supervisors and students, including academic success, professional growth, and personal well-being.

Ultimately, this study adds to the ongoing conversation about ethics in doctoral education, promoting a culture of accountability, transparency, and integrity within academic institutions. By delving into supervisors' perceptions of ethical dimensions, this research aims to advance understanding and practice in doctoral supervision, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of doctoral education programs.

Methodology

Supervisors were asked to complete a Likert scale survey to share their views on the ethical aspects of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. The survey consisted of questions using a Likert scale to gauge different ethical considerations. The responses were collected, organized, and analyzed to uncover any recurring patterns or emerging trends.

Ethical Dimension	Survey Question
Respect for Autonomy	To what extent does your supervisor respect your autonomy in decision-making regarding your research direction and methodology?
Fairness and Equity	How fairly does your supervisor distribute resources (e.g., funding, access to research opportunities) among supervisees?
Transparency and Open Communication	How transparent is your supervisor in communicating expectations, timelines, and feedback to you?
Integrity and Ethical Conduct	To what extent does your supervisor uphold ethical standards in interactions with supervisees, such as giving proper credit for ideas and contributions?
Professionalism and Boundaries	How effectively does your supervisor maintain professional boundaries in the relationship, avoiding behaviors that could be perceived as crossing ethical lines?
Support and Mentorship	How would you rate the level of emotional support and mentorship provided by your supervisor, beyond purely academic guidance?
Power Dynamics and Accountability	How aware are you of power differentials within the supervisory relationship, and how empowered do you feel to voice opinions and concerns?

Results

The survey data was analyzed using tabulated data analysis, which revealed the following insights:

Ethical Dimension	Average Rating (Out of 5)
Respect for Autonomy	4.2
Fairness and Equity	4.0
Transparency and Open Communication	4.4
Integrity and Ethical Conduct	4.3
Professionalism and Boundaries	4.1
Support and Mentorship	4.5
Power Dynamics and Accountability	3.8

Discussion

Based on the analysis, supervisors tend to view the supervisor-supervisee relationship positively, showing a strong appreciation for autonomy, transparency, integrity, professionalism, and support. Nevertheless, there's an opportunity for enhancement in managing power dynamics and encouraging accountability.

dimensions and the profound impact it has on both parties involved (Zimmerman, 2016).

Central to this ethical framework are principles such as autonomy, which respects the individual agency and self-determination of supervisees. Upholding autonomy means recognizing and valuing their ability to make informed decisions about their academic and personal journey.

Conclusion

The relationship between doctoral supervisors and supervisees transcends the mere exchange of knowledge and guidance; it embodies a rich tapestry of ethical considerations, moral principles, and intricate interpersonal dynamics. When we delve into this relationship through the lens of moral theory, we uncover a profound understanding of its ethical

Integrity serves as another cornerstone, encompassing honesty, transparency, and adherence to ethical standards in all aspects of the supervisory relationship. Without integrity, trust cannot flourish, and the foundation of the relationship may crumble. Moreover, fostering an environment of respect is paramount. Respect entails acknowledging the unique perspectives, experiences, and contributions

of each party, creating a space where open dialogue and collaboration can thrive. It's about valuing diversity of thought and ensuring that all voices are heard and respected within the academic discourse (Zhang & Zhao, 2019).

By prioritizing these ethical values, supervisors, institutions, and doctoral programs can create a supportive ecosystem where supervisees feel empowered to explore, challenge, and grow intellectually and personally. This entails not only providing academic guidance but also offering emotional support, mentorship, and resources to navigate the complexities of doctoral education (Zhang & Zhao, 2019)

Furthermore, promoting open communication channels is essential. Effective communication fosters understanding, resolves conflicts, and ensures that expectations are clear and mutually agreed upon. It encourages supervisees to voice their concerns, seek guidance when needed, and actively engage in shaping their educational journey (Zou, 2017).

Institutions and doctoral programs play a pivotal role in cultivating this ethical culture by establishing policies, guidelines, and support mechanisms that prioritize the well-being and success of supervisees. This includes providing access to resources such as counseling services, professional development opportunities, and networking events to enrich their academic experience and prepare them for future endeavors (Zhang et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the supervisor-supervisee relationship in doctoral education is not just an educational partnership but a moral endeavor guided by principles of integrity, empathy, and mutual respect. By embracing these ethical values and fostering a supportive environment, supervisors and supervisees can cultivate enriching and meaningful relationships that not only facilitate academic excellence but also nurture ethical leadership and integrity within the academic community.

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