Liminal spaces: the tacit dimension of the doctoral supervisory relationship

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Thesis Declaration

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University’s rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis.

I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures, and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

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Abstract

This investigation addresses the tacit dimension of doctoral supervisory relationships. Using *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as a methodology, the investigation seeks to illuminate the nature of the dispositional qualities that supervisors embody in highly valued supervisory relationships. The experiences of nine doctoral supervisors, selected on the basis of being well regarded as supervisors at the site institution, and of eight of their PhD candidates, are explored in depth. The setting is a research-focused Australian university.

The notion of threshold concepts and liminality provides a lens through which to view the nature of the challenges commonly associated with doctoral candidature. Existential humanism provides a further framework for examining the nature of supervisory relationships that are viewed as being supportive.

Three important insights emerge from the investigation. First, participants reported qualities in the supervisors and supervisory relationships that are highly consistent with the therapeutic approach advanced by existential humanists, particularly by Carl Rogers (1902-1987). Second, well-regarded supervisors embody qualities in their interpersonal communications with candidates that are effective in establishing positive rapport. These qualities are perceived by the candidates to be characterised by respect and, when consistently applied, as providing a strong basis for the establishment of trusting relationships. Third, the ways in which well-regarded supervisors embody these qualities are conveyed by tacit means, and relate to their commitment to collegiality, collaboration and reciprocity.

Previous investigations of effectiveness in doctoral supervision have given insufficient attention to the ways in which supervisors establish rapport in supervisory relationships. This investigation points to tacit ways in which rapport is developed. Based on the investigation, a model for raising the level of emotional support provided by supervisors for doctoral candidates is proposed. Its implications for how supervisors are inducted to the responsibilities of supervision are wide-ranging.
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother, Mathilda Magdalena Anderson.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This investigation concerns the nature of successful doctoral supervisory relationships. It addresses specifically the dispositional qualities of supervisors who are well regarded for their ability in assisting doctoral candidates to negotiate the intellectual and emotional challenges commonly associated with meeting the requirements for the award of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). In Australia, the award of a PhD generally requires the development of a thesis that scholars will judge for its significance and originality as a contribution to knowledge in a discipline or field of study. To this end, universities typically appoint one or more supervisors to guide and support the candidate. The desired characteristics and behaviours of doctoral supervisors have been extensively investigated, giving rise to the identification of a variety of models for best supervisory practice. Missing, however, is an understanding of the kinds of dispositional qualities of mind and character that enable a supervisor to develop a strong intellectual and emotional rapport with a candidate within the supervisory relationship. These qualities, and the tacit ways in which they are communicated, are the focus of the present investigation. This first chapter introduces the investigation.

The research setting

In Australia, interest in doctoral education has been evident since the early 1980s. Issues of concern in the literature reported at that time included: the quality of doctoral supervision (Ibrahim, McEwan & Pitalbo, 1980; Barrett, Magin & Smith, 1983; Moses, 1984); a perceived lack of clarity about doctoral supervisory roles and responsibilities (Moses, 1984); deficiencies in the research and writing skills of doctoral candidates (Zuber-Skerritt & Knight, 1986); the lack of recognition given to doctoral candidates for their contributions to research (Powles, 1984); and poor retention and completion rates (Anderson & Johnston, 1983; Barrett & Magin, 1983; Hill, Johnston & Smith, 1983; Nightingale, 1984; Powles, 1989).

Interest in the quality of supervision intensified during the early 1990s, particularly in as much it pertained to improving on-time doctoral completions. Moses investigated
gender-related and discipline-specific barriers to doctoral completions (Moses, 1990a; 1990b); and the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (1990) examined in detail the progress rates of doctoral candidates over a seven-year period from 1983. There also emerged an interest in the nature of supervisory quality. Parry and Hayden (1994) investigated doctoral supervisory practices across a range of academic departments at a large metropolitan university in Melbourne; and Cullen, Pearson, Saha and Spear (1994), as part of a research project conducted at the Australian National University, surveyed doctoral supervisors and candidates in order to identify characteristics of effective doctoral supervision. A desire to see the research emphasis move away from “matters of administration and procedure, protocol and policy, finance and governance …” also began to be expressed (A. Lee & Green, 1995, p. 2). Green and A. Lee (1995, p. 40), building on an earlier assertion by Connell (1985) that doctoral supervision is a highly advanced form of teaching and not simply a technical exercise, identified the need for doctoral supervision to be seen as a pedagogy involving complex power relations between “disciplinarity, research and teaching.”

Later in the 1990s, a Commonwealth Government review of higher education financing and policy (West, 1998) expressed further concern about lengthy doctoral completion rates. It saw a link between these and supposed deficiencies in the quality of doctoral supervision. In the policy statement that followed, the Commonwealth Minister for Education emphasised the importance of universities being responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of doctoral candidates (Kemp, 1999). These developments prompted further investigation of doctoral student dissatisfaction. Harman (2003) reported that PhD candidates were largely dissatisfied with their supervision due to the high supervisory workloads that had become prevalent as enrolments escalated nationally, together with weaknesses in supervisory practices. Neumann (2003), drawing upon a large-scale survey of doctoral candidates and experienced supervisors, reported similarly. She found that as many as 12 per cent of the candidates surveyed were dissatisfied with their experience of doctoral supervision, and five per cent of respondents expressed serious grievances (Neumann, 2003, p. xiii). Sinclair (2004, p. 6) re-examined doctoral completion rates and reported marked differences between different disciplinary groupings, a finding that resonated with earlier reports by Becher, Henkel and Kogan (1994) in the United
Chapter 1: Introduction

Kingdom, and by Parry and Hayden (1994) and Cullen et al. (1994) in Australia. Ways of improving doctoral supervisory practices were also explored, including through the professional development of doctoral supervisors (Pearson & Brew, 2002), the creation of models of facilitative supervisory practice (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004), and the identification of ways to evaluate the quality of doctoral supervision (Zuber-Skerritt & Roche, 2004). According to Cuthbert and Molla (2015, p. 33), the trend in much of the research at this time was to respond to national and institutional imperatives to improve doctoral supervision in ways intended to achieve increased efficiency.

Notwithstanding the volume of research produced, there was, as Pearson and Kayrooz (2004, p. 100) identified, the “lack of a robust conceptual understanding of what [doctoral] supervision involves.” In a similar vein, Grant (2003) noted that while good supervision was widely considered to be central to the success of a doctoral candidate, it was a pedagogy that was poorly understood, with attempts to generate a unifying theory for supervisory pedagogy still limited. In Grant’s view, supervision was an ethical practice in which there were “productive power relations” between a doctoral candidate and a supervisor (Grant, 2003, p. 175). Manathunga (2005, p. 19), supporting Grant’s view, asserted that research to date had erroneously portrayed supervision “as an unproblematic teaching relationship” that was understood to be a rational and transparent engagement between two equally powerful, autonomous individuals.

More recently, as doctoral enrolments have increased, the Australian literature on doctoral education has come to accommodate a broad range of concerns. Pearson (2005, p. 119) argued the need to link critical developments in research on doctoral education in Australia with what is happening in the global context in this area of research. Manathunga (2005, p. 17), responding to a trend in Australia and elsewhere for universities to prescribe supervisor training and development programs, criticised the focus of many of these programs, arguing that they were concerned solely with administrative responsibilities and that supervisors would benefit more from a pedagogical focus that took account of the cognitive and affective domains of doctoral supervision. Parry (2007) provided a detailed analysis of the nature and significance of disciplinary differences in the creation of new knowledge at the level
of the doctorate, and, in the process, identified the largely tacit ways by which candidates learn disciplinary conventions. Boud and A. Lee (2009, p. 1) identified the need to frame doctoral education as an area of professional practice that accommodates the various types of doctorates increasingly on offer. Nulty, Kiley and Meyers (2009, p. 693) produced a framework for promoting and recognising excellence in supervision. Vilkinas, Leask and Ladyshewsky (2009) articulated a business management approach to doctoral supervision. Brew and Peseta (2009) investigated mechanisms for institutional recognition of successful doctoral supervisors. Simmons, Holbrook, St. George, Lawry and Graham (2009) discussed issues relating to supervision and developing a researcher perspective during the course of candidature. Halse and Malfoy (2010, p. 79) presented an argument for theorising doctoral supervision as professional work, advancing a model that provided a discourse, language and theory to prepare academics for understanding the task and responsibility of supervision.

The need to develop more relevant doctoral supervisory training programs has also been a theme in the related Australian literature. Hammond, Ryland, Tennant and Boud (2010, p. v), drawing upon a large-scale empirical investigation of existing supervisory training programs in Australian universities, identified a need to take account of the changing context of research education and of the impact that this change is having on supervisory roles and responsibilities. They argued the need for a more formal and a more professional approach to supervisor training. Kiley (2011a) also identified this need. Drawing upon national data, including national Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire survey data over the period from 2002 to 2009 that showed a slight improvement over time in candidate satisfaction levels with supervision, Kiley argued that although supervisory training and development programs had become better informed by the increased focus on the pedagogy of research education, there was only slight evidence that the quality of supervision had improved (Kiley, 2011a, p. 596).

A recent development in many Australian universities has been the requirement to establish supervisory teams or panels for each doctoral candidate. Manathunga (2012, p. 29) argues in favour of this requirement, suggesting that it provides better support for doctoral candidates and their supervisors, particularly those in trans-disciplinary
and inter-disciplinary fields where a broad range of intellectual expertise is required. This development has provided insight into the way the sector has responded with relative speed to the perceived needs of higher degree research candidates in the rapidly changing context of doctoral education in Australia, and globally.

Parallels exist between the interests of Australian researchers and those of researchers in other countries concerning doctoral supervision. One broad area of interest concerns the requirements for high quality supervision. Wisker (2005; 2012), writing in the context of the United Kingdom, developed a comprehensive list of recommendations for supervisors to follow to provide effective supervision. Lee (A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 267), also drawing upon experience in the United Kingdom, argued that a more conceptual approach to supervision was required in order to add a new dimension to doctoral supervisory relationships. Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel and Hutchings (2008), drawing upon the results of a five-year project that sought to transform doctoral programs at American universities, reported that “students who have had beneficial advising relationships often refer to themselves as ‘lucky’, highlighting the almost random and haphazard access to high-quality advising and mentoring” (Walker et al., 2008, p. 90). They also observed that “… effective teaching and advising of doctoral students should not be a matter of luck!” (Walker et al., 2008, p. 90). Pursuing a related avenue of enquiry, Barnes and Austin (2009, p. 298) investigated the responsibilities, functions and characteristics of exemplary doctoral supervisors in the United States with a view to providing empirical evidence that could be used to address the “woefully uneven” quality of doctoral supervision. These researchers found that doctoral supervisor responsibilities were diverse; they included helping candidates to be successful, and to develop as researchers and as professionals. Supervisory functions were reported to include collaborating, mentoring, advocating and chastising; and desirable supervisor characteristics were identified as including being friendly, collegial, supportive, accessible and honest (Barnes & Austin, 2009, p. 298). According to Kiley (2011b), doctoral supervisors in Australia share many similarities with their American colleagues.

Some themes and reference points from the literature on doctoral education are especially pertinent to the present investigation. The themes include: how doctoral candidates achieve mastery of discipline-specific conventions for making and
reporting knowledge; what the characteristics are of quality communication between doctoral supervisors and their candidates; and whether or not there are tensions arising from the power imbalance between doctoral supervisors and their candidates that have a potential to be disruptive. Important reference points on these themes include works by Parry (2007), Wisker, Exley, Antoniou and Ridley (2008), Arnold (2009), Doloriert, Sambrook and Stewart (2012), and Jasman (2012). Parry (2007) investigated the importance to doctoral completion of understanding field-specific cognitive and social conventions for making and reporting knowledge, which she identified as being communicated largely by tacit means. Wisker et al. (2008) identified the heavy reliance of doctoral candidates on the communication skills of their supervisors, including skills in communicating tacitly. Arnold (2009), building on research by Grant (1999), introduced insights from psychoanalysis as a means of exploring how doctoral supervisors might learn from taking account of the requirements of one-to-one relationships between psychotherapists and their clients. Doloriert et al. (2012, p. 732), who investigated the nature of supervisor-candidate communications, identified the importance of emotion and of conveyances of power within the supervisory relationship. Jasman (2012) reported on an initiative to make tacit elements of communication practices more explicit in doctoral supervision so that these elements could be adequately questioned, reflected upon and changed. Taken together, these various works have greatly influenced the direction taken in the present investigation, and they are reviewed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Doctoral education continues to be an important area for scholarly investigation. According to Wisker (2012), the related research literature shows that much supervision in the UK keeps the supervisory relationship a private one, removed from the larger collegial community and essentially ‘untrained’. Wisker argues that as a result of changes in funding, particularly in Australasia, there is a new transparency and rigour to the supervision process. In the UK, she argues that institutions have more clearly defined policies concerning the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and candidates, and there are clearer criteria for who is eligible to act as a supervisor. Cuthbert and Molla (2015, p. 34) suggest, in fact, that governments in many countries are now demonstrating by their policies and auditing requirements that “the management of the PhD is too important to be left to universities themselves”, and that this imperative is the basis for “a range of policy interventions directed towards
revitalizing the PhD in line with its key role as the nursery of national innovation and economic growth.” Governments also have a vested interest in the efficiency and effectiveness of doctoral supervision. In Australia, at least, fees for doctoral candidature in public universities are publicly subsidised, and public funding of universities for the provision of PhD programs is predicated upon expectations of timely completion by doctoral candidates. Attrition rates that are too high and completion rates that are too slow are routinely identified as being a drain on public resources (see, for example, Kiley, 2011a). High attrition rates also impose a significant personal cost on doctoral candidates. In Australia, as in other developed countries, there has been strong growth over recent decades in the number of doctoral candidates. Official statistics record that the number of candidates commencing doctoral studies in Australia increased from 8,373 in 2004 to 12,016 in 2014 (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2015). Associated with this growth, as noted by Hammond et al. (2010), is an increase in the diversity of doctoral programs. As documented by Neumann (2003) there has also been an increase in the diversity of the backgrounds and aspirations of doctoral candidates.

In Australia, doctoral supervisors report increased pressure both to assist candidates to complete in minimum time (Connell & Manathunga, 2012, p. 8) and to supervise in areas that lie close to the perimeter of their spheres of knowledge (Manathunga (2012, p. 29). There are also reports of an increased incidence of cultural and linguistic differences between doctoral supervisors and their candidates (Hammond et al., 2010, p. 11), of pressure on supervisors to accommodate the increasingly trans-disciplinary and applied nature of knowledge production (Taylor, 2013, p. 124), and of an increasing need for PhD programs to be tailored to meet specific labour-market needs (Muller & Young, 2014, p. 134). These pressures impact significantly on doctoral supervision (Taylor, 2013, p. 118) and they have important implications for the professional development needs of doctoral supervisors (Hammond et al., 2010, p. v).

Though the circumstances of doctoral education are evolving, the fundamental need for quality in doctoral supervision remains.

**Insights for supervisory relationships from the helping professions**

Some studies have drawn parallels between doctoral supervision and the helping professions, which include, for example, coaching, counselling and psychotherapy
(see, for example, Arnold, 2009, p. 56; Grant, 1999; McMichael & Garry, 1990, p. 119). For example, Wisker et al. (2003, p. 391) use Heron’s (1990) interaction analysis for facilitators in the helping professions thus drawing a strong parallel between the realms of counselling and doctoral supervision. Bartlett and Mercer (2000, p. 196) argue that many aspects of the doctoral supervisory relationship are to be found in a range of other professional relationships including those in “mentoring, personnel management and supervision between psychoanalysts.” Similarly, Wisker et al. (2008) note that supervision has in common with mentoring, coaching and tutoring a one-to-one relationship intended to support a candidate and empower learning. Further, Arnold (2009, p. 56) argues that supervisory pedagogy may benefit from interrogating the pedagogical aspects of psychotherapy, which “can enable a deeper understanding and richer practising of postgraduate supervision.”

In order to effectively establish a working relationship with a candidate, the doctoral supervisor is required to have a mix of attitudes, behaviours and skills in both the educational and interpersonal aspects of teaching and learning. Consistent with this idea is Grant’s (2003, p. 175) argument that supervision is different from other forms of teaching and learning in higher education because of its “peculiarly intense and negotiated character, as well as in its requirements for a blend of pedagogical and personal relationship skills” in the supervisor.

Doctoral supervisors are not helping professionals, and a supervisory relationship is, of course, fundamentally different from a helping relationship, particularly in that it is not a healing relationship. There may, however, be merit in interrogating parallels between the nature of the doctoral supervisory relationship and the relationship that typically occurs between helping professionals and their clients. Important parallels between a client-centred approach to the helping professions and doctoral supervision are that both relationships typically involve learning conversations; both are constructed around one-to-one relationships that are developed over a long period of time; and both involve problem-solving, often in an atmosphere of emotional discomfort and an unequal power balance. Seen in this way, certain responsibilities may be attributed to doctoral supervisors in working successfully with individual candidates, including a responsibility to guide and support the candidate in negotiating the challenges associated with doctoral candidature.
Useful insights about the quality of supportive doctoral supervisory relationships can be drawn from the broader therapeutic context of the helping professions. First, what is particularly noteworthy in making the comparison is that the qualities in communication required in the context of the helping professional relationship might provide a deeper understanding of the nature of supportive interpersonal communication in the context of a doctoral supervisory relationship. In psychotherapy, for example, important qualities of the therapist in communicating with the client are “empathy, warmth, congruence, complex verbal skills, approval, supportiveness, optimism and respect” (Arnold, 2009, p. 59). Siegel (2010, p. 180) refers to these qualities as “mindfulness traits.” Richardson, Sheean and Bambling (2009, p. 72) draw attention also to the ethical aspect of the qualities that counsellors and psychotherapists should demonstrate, including: “empathy, sincerity, integrity, resilience, respect, humility, competence, fairness, wisdom and courage.” Qualities such as these may be equally important for doctoral candidates to experience in their interpersonal communications with their supervisors. Second, each of the helping professions shares a requirement for practitioners to have highly developed interpersonal communication skills, together with supportive attitudes and behaviours, that need to be developed and learned by the practitioner in order to achieve a successful relationship with clients. Effective interpersonal communications skills seem also to be essential for doctoral supervision, but doctoral supervisors do not always innately acquire these skills, and the department, faculty or institution in which they work may not necessarily require them to receive relevant training. Indeed, supervisors may also need to develop emotional management skills, since PhD supervision is an emotional process, according to Johansson, Wisker, Claesson, Strandler and Saalman (2014). Most Australian universities have mandatory training for novice supervisors that, as Kiley (2011a, p. 591) observes, are intended to raise awareness about candidate expectations, roles and responsibilities, and about the need to implement effective supervisory practices. Doctoral supervisors may, however, remain relatively untrained in interpersonal communications skills when compared to the helping professions, where, according to Richardson et al. (2009, p. 72), professionals are typically trained in interpersonal relationship-building skills over a number of years. Therefore, just as the helping professionals are required to be skilled in the interpersonal dimension of the therapeutic relationship, so, arguably, might doctoral supervisors be required to be skilled in interpersonal communications in their
supervisory relationships. The importance of training supervisors in interpersonal communication skills has implications for the quality of the supervisory relationship.

**Theoretical perspectives**

This investigation draws upon several theoretical perspectives that taken together provide a conceptual lens through which the elements of highly valued supervisory relationships may be closely examined. One of these perspectives concerns the notion of liminality, a concept that is associated with the threshold concept framework (Meyer & Land, 2006). A central tenet of liminality is that “in all disciplines there are conceptual gateways … or threshold concepts, that must be passed through, however difficult that passage might be, to arrive at important new understandings” (Land, Meyer & Smith, 2008, p. x). One way of describing the difficulties of negotiating conceptual gateways is by likening them to the experience of being in a liminal space, that is, in a state of ‘limbo’, described by Turner (1977, p. 37) as being “between established states.” A liminal space is a space of transformation, but, as Land et al. (2008, p. x) argue, it can also be a “suspended state, or stuck place, in which understanding approximates to a kind of mimicry or lack of authenticity.” Various scholars have referred to the experience of doctoral candidature as being akin to a liminal space (see, for example, Trafford, 2008, p. 280). Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 134) refer to it as a "rite of passage to the scholarly life" in which the candidate is repeatedly confronted by conceptual challenges that must be addressed in order to make intellectual progress. Crossing intellectual thresholds is a continuing process during candidature, not a single, finite event, given the depth of the higher learning endeavour concerned. In the liminal space of doctoral candidature, candidates negotiating threshold concepts are prone to experiencing feelings of uncertainty and a lack of authenticity (see, for example, Parry, 2007, p. 127). Their intellectual challenges have emotional correlates, an appreciation of which is important knowledge for doctoral supervisors because of the relevance of the affective domain to candidature. As Cousin (2008, p. 264) asserts, facilitators of learning must acknowledge the importance to their practice of the “principle of constructing a supportive liminal environment…” that “…addresses the kind of complicated learner transitions learners undergo.” The nature of the experience of liminality for doctoral candidates is addressed in detail in Chapter 3.
Also relevant to the present investigation are theoretical perspectives that derive from humanism and existentialism. It might be argued that humanism cannot be separated from existentialism. According to Bugental (1981, p. 10), “the truest existentialism is humanistic, and the soundest humanism is existential. The two are not the same, but their overlap is rich.” Existential humanism provides a relevant underpinning to the present investigation since it is concerned with illuminating issues of difficulty, meaning and the development of doctoral candidates’ cognitive and affective potential during their candidature. Existential humanism also concerns the freedom to make choices and to be responsible for those choices, which is particularly relevant in the light of the anxiety that doctoral candidates reportedly experience during candidature.

A humanist perspective is fundamental to the client-centred approach advocated by Carl Rogers (1902-1987) for use in the helping professions (Rogers, 1961). Rogers (1961, p. 26-27) drew on his experience as a psychotherapist to argue that “persons have a basically positive direction … the more the individual is understood and accepted, the more … they are positive, constructive, moving towards self-actualization, growing towards maturity, growing towards socialization.” In the field of education, Rogers (1969) advocated a facilitative way of teaching that gave expression to three conditions: congruence, where the facilitator is sincere rather than inauthentic in the role adopted in the relationship; unconditional positive regard, where the facilitator unreservedly accepts the learner without judgement; and empathetic understanding, where the facilitator identifies with the feelings, thoughts and attitudes of the learner. Rogers’ perspective provides a basis for exploring the attitudes of doctoral supervisors with respect to their candidates. Doctoral candidature may be seen as a sensitive and highly personalised experience that is unique to each candidate. Seen in this light, doctoral supervisors might be expected to foster mutually respectful, trusting and reciprocal relationships with individual candidates. According to Walker et al. (2008, p. 102), these are important qualities, not because they make the relationship more pleasant, but also because “they are necessary conditions for learning.” Many other researchers agree with Walker et al., for example, Wisker et al., (2003) found it was important for supervisors to create conditions for cognitive development and learning, and yet the nature of such conditions remains vague at best.
Key tenets of existentialism, identified by Spinelli (2005), May (1983), Yalom (1980) and Frankl (1964) include freedom, choice, isolation and meaninglessness. These may also be seen to be relevant to the experience of doctoral candidature. According to Yalom (1980, p. 8), the experience of human freedom and responsibility brings with it a sense of dread that relates to the need to make choices. There are parallels here with doctoral candidature. Doctoral candidates, by virtue of being in an extended state of liminality, are prone to feeling uncertain and apprehensive about the knowledge-making processes in which they are engaged. In these circumstances, the ways in which supervisors relate to and are perceived by their candidates becomes important. According to Spinelli (2005, p. 112), there are “ways of being” embodied in the bearing of a helping professional that are conveyed to and perceived by the client. In the same vein, Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 48), drawing on Geertz (1973), employ the notion of ‘ways of being’ in their depiction of the process in which individual academics adopt “a particular way of being, a personal and professional identity, set of values, taken-for-granted knowledge and recurrent practices.” Extending this perspective to doctoral supervisors suggests that examining the dispositional qualities of supervisors embodied in their ‘ways of being’ in their relationships with candidates might be an important avenue of enquiry.

The research problem
A great deal of research over the past three decades has produced models of doctoral supervision (see, for example, Cullen et al., 1994), lists of attributes of productive supervisors (Kiley, 2011b), and inventories of characteristics and behaviours of exemplary supervisors (see, for example, Barnes & Austin, 2009). The purpose of much of this research has been to establish what doctoral supervisors should know and should do to be successful as supervisors, particularly given the pressures on them to accommodate changes in the context of doctoral supervision. Various scenarios have been developed, but their reach has not extended to take fully into account the importance of the dispositional qualities of supervisors in establishing rapport in the supervisory relationship. Reference is made in the literature to certain supervisory qualities, as, for example, where Barnes and Austin (2009, p. 309) refer to successful supervisors being "friendly/professional, collegial, supportive/caring, accessible, and honest." To date, however, there has not been an investigation of experiences of the relationship between supervisors and candidates from an existential
humanistic perspective. It is this gap in the literature that the present investigation specifically seeks to address.

An existential humanistic lens would suggest that well-regarded supervisors are likely to adopt facilitative ways of being towards their candidates that might be expected to enhance the development of supportive supervisory relationships. Rogers (1969) characterised certain attitudinal qualities in the facilitator that are likely to support positive ways of being in professional relationships, such as between the facilitator and learner. As discussed earlier, these include a sense of being congruent in the relationship, the display of an unconditional positive regard for the learner and the cultivation of an empathetic understanding of the learner’s circumstances.

The interpersonal communication between a supervisor and candidate, according to Lee (A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 267) and Wisker et al. (2008, p. 6), is critical to developing a high-quality supervisory relationship. It might be expected that the non-verbal elements of communication play an important role in the development of such a relationship. By their nature, dispositional qualities are communicated mainly by tacit means, as Gerholm (1990, p. 268) explains. It follows that non-verbal communication plays a pivotal role in how dispositional qualities are conveyed within interpersonal relationships, including in a doctoral supervisory relationship. According to Wisker et al. (2008, p. 135), non-verbal communication in doctoral supervision is experienced by picking up unspoken messages conveyed by choice of words, emotional undertones, behaviours and body language. Non-verbal communication creates a particular tone in the communication between supervisor and candidate. It is also used to establish rapport in the one-to-one supervisory relationship (Wisker et al., 2008, p. 16). According to Parry (2007, p. 124), the importance of rapport in a successful supervisory relationship cannot be underestimated. She noted, though, that its importance is not given much empirical attention in the literature. Despite extensive research on the importance of supervisory practices to doctoral outcomes, the dispositional qualities and underlying values, beliefs and attitudes of supervisors within supervisory pairs have to date not been empirically investigated. The present investigation seeks to throw light on these qualities and values, beliefs and attitudes.

Supervisors have been shown to facilitate, largely by tacit means, the learning of academic conventions that are rooted in disciplinary norms, as was explained by Parry
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(2007, p. 128). Jasman (2012, p. 30) asserts that an examination of the tacit nature of the practices of doctoral supervisors may provide a means by which such practices can be made explicit. Other than in research by Becher (1989), Parry (2007) and Jasman (2012), there has been little acknowledgement to date of the role and importance of tacit cues, behaviours and conveyances of meaning between supervisors and their candidates. A central concern of the present investigation, therefore, is the nature of what is tacitly communicated between supervisors and their candidates, while acknowledging that not all elements of tacit communication may be described (Polyani, 1983, p. 4). To the extent that the elements of tacit communication between supervisors and candidates may be described and documented, it may be possible to identify the dispositional qualities of well-regarded supervisors. Achieving this outcome would shed light on the ways in which highly valued and successful supervisory relationships develop. Further, it may provide ways to inform the effective professional development of supervisors. Against this background, the aim of the present investigation is to illuminate the dispositional qualities that well-regarded doctoral supervisors embody in their supervisory relationships.

Three research questions capable of being empirically examined derive from this aim. First, what is the nature of the experience of candidates and their supervisors of the dispositional qualities of well-regarded supervisors? Second, what are the dispositional qualities of supervisors that candidates perceive to be important to their progression in candidature? Third, what are the dispositional qualities of supervisors that supervisors believe are important to the progress of their candidates? These questions accommodate the notion of doctoral candidature as a liminal experience, characterised by intellectual difficulty and emotional discomfort. Furthermore, they accommodate an exploration of candidates’ experiences of the troublesome aspects of candidature, and the potential of supervisors’ dispositional qualities to providing support to candidates in facing these liminal challenges.

Methodology

The investigation employs Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry. This methodology is well suited to an investigation of socio-semiotic phenomena, such as the experiences of PhD candidates and their supervisors of a
supervisory relationship. Naturalistic Inquiry typically employs an ethnographic approach, using in-depth interviewing to explore culture-specific behaviours and conventions in their natural settings. This approach provides a useful avenue for interpreting the issues, claims and concerns reported by the participants concerning their experiences in a specific cultural setting. This approach is distinctive from much of the research to date in that it investigates the nature of supervisory relationships from the point of view of both supervisor and candidate within the supervisory pairs.

An interpretive stance is congruent with the existential theoretical framework underpinning the investigation because it acknowledges that individuals make their own unique interpretations of their experiences of doctoral supervision. Naturalistic Inquiry also allows for the deployment of a repertoire of methods for data collection and analysis that take into account the need for a range of trustworthiness criteria for establishing rigour in the investigation. The procedures followed to provide for trustworthiness are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

A distinctive ontological aspect of Naturalistic Inquiry is the emancipatory nature of the methodology, which, in the context of the present investigation, is consistent with a desire to give equal voice and privilege to candidates’ and supervisors' personal experiences of their supervisory relationships because these perspectives are seldom heard due to their intensely private nature. It is assumed that candidates can describe what they perceive to be their supervisors’ dispositional qualities. It is further assumed that supervisors can describe the qualities that they believe they bring to their supervisory relationships with candidates. Supervisors should also be able to express what they understand to be the underlying values, beliefs and attitudes that they hold and that inform these qualities.

The methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry is particularly well suited to an exploration of the tacit forms of communication that occur between supervisors and candidates because of its use of ethnographic interviewing methods and techniques. It also allows for the mapping of taken-for-granted knowledge about supervisors’ ways of being in supervisory relationships that may be difficult or impossible to express verbally. For participants to articulate such knowledge requires them to reflect deeply on their experiences, requiring considerable time spent interacting with the researcher to build rapport. This process of reflection potentially is of benefit to candidates because it
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may provide them with a deeper understanding of their own knowledge-making processes and of the disciplinary conventions they are attempting to learn during their doctoral study. The process of reflection may also benefit supervisors by assisting them to develop a deeper understanding of what constitutes the strengths in their supervisory practices, and by contributing generally to their knowledge base that informs their supervisory practice.

Scope of the investigation

The focus of the present investigation is on the nature of the dispositional qualities that well-regarded supervisors embody in their relationships with their doctoral candidates. The investigation is not especially concerned with many other topics that have been important in the literature on doctoral education to date, such as retention and completion rates, disciplinary differences in the nature of candidature, cross cultural differences and issues, and the professional training of doctoral supervisors.

The investigation's methodological approach involves the development of an in-depth account of the nature of the doctoral supervisory experiences of eight candidates and nine supervisors of those candidates. As documented in Chapter 4, the investigation aims to illuminate the qualities of supervisors that may underpin highly valued doctoral supervisory relationships. These qualities are reported using “thick description” (Patton, 2002, p. 40) to convey their richness and complexity. This approach provides a basis for others to identify with the findings from this investigation, but not to project them to a larger group than the participants in the investigation.

Due account needs to be taken of the researcher’s values in identifying the topic of supervisor-candidate relationships as one worthy of detailed investigation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 174), it is normal in interpretive research for the researcher’s values to impact on the identification of a research topic, as well as on the choice of a research methodology. The researcher's values are described clearly in Chapter 4.

Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is presented in nine chapters, of which this introductory chapter is the first. Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature on doctoral supervision as it
relates to the nature of successful supervisory relationships and to the attributes and behaviours of effective supervisors. Chapter 3 addresses in detail the theoretical perspectives that provide a conceptual framework for the present investigation. Chapter 4 outlines the research design for the investigation and describes how the investigation was implemented. Chapters 5 to 8 report the findings from the investigation, addressing in sequence the nature of doctoral candidature as a liminal experience, the reported ‘ways of being’ of doctoral supervisors who are well-regarded by their candidates, the values, beliefs and attitudes of these supervisors and the importance of reciprocity as an element in these relationships. Chapter 9 identifies important themes to emerge from the findings. It also explores their implications for reconceptualising the nature of supportive doctoral supervisory relationships.
Chapter 2
The Importance of the Supervisory Relationship

This chapter presents a critical review of recent research relating to the importance of the supervisory relationship in doctoral supervision. Research to date on this topic has tended to focus on the personal attributes and professional behaviours of effective doctoral supervisors. The chapter begins with a review of the main themes from this research. While the literature on doctoral supervision highlights the importance of the supervisory role, the broader question of why certain kinds of supervisory relationships may be superior has not been as well investigated. The importance of a supervisor’s interpersonal communication skills to the quality of these relationships is examined in this chapter, with particular attention given to the matter of how these skills may be critical to the provision by supervisors of emotional support for their candidates. The potentially adverse impact of a perceived power differential in the relationship is discussed, as is the impact of the paradoxical values of competition and collaboration on the supervisory relationship.

Effective doctoral supervision

The task of improving the effectiveness of doctoral supervision is not, of course, an easy one. As de Wied (1991, p. 12) has argued with regard to Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands, “… the attempt is being made to adapt deeply rooted attitudes and expectations, long established organisational forms and traditions, to what now seem to be the exigencies of efficiency and international competitiveness.” It is, therefore, important to recognise that current issues of concern regarding the effectiveness of doctoral supervision are not new issues. According to Cullen et al. (1994, p. 21), the organisational forms and traditions that underpin doctoral education in Australia may not have been long established, however, historically, the attitudes and expectations of both academics and students may be deeply rooted in British and German traditions, as Becher, Henkel and Kogan (1994) and Parry (2007) noted.

As identified in Chapter 1, there is ample evidence in the Australian literature that effective doctoral supervision contributes substantially to a candidate’s success in meeting the requirements for a doctoral award (see, for example, Grant, 2003, p. 175; and Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004, p. 99), and that there is an explicit link between
supervisory quality and completion (see, for example, Blass, Jasman & Levy, 2012, p. 32; Kiley, 2011a, p. 585; and McCulloch, 2010, p. 175), and with the quality of the experience of doctoral candidature (see, for example, Cullen et al., 1994; Ives & Rowley, 2005, p. 550). Evidence in the literature from other national settings also shows the importance of the quality of the supervisory relationship that develops between a supervisor and a candidate when supervision is viewed as being effective (see, for example, Barnes & Austin, 2009, p. 297; Doloriert et al., 2012, p. 733; A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 267; Walker et al., 2008, p. 89; Wisker, 2005, p. 41). The work of Barnes and Austin (2009) provides particular insights concerning the nature and importance of the supervisory relationship. They found that not only does the quality of a supervisory relationship play a critical role in the overall quality of the doctoral experience for candidates, but it also has an impact on how candidature progresses, on success in degree completion, and on how well doctoral candidates feel that they have been effectively socialised to their disciplines (Barnes & Austin, 2009, p. 301).

Attributes and behaviours of effective supervisors

Over a period of a quarter of a century there has been a trend in the international literature to focus on the personal attributes and professional behaviours of effective supervisors. McMichael and Garry (1990) report that candidates identify top-ranking characteristics of the ideal supervisor to be: available, critical, enthusiastic, helpful, involved, knowledgeable and stimulating. Cullen et al. (1994) report that successful supervisors are: approachable, friendly, supportive, open-minded, prepared to acknowledge error, well organised, thorough, positive and enthusiastic about their candidate’s research. Zuber-Skerritt and Roche (2004, p. 87) report that effective supervisors are: encouraging, resourceful, committed to the student, directed by the student’s needs, highly organised, insightful, intelligent and positive. Wisker et al. (2008, p. 15) suggest that supervisors should have the ability to listen, empathise, guide (but not order), refer, support, reward and help the candidate to develop independence. Lee (A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 267) found that in a high-quality supervisory relationship the candidate is “enthused, inspired and cared for.” Walker et al. (2008, p. 102) found that supervisory relationships flourish when they are based on the qualities of respect, trust and reciprocity. Barnes and Austin (2009) addressed in detail how exemplary supervisors (those who have graduated a large number of candidates) see their roles and responsibilities as supervisors. Drawing upon data
collected about how 25 exemplary doctoral supervisors guide their candidates, they found that exemplary supervisors were: professional but friendly, collegial, supportive, caring, accessible and honest (Barnes & Austin, 2009, p. 305). Kiley (2011b, p. 10) found that highly productive supervisors are nurturing individuals who care for, support and extend their candidates, and have professional behaviours that include altruism, collegiality and collaboration.

The relevant research literature has produced lists of personal attributes and professional behaviours of supervisors that provide useful insights about what is required for effective supervision that assists candidates in successfully achieving doctoral outcomes. In effective supervision, the supervisor has to be able to play a variety of supervisory roles that contribute to the candidate’s intellectual progress during candidature. These roles include, for example, being an “essential guide, teacher, colleague and mentor in the research process” (Wisker, 2005, p. 41). However, as Delany argues (2008, p. 10), such lists do not show directly and explicitly how supervisors assist candidates to make progress during candidature. They also do not provide widely applicable strategies for supervisors to follow in managing the tensions inherent in supervisory relationships, as Cullen et al. (1994, p. 95) observed, nor do they capture the complexities of the supervisory role, as have been described by Pearson and Brew (2002, p. 139) and Halse and Malfroy (2010, p. 79). Fundamentally, the application of lists of positive personal attributes and professional supervisory behaviours as guides to best practice in doctoral supervision is insufficient because such lists do not address how rapport in successful supervisory relationships might be developed and maintained.

**Personal support in supervisory relationships**

Easily overlooked when the focus is on lists of the personal attributes and professional behaviours of doctoral supervisors is the role played by supervisors in providing candidates with appropriate personal support during candidature. Attempts have been made to characterise personal support. As Neumann (2003, p. 47) reports, an important aspect of supportive supervisory practice concerns the provision of personal support to candidates in response to their emotional needs during candidature. A small number of researchers (see, for example, Fraser & Mathews, 1999; Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2001; Moses, 1985) have shown that candidates want their supervisors to have
professional expertise, such as expert knowledge in their topic area, and they also highly value having a relationship with their supervisors which provides them with personal support that will assist them with meeting intellectual and emotional challenges during candidature. The importance of personal support, and perceptions of limits to such support, however, differs between supervisors and candidates. Notably, Moses (1985, p. 37) found that supervisors readily addressed the professional rather than personal aspects of their supervisory relationships. Indeed, they omitted to highlight their personal qualities as being important to the relationship. Parry (2007, p. 124-125) also found that while supervisors restricted themselves to expressing the “professional nature” of their relationships, candidates were more candid in their descriptions of “personal dynamics” with their supervisors, and more likely than supervisors to report on the personal aspects of their supervisory relationships. Taking the notion of a personal relationship further, Doloriert et al. (2012, p. 739) report that candidates generally perceive the supervisory relationship as being closer than supervisors perceive it to be. These researchers also found that many candidates reported that feeling close to the supervisor had a positive influence on the relationship with their supervisors (Doloriert et al., 2012, p. 740). Such findings point to the potential for a mismatch between candidates’ and supervisors’ perceptions and expectations of how close and personally supportive the supervisory relationship ought to be, especially where supervisors do not wish to engage in a close personal relationship with their candidates.

An attribute shown earlier to be important in effective supervisory relationships is supervisory ‘friendliness’ towards the candidate. By way of example, Wisker (2005, p. 45) draws upon empirical evidence to argue that candidates generally expect their “supervisors to be friendly, open and supportive … and establish a consultative, supportive relationship.” In contrast, Walker et al. (2008, p. 118) explain that the important principle for the supervisor in developing the relationship is not about being “nice or friendly, but rather about setting the conditions that elicit high-quality work.” Similarly, Neumann (2003, p. 47) observed that while the role for supervisors was based on mutual respect and trust in the relationship, it did not necessarily involve engaging in a close personal friendship with the candidate. Indeed, Ives and Rowley (2005, p. 551), in their longitudinal study of how supervisors and candidates worked together in their doctoral supervisory relationships, found that when candidates chose
their supervisor solely on a friendship basis they were likely to encounter serious problems during the candidature. This evidence shows that friendship may get in the way of effective supervision, perhaps because it hinders the supervisor’s ability to be critical of the candidate’s work-in-progress. While being in a professional relationship may certainly require the supervisor to be friendly and sympathetic to the candidate, as was shown earlier, being friendly is not the same thing as being in a friendship. It is probable, then, that supervisory relationships may be found to be somewhere on a continuum of “strictly professional interaction to very personal interaction” (Moses, 1985, p. 38), where supervisors find for themselves the most comfortable place to be on the continuum, depending on their preferences and on the needs of their candidates. The reported experiences of participants in the present investigation may add insights into the ways in which well-regarded supervisors manage their position on this continuum.

**Effective interpersonal communication skills**

In order to develop successful supervisory relationships, supervisors might be expected to have many attributes and be proficient in many skills, including effective interpersonal communication skills. A major concern in doctoral education, however, is that some supervisors and candidates do not develop successful relationships. Barnes and Austin (2009, p. 298) assert that doctoral education in the United States has “exceedingly vexing problems”, the most important of which is that the quality of “doctoral advising is woefully uneven.” Walker et al. (2008, p. 90) also found that access to high-quality supervision was variable and not all supervisors are as proficient in developing and maintaining a supervisory relationship, as they ought to be. One reason for the lack of uniform high-quality supervision may lie in the lack of interpersonal communication skills on the part of supervisors. As Becher (1993) recognised:

> The heavy reliance on supervision assumes a competence on the supervisor’s part which cannot always be taken for granted. Variation in quality is perhaps inevitable when supervisors receive no formal training for the task and when they are often selected for their expert knowledge in the field rather than for their interpersonal skills. (pp. 145-146)

While supervisory training programs for novice supervisors have become mandatory in many higher education sectors there is little evidence to suggest that a core topic in
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such programs concerns the development of interpersonal skills. The need for highly developed interpersonal skills is consistent with Harman’s (2003, p. 328) argument that a major concern with the quality of supervision relates to “a lack of supervisor interpersonal skills.” Further, in order to establish an effective teaching and learning relationship, the supervisor, according Wisker et al. (2008, p. 81), is required to have excellent one-to-one relationship-building skills that include a strong ability to communicate effectively in the supervisory relationship. What is less well understood in the research literature to date is the extent or ways in which supervisors’ interpersonal communication and relationship-building skills contribute to successful supervisory relationships.

The importance of open and clear communication between the supervisor and candidate as being key to developing a successful supervisory relationship has been identified in a number of studies (see, for example, Jasman, 2012, p. 37; A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 267; Zuber-Skerritt & Roche, 2004, p. 87). In particular, Wisker (2005, p. 51) argues that supervisors need excellent communication skills and strategies in order for candidates to have a positive supervisory experience. She further suggests that when good communication breaks down in situations where there are personality clashes between supervisor and candidate, supervisors ought to “remain cordial at least” since the candidate cannot maintain a steady progression in his or her work unless the supervisory relationship remains cordial and professional (Wisker, 2005, p. 63). Based on the earlier discussion about candidates who may have expectations of having a close personal relationship with their supervisors (see Doloriert et al., 2012), many candidates may need more than cordiality from their supervisors; they may need to feel a personal connection with their supervisor. For example, Doloriert et al. (2012, p. 740) found that when the style of supervision is distant, then candidates tended to perceive a lack of connection with their supervisor, which they described as having a negative influence on the supervisory relationship.

One of the main means by which communication in the supervisory relationship is developed is through supervisory meetings where conversations take place that contribute to the candidate’s learning and intellectual advancement. According to Li and Seale (2007, p. 513) there are very few studies involving analysis of supervisory conversations. The literature on doctoral supervisory conversations is scanty,
possibly, because it is very difficult to identify patterns in communication and social positioning in the hierarchy of supervisory relationships from conversations in meetings. Doloriert et al. (2012, p. 745), however, found that the most frequent form of feedback used by supervisors was in conversations that take place in face-to-face meetings with candidates. They also found that while candidates tended to request meetings with supervisors to obtain specific technical or theoretical advice, an interesting secondary outcome to such meetings seemed to be the development of rapport between the supervisor and candidate that developed unintentionally. The observation that supervisory conversations are also opportunities for interpersonal rapport to develop between candidates and supervisors is important because it shows the ad hoc nature of how rapport in the supervisory relationship develops.

A characteristic of good interpersonal communications in successful relationships is that both parties demonstrate active listening skills. In terms of the conversations between doctoral supervisors and their candidates, Bartlett and Mercer (2000, p. 198) argue that dialogue between the supervisor and candidate should, ideally, be collaborative. However, in an empirical investigation of supervisory meetings of four supervision teams, Manathunga (2012, p. 34) found that some supervisors focused more on how they were managing the meeting, “rather than on how the student is responding to the feedback or gaining opportunities to contribute to the conversation.” Wisker, Robinson, Trafford, Warnes and Creighton (2003) outline high-level supervisory dialogue skills that enable the supervisor to question, debate, elicit ideas, and which help candidates to focus, conceptualise, plan, act, develop, complete and report on their work. They found that the most useful conversations seemed to take place “where supervisor and candidate can match their cognitive processes and move forwards, leaving candidates suggesting developments and work that they will undertake independently” (Wisker et al., 2003, p. 392). It is clear that no matter whether the tone of an individual supervisory relationship is friendly or formal, in order to be effective, the interpersonal communication between the supervisor and candidate is central. The tone of supervisory conversations in highly valued supervisory relationships will, therefore, be explored in the present investigation.
Effective non-verbal communication

Effective non-verbal communication skills are pivotal to building rapport in the doctoral supervisory relationship. The importance of rapport, which according to Wisker et al., (2008, p. 16) means that there is a good understanding between the candidate and supervisor, is widely acknowledged in the relevant literature. By way of example, Parry (2007, p. 124) found that rapport in supervisory relationships in the humanities is essential “because it provides the primary source of affirmation about particularistic research where intellectual isolation is the norm.” Less well-appreciated are the interpersonal communication mechanisms by which rapport in the supervisory relationship develops. Indeed, as Parry (2007, p. 29) shows, the relevant research to date has not sufficiently taken account of the influence of non-verbal means of communication between supervisor and candidate by which many disciplinary norms are learned, much less upon the influence of non-verbal communication on the quality of the doctoral supervisory relationship. According to Schein (1965), different kinds of organizations depend on different kinds of authority and power and this in turn limits the kind of involvement their members can have – that is, leads to certain kinds of psychological contracts that are tacitly negotiated and which form the culture of the organization.

Aspects of the interpersonal communication between a supervisor and a candidate occur tacitly: a message is conveyed and understood without being verbally stated and is, therefore, difficult to describe with any accuracy or precision. Regarding tacit knowledge, Polyani (1983, p. 4), in The Tacit Dimension, stated: “we can know more than we can tell.” In the context of doctoral education, tacit knowledge cannot easily be transmitted from the supervisor to the candidate through verbal forms of communication, such as speaking or writing: it needs to be experienced to be perceived. The disciplinary differences in the tacit knowledge that are part of a candidate’s “socialisation into an academic discipline” (Gerholm, 1990, p. 270) and that contribute to a specialisms’ academic culture, are, according to Parry (2007, p. 30), “essential elements of cultural capital for successful doctoral students.” When it comes to knowledge production and reporting at the level of the doctorate there are disciplinary norms, values and conventions that are learned explicitly. However, for the most part, as Parry (2007, p. 28) shows, disciplinary norms, values and conventions are implicitly learned at the unstated, or tacit level.
In the same way that many aspects of the supervisor’s knowledge are conveyed by non-verbal means to a candidate, many of the supervisors’ dispositional qualities may be experienced and interpreted by the candidate without necessarily being verbally acknowledged. Clearly, in addition to what explicitly happens during interpersonal communication between a doctoral supervisor and a candidate, there are inexplicit messages embedded in the supervisor’s behaviour that give supervisory conversations a certain tone, and that are conveyed and understood without being spoken about or openly expressed. In terms of setting a positive tone in the communications between a supervisor and a candidate, Wisker et al. (2008, p. 135) highlight the importance of supervisors checking that the emotional undertone of their communications with candidates is positive, particularly the tone of e-mails when assessing work electronically, in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Research to date on the roles of supervisors and the necessary skills required in doctoral supervision, in the main, concerns actions that do not directly address the nature of the dispositional qualities of supervisors, or how those qualities are perceived and experienced by candidates. Although dispositional qualities, by their nature, may be difficult to verbalise, their expression may be perceived and interpreted; and most people can usually describe their experience of them. These dispositional qualities refer to the inherent and implicit characteristics of mind, character and behaviour that are experienced and understood without them necessarily being verbally expressed. These qualities of a person’s behaviour are “most evident not in the words, but in body language, eye movements, facial expressions, voice tone, breathing, and gesture” (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross and Smith, 1994, p. 415). As Polyani (1983, p. 5) explained, “we can recognize the moods of the human face without being able to tell, except quite vaguely, by what signs we know it.” Investigating and documenting the dispositional qualities of supervisors that may be communicated non-verbally by supervisors is problematic because it necessitates giving verbal characterisation of the personal traits of mind and character, and to nuances of interpersonal communication that are essentially inexplicit. While there are many empirical studies that provide lists of desirable personal attributes and professional behaviours of doctoral supervisors, there is relatively little empirical research that provides insights into the non-verbal ways in which supervisors, for their part, may develop supportive supervisory relationships. One example, though, is a
study by Bartlett and Mercer (2000, p. 199) in which supervisors were found to provide support to their candidates through being gently challenging and encouraging. Wisker (2005, p. 45) also goes some way towards explicitly identifying how supervisors might be supportive: by being non-judgemental of the candidate; by being gently constructive; by encouraging; and by not being harshly critical when providing feedback on the candidate’s work. The nature of the experience of candidates and their supervisors of the dispositional qualities of well-regarded supervisors will be explored in the present investigation.

An interesting aspect to reportedly effective supervision concerns supervisors’ intentionality in their supervisory practices. Walker et al. (2008, p. 91) explain the importance to good supervisory practice of the supervisor intentionally making explicit their non-verbal, and typically taken-for-granted knowledge and expertise. In support of the notion of intentionality, Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (1997, p. 1) argue that good supervision is based on the supervisor being aware of the impact of their practices on candidates. Along similar lines, Jasman (2012, p. 28) reports on a learning experience for doctoral supervisors “designed to make tacit practices explicit so that they can be questioned, reflected on and changed in line with the needs of particular students.” Hartnett and Katz (1977, p. 653) emphasised how emotionally vulnerable doctoral candidates are to what they perceive as being positive and negative signals from their supervisors. While such signals may be tacitly conveyed and may not have been verbalised, candidates may keenly perceive them. Therefore, the importance of the concept of intentionality to the present investigation lies in its ability to shed light on how supervisors might need to be particularly aware of and sensitive to the impact of the tone of their communication in the supervisory relationship on the affective domain of learning for candidates.

Relevance of the affective domain in candidature

There are several important themes in the literature on doctoral supervision that point to the relevance of the affective domain in doctoral candidature. In undergraduate study, there is now a large body of knowledge in the higher education literature concerning the inextricable link between cognition and emotion, and intellectual development and positive emotional development (see, for example, Pessoa, 2008, p. 148). For some time, researchers have reported on the importance of the affective
domain to the development of confidence and self-esteem (see, for example, Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993, p. 33; McCarthy & Schmeck, 1988, p. 134), and to the adoption by students of different approaches to learning (Entwistle, 1988, p. 25). Biggs and Tang (2007, p. 33) have subsequently reported that the affective domain is important to undergraduate learners' positive feelings of self-efficacy and motivation. However, while the link between intellectual development and positive emotional development is well documented in undergraduate settings, there is very little empirical research concerning such a link for doctoral candidates. A reason for this situation may be because emotions are largely considered unacceptable in an academic environment. As Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993, p. 15) assert, “…there is almost a taboo about them [emotions] intruding into our educational institutions, particularly at higher levels.”

It is well accepted in the relevant literature that doctoral candidature is both intellectually and emotionally challenging for candidates. A large Finnish empirical investigation (Stubb, Pyhältö & Lonka, 2011, p. 33) which documents the emotional demands associated with doctoral candidature found that many candidates have to balance positive emotions, such as inspiration, enthusiasm and moments of joy in discovery and learning that motivate them to keep going during candidature, with negative emotions of uncertainty and anxiety that are related to stress and exhaustion experienced during candidature. Similarly, Styles and Radloff (2000, p. 207) found that coping with uncertainty was a major issue for candidates, particularly, coping with the uncertainty that is intrinsic to the research process. Many candidates, especially in the early stages of candidature, according to Parry (2007, p. 127), feel they are imposters, pretending that they are able to do research. According to Budd, Scevak, and Cantwell (2010, p. 255), the ways in which these kinds of emotional demands impact on candidates’ motivation to persist with candidature have not been adequately investigated.

The affective domain plays an important role for candidates during candidature, and it also impacts on supervisory relationships. Grant (2003) found that in the intensity and privacy of the supervisory relationship, many candidates may experience strong feelings towards their supervisor that often remain unspoken, such as feelings:
… of gratitude, resentment, frustration, disappointment … and desire to please, to challenge, to do well, to earn glory, to push towards independence, to resist, to be respected by, to be recognised as clever, to become like, to be authoritative. These feelings may be unconscious, confusing and changing, not amenable to rational explanation and neither supervisor nor student might wish to admit to them. (p. 185)

Candidates’ emotions towards their supervisors are important because candidates react to tacit cues conveyed by supervisors whether they are intended to or not. Of interest is how the ‘emotional intelligence’ of doctoral supervisors might assist candidates in managing the emotional demands of candidature and those in the doctoral relationship. In the 1990s, Goleman (1996) popularised research from many neuroscientists and psychologists that sought to demonstrate how emotional intelligence is of equal importance to thinking as is rational intelligence, usually referred to as IQ. People with a high emotional intelligence, according to Zohar and Marshall (2000, p. 3), have an awareness of their own and other people’s feelings, and have the ability to respond appropriately to these feelings with empathy and compassion. Schein (1965, p. 130) links the development of interpersonal competence with the ability of a person to behave with emotional intelligence. Only a few researchers use the term ‘emotional intelligence’ when they refer to a suite of important qualities in supervisors that are necessary to deal with the affective domain of doctoral supervision (see, for example, Doloriert et al., 2012, p. 736; Sambrook, Stewart & Roberts, 2008, p. 84) and for developing a positive relationship (see, for example, A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 275). Styles and Radloff (2000, p. 212) found in their investigation of doctoral candidates’ emotional responses about their developing theses that supervisors’ management of their candidates’ feelings throughout all stages of the candidature played a crucial role in the reported quality of the doctoral supervisory relationship. It is not unexpected that candidates would find this management important. Similarly, Pearson and Kayrooz’s (2004, p. 101) analysis showed the importance for supervisors to be aware of providing candidates with both intellectual support and emotional support, which they regarded as forming part of the mentoring role of supervisors. Styles and Radloff (2000) crystallised this view regarding the relevance of the affective domain in candidature:

… it is important that students, supervisors, and universities administrators acknowledge the crucial role, which affect plays in postgraduate research and address the issues surrounding the management of feelings throughout all stages of
postgraduate study. Supervisors need to be aware of the ambivalent nature of candidates’ feelings towards their study and that they need help to develop strategies to reduce the impact of negative feelings in order to stay motivated to continue with their research. Being able to discuss feelings requires a close relationship between student and supervisor. (p. 212)

It may be important for certain candidates to feel connected emotionally to their supervisor in a close supervisory relationship in order for the relationship to be perceived as positive. Of relevance to the present investigation are the ways in which both candidates and supervisors address the challenges presented by emotions in the supervisory relationship. Of further interest are the ways in which the supervisory relationship may play an important role in keeping up the candidate’s morale and motivation during candidature. Therefore, how supervisors might assist candidates to cope with difficult emotions that potentially arise in the affective domain during candidature is explored in the present investigation.

**Managing tensions in the supervisory relationship**

Certain tensions may arise in supervisory relationships that are associated with candidates’ perceptions of tacit cues conveyed by their supervisors. In addition to managing the emotional demands on candidates that may present in the affective domain of candidature, supervisors are concerned with managing potential tensions in the supervisory relationship, which may interfere with developing and maintaining rapport in individual supervisory relationships. Two such tensions that have been identified in the relevant research literature concern the effect on doctoral supervisory relationships of power differentials in the supervisory relationship and the need to find a balance between the paradoxical academic values of collaboration, on the one hand, and individualism and competition, on the other.

**Power differentials in the supervisory relationship**

An aspect of doctoral supervisory relationships that may be problematic concerns tensions associated with the power differential between supervisors and candidates in supervisory relationships. While there are institutional checks and balances in place to ensure supervisory accountability for behaviour with candidates, even in successful supervisory relationships there is an imbalance of power, which, according to Grant (1999, p. 9), exists by virtue of the supervisor’s institutional position. Both Bartlett
and Mercer (2000, p. 196) and Yeatman (1995, p. 9) criticise the more traditional master and apprentice model of supervision on these grounds, describing the imbalance of power as being akin to the imbalance between a master and apprentice, in which the supervisor’s knowledge set is assumed to be superior to the candidate’s knowledge set. These researchers argue that an assumption that supervisors’ knowledge is superior to that of candidates negatively affects the supervisory relationship.

Brown and Atkins (1988) explored the power differential and found that it impacted, either positively or negatively, on the formation and development of the postgraduate supervisory relationship. Indeed, according to Armitage (2007, p. 19), the power differential plays a central role in how the doctoral supervisory relationship forms. To mitigate potential negative effects of the power differential, Devos and Manathunga (2012, p. 2) highlight the importance of acknowledging the power differential in doctoral supervisory relationships, particularly in as much as it concerns issues of knowledge and identity formation in doctoral candidates.

There are internal divisions and expressions of power and authority within academic tribes, as described by Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 54). There are also qualitatively different kinds of power tensions in supervisory relationships that arise from distinctive disciplinary traditions, according to Parry (2007, p. 123). However, investigating power differentials in supervisory relationships is difficult because the “culture of privacy” in doctoral supervision runs so deep that even departmental heads, according to Walker et al. (2008, p. 90), are reluctant to intervene in dysfunctional supervisory relationships. It will be important in the present investigation to examine the role that power tensions play in the formation and development of highly valued supervisory relationships.

A related issue for supervisors in managing the power differential in the supervisory relationship concerns the degree of candidate autonomy that the supervisor allows or encourages, and the extent of candidates’ developing independence during candidature. Parry (2007, p. 36) reports that in the various stages of doctoral candidature, the candidate moves from novice to expert, with corresponding growth in intellectual ability and, therefore, autonomy. Associated with these stages is the need for supervisors to manage their candidates’ progression along the dependence-
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independence continuum during candidature. Where an individual candidate is placed on the continuum of dependence to independence relates not only to the amount of direction that the supervisor provides, but also, according to Doloriert et al. (2012, p. 743), to the degree of structure that a supervisor provides to the candidate and the extent to which the supervisor takes the initiative to progress the candidature. According to Grant (2003, p. 182), supervisors need to understand how to manage the tension between discipline and freedom, and also between dependence and independence (A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 277) with individual candidates. Managing this tension is important because, as Kandlbinder and Peseta (2001, p. 49) point out, the goal and responsibility for candidates in all disciplines is to achieve “competent autonomy” as researchers by the completion of candidature. They argue that the supervisory role includes guiding the candidate in the endeavour to become a competent and independent researcher.

Doctoral supervisors play an important role in encouraging candidates to maintain momentum during each of the different stages in their research. Clearly, the amount of supervisory direction also changes appropriately during candidature. It is problematic, however, according to Lee (A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 274), when candidates need a great deal of direction through all the stages of candidature. Such candidates may lack confidence in their intellectual ability to achieve doctoral outcomes, and may constantly seek affirmation and approval, demanding more than is reasonable of their supervisors. One consequence of a high level of dependence on the supervisor, according to Devos and Somerville (2012, p. 54), is that when supervisors provide too much form, structure and guidance, they run the risk of confining the candidate’s thinking to the point where new knowledge is not being made. Parry (2007, p. 80) argues that it is reasonable for supervisors to be expected to both guide candidates and promote high levels of independence. From such studies, it is clear that while the candidate is ultimately responsible for becoming a competent and independent researcher and for producing a thesis of the required standard, supervisors have a responsibility to manage the candidate in order to mitigate over-dependence on them. Over-dependence upon supervisors to do the work of the research hampers the candidate’s ability for original thinking in developing the empirical research, and ultimately in completing the thesis satisfactorily.
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It is inappropriate to accord all power, and by implication, all responsibility, for the supervisory relationship and for how the candidature progresses to the supervisor. Supervisors and candidates each have a shared responsibility not to abuse their power in the supervisory relationship. On this point, Neumann (2003, p. xvi) argues for a more balanced relationship, finding that the supervisory relationship works best “where the inherent power differentials in the relationship are clearly recognised; and there is open and frequent communication between student and supervisor.” Similarly, Leder (1995, p. 5) argues that for both parties in the supervisory relationship it is a question of balance: for candidates “to become autonomous learners, yet, heed advice”, and for supervisors to not “constrain the scope, perspectives, methodology and directions of a student’s work” but, rather, provide the support and guidance needed for candidates to become autonomous scholars. Similarly, Delamont, Parry and Atkinson (1998, p. 157) refer to the “delicate balance” that supervisors need to achieve between the extremes of control of the candidature and non-intervention with their candidates during candidature. Benmore (2014, p. 13) points out that supervisors have to make choices about the degree of direction they provide in supporting an individual candidate in order to facilitate the candidate’s independent learning and intellectual growth. Of interest to the present investigation are the ways in which well-regarded supervisors manage the potential issues of their candidate dependency on them during candidature.

On the issue of managing power tensions in the supervisory relationship, a few researchers have noted that power tensions can be appropriately managed in order to have a positive influence in the supervisory relationship. Connell and Manathunga (2012, p. 6) argue that power tensions are best managed when supervisors and candidates are “engaged in an educational interchange.” The work of Bartlett and Mercer (2000, p. 196) supports this argument. They describe their experiences of the power dynamic in their doctoral supervisory relationship as positive, because their relationship was based on assumptions of collaboration, community and companionship. It appears that while production of new knowledge within the doctorate is fostered by the interpersonal supervisory relationship, it is not limited to that relationship, because new knowledge production is also influenced by the cultural context of the wider academic community.
Paradoxical academic values

Tensions in the supervisory relationship may also arise from a conflict between the academic values, norms and conventions of collaboration, and as Vilkinas (2008, p. 297) describes, working together in communities of practice, and the imperative for competition and working as an independent researcher (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 118). The nature of academic culture and identity is paradoxical because, as Henkel and Vabø (2006, p. 129) explain, academics are expected to be distinctive from the members of their academic community in that they make an individual contribution to knowledge, while at the same time conforming to the values, beliefs and conventions embedded in their disciplinary communities. Therefore, in academic culture there is “sameness and difference, individuation and identification, future and past in identity… and the dynamic between individual and collective” (Henkel & Vabø, 2006, p. 129). Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 118) argue that academics in all disciplines are required to distinguish themselves from their professional colleagues by integrating and then transcending their predecessors’ work, in order to push forward the frontiers of knowledge in a particular specialism. Essentially academics are “rivals” in that they “seek to surpass each other in the quality and significance of their work” (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 118). The relevant literature shows that the dominant values of academia include independence and individualism (Henkel & Vabø, 2006, p. 134), and competition, based on the drive to gain a professional reputation (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 118) and paradoxically, also collaboration (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 122) and collegiality between members of an intellectual community (Walker et al., 2008, p. 139). According to Walker et al. (2008, p. 81), the emphasis in academia on rewarding individual success in academic careers has fostered a culture of “competitive individualism.” On the other hand, academics must also collaborate with each other in order to secure research grants. According to Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 123) collaboration between academics usually occurs because of funding requirements, although, in the experimental sciences, collaboration is usually the norm. Candidates’ and supervisors’ perceptions of tensions in their individual supervisory relationships have to take account of influences of academic culture and identity, which, according to Henkel and Vabø (2006, p. 131) occur at the level of the individual supervisor, as well as at disciplinary, departmental, and institutional levels. Of interest to the present
investigation is how the paradoxical academic values of competition and collaboration may have an impact on the quality of individual doctoral supervisory relationships.

The process of supervision cannot be considered independently from the academic cultural values, norms, beliefs and practices that constitute academic specialisms. Henkel and Vabø’s (2006) empirical findings show that academics are motivated in their professional work by deeply held:

... values, interests and beliefs, self-images and reputations...[that]...are the products of interaction between individual histories and choices and the workings of key communities and structures: disciplines, departments and institutions. They ... provide the structures, processes, rewards and sanctions that reinforce academic values and beliefs and establish academic identities. (p. 128)

Academic identity is formed gradually, according to Becher and Trowler (2001), primarily through engagement with various academic disciplines and specialised communities within them. Henkel and Vabø (2006, p. 128) elaborate this view, contending that developing academic identity is a life-long project with doctoral education being the prevalent means of an individual’s induction to the culture of the discipline. Supporting this view, Baker and Lattuca (2010, p. 809) found that candidates learn about academic culture during their doctoral experience: showing the link between knowledge development and academic identity development. According to Green (2005, p. 151), research supervision is as much implicated in the production of scholarly identity as in the production of knowledge. Henkel and Vabø (2006, p. 128) argue further that the development of a candidate’s scholarly identity occurs within the academic culture of a specialism and will be influenced by exposure to the values, beliefs and attitudes of the candidate’s supervisors. The role of the supervisor in initiating the development of the candidate’s scholarly identity is, therefore, highly instrumental, according to S. Parry (personal communication, 27 November, 2015) and is of interest in the present investigation.

It seems clear that the values, beliefs and behaviours of supervisors implicitly send messages to doctoral candidates about academic purpose, conventions, commitment, and their responsibilities as future scholars. Whether consciously or unconsciously, candidates learn the tacit norms of their specialist knowledge domain, which Parry
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(2007, p. 126) termed “disciplinary savvy”, during candidature. According to Green and A. Lee (1995), the dominant values of the academic community are non-verbally communicated. They describe candidates as:

…watching and learning how to be, how to interact and intervene…how to speak and when, even how to hold one’s body or deploy certain mannerisms and gestures (‘impatience’, for instance)…Much necessarily remains unspoken, more or less invisible in its normativity. (p. 41)

Taking a broader view of candidature, Walker et al. (2008, p. 10) found that embedded in the culture of intellectual community at the departmental level are the cultural norms, conventions and traditions (Becher, 1989), or, “the hidden curriculum”, which influence the supervisory relationship at a tacit level. Walker et al. argue that the culture of the intellectual community has the potential to establish conditions for doctoral candidates in which “intellectual risk taking, creativity and entrepreneurship are possible” and, for forming “real partnerships between faculty and students, habits of respect for and interest in one another’s work, and for the lively exchange of ideas [to take place] in which new knowledge is forged and transformed” (Walker et al., 2008, p. 10-11). They observed, however, that cultural shifts are required in the one-to-one supervisory relationship between a candidate and a supervisor in order for doctoral supervision to be uniformly characterised by the attributes of “respect, trust and reciprocity” which they consider to be key to successful supervisory relationships (Walker et al, 2008, p. 102).

Concluding remarks

This chapter has presented a clear body of evidence about the importance of effective supervision, and, in particular, the importance of a high-quality supervisory relationship to doctoral candidature. The literature reviewed in the chapter has shown that supervisory relationships that are personally supportive rely on effective interpersonal communication skills, and on the need for the doctoral supervisor to take cognisance of the important role played by the affective domain in candidature. As in all interpersonal relationships, the doctoral supervisory relationship has a non-verbal component of communication that is largely tacit in nature. The relevant research to date has not sufficiently taken account of the role that the tacit aspects of interpersonal communications play in successful doctoral supervisory relationships.
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The chapter has also highlighted a number of issues that indicate important gaps in the literature. The first issue concerns the potential effects of the power differential in the supervisory relationship on the autonomy and independence of candidates. The second issue concerns the dominant values, norms and conventions in academic culture: of competition and individualism, and, paradoxically, of collaboration and the notion of communities of practice. The degree to which such paradoxical values, norms and conventions are accommodated successfully by supervisors might be expected to have an impact on the tone in supervisory relationships and, possibly, on candidates’ perceptions of their scholarly identity development. These are important issues because as Connell and Manathunga (2012, p. 7) argue, supervisory “practices of respect and support” that may be present within an academic culture that promotes practices of collaboration and community are not yet, but ought to become normative in supervisory relationships. While the responsibility for developing and maintaining the quality of the relationship is shared by the supervisor and the candidate, it is reasonable to expect that supervisors, for their part, have a professional responsibility for developing sufficient competence with their interpersonal communication skills to enable them to facilitate supportive and respectful relationships with their candidates.

Before addressing such complex issues empirically in the Australian context, it is first necessary to view doctoral supervision from an appropriate, illuminating, theoretical perspective. The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the present investigation. It shows how the doctoral supervisory relationship may be framed as a holistic interpersonal relationship within a framework of humanistic and existential values and concepts.
Chapter 3

Theoretical Considerations

Research literature for at least three decades has shown the importance of the supervisory relationship in doctoral supervision, and the role of supervisors in enabling doctoral candidates to progress successfully through candidature. Chapter 3 addresses in detail the theoretical perspectives that provide a conceptual framework for the present investigation. In this chapter, the potential relevance to candidature of the notion of liminality, as it derives from the threshold concept framework, is explained. The chapter also argues the case for an existential humanistic view of how candidates and supervisors relate to one another and make meaning of their reality in supervisory relationships. The chapter draws especially on works by Rogers (1961, 1969), Yalom (1980) and Spinelli (2005) in order to provide a lens through which to examine the nature of highly valued doctoral supervisory relationships.

Liminality

Various scholars view doctoral candidature to be, in terms of the threshold concept framework, a liminal space (see, for example, Kiley & Wisker, 2009, p. 432; Trafford, 2008, p. 280; Trafford & Leshem, 2009, p. 312). A state of liminality may be general in nature and it may be specific to a particular situation. Turner (1977), an anthropologist, drawing on the work of van Gennep (1873-1957), originally described liminality as a transformative time/space, featuring ambiguity and a state of being in-between the past and the future, where identity is suspended as a person advances from one state or position to another. Meyer and Land (2006, p. 22) describe a liminal space to be one in which a person becomes uncertain about the “identity of self and purpose in life.” Araújo (2005, p. 207) describes the life of the doctoral candidate in exactly these terms, as one of being “… suspended in the interval of time” that is candidature. Indeed, candidates may associate this phase of life with uncomfortable feelings of being ‘in limbo’ while making the transition towards a new scholarly identity. Developing a researcher identity may be particularly challenging for PhD candidates who bring a wealth of professional experience to their doctoral studies, according to Trede and Bridges (2010, p. 283). Turner (1977, p. 37) described liminality as an initiation or rite of passage that when protracted, presents a very long
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threshold: “a corridor almost, or a tunnel.” An initiation or rite of passage requires novices to be suspended from everyday life as they enter another physical and psychological space where they are on their own. The effect of such an isolating experience is that it is a time of solitude and reflection, providing the opportunity for change into a more mature identity. Turner evokes the image of liminaries (people experiencing a liminal space) enduring challenges that seem impossible, through which they are refashioned and transformed. Furthermore, Turner explains that such a refashioning or reconstruction is a process of humbling and submitting to ordeal, whether inflicted by self or by others that accompany preparation for elite-hood. In this sense, undertaking a doctorate is for the candidate a liminal space, which is considered to be a protracted and difficult “rite of passage to the scholarly life”, as Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 134) described it, and also an essential part of the preparation for elite-hood of academic life. In this liminal space, a candidate might be expected to mature intellectually and emotionally, along the same lines as Cousin (2008, p. 263) argues that learners, in general, mature “through increasingly sophisticated epistemological understandings.”

While potentially transformational and empowering, liminal spaces are characterised by intellectual and emotional discomfort. Doctoral candidates are not exempt from experiencing discomfort in this regard. Undertaking a doctoral degree poses many intellectual and emotional challenges that candidates would not have encountered in their previous studies, and which may impact considerably on their self-esteem. Styles and Radloff (2000, p. 203) found that overall; candidates express a high degree of strong emotions during their doctoral candidature. They argue that the affective domain needs to be acknowledged by both candidates and supervisors in order to develop strategies that address positive and negative emotions that may arise during candidature (Styles & Radloff, 2001, 97). Examples of such emotions are anxieties associated with stress and exhaustion (Stubb et al., 2011, p. 33) and, anxieties related to the uncertainty inherent in the research process (see Parry, 2007, p. 84; Trafford, 2008, p. 274). Such emotions are typically regarded as being part of the doctoral journey: thirty years ago, Moses (1985, p. 20) reported, “It is a common experience for candidates to undergo feelings of disillusionment, failure and depression.” While in such a state of liminality, doctoral candidates may well feel intellectually and emotionally “stuck”, as Kiley (2009, p. 293) identified. It might be expected,
therefore, that supervisors would “seek to create supportive liminal environments to help learners through such difficulty – that they might move on and succeed” (Land, Cousin, Meyer & Davies, 2006, p. 196). The notion of liminality in the context of doctoral candidature is a useful way to view the doctoral experience and it has implications for better characterising highly supportive learning conditions for the candidate.

**The threshold concept framework**

Proponents of the threshold concept framework (see, for example, Land et al., 2008; Meyer & Land, 2006; Cousin, 2008) argue that in all learning, including at the doctoral level, learners typically confront conceptual thresholds (or limens) in their learning that need to be crossed in order to achieve new and higher levels of understanding. Threshold concepts are, therefore, akin to intellectual portals or conceptual gateways that open up “a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. They represent transformative thinking; a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something, without which the learner cannot progress” (Land et al., 2008, p. x).

The notion that there are threshold concepts in each discipline that must be negotiated in order for learners to arrive at important new understandings appears to have gained momentum in research on doctoral candidature. Researchers, such as Kiley (2009), Kiley and Wisker (2009, p. 432), Kiley and Wisker (2010, p. 219), Trafford (2008, p. 280), and Trafford and Leshem (2009, p. 312) have found that the idea of doctoral candidates needing to cross challenging intellectual thresholds provides a useful framework for understanding candidates’ experiences of doctoral study and how supervisors might support candidates during candidature. Two characteristics of the threshold concept framework are particularly useful to understanding what is experienced by candidates who report experiencing supportive supervision. First, crossing thresholds is transformative and changes a person’s identity. Once the threshold concept has been fully understood and the threshold has been crossed, the person has new knowledge and a transformed internal view of the subject. In addition, the transformation is irreversible, because the new understanding is unlikely to be forgotten and represents a new world-view. Second, crossing intellectual thresholds very often proves to be problematic and difficult for the learner, which has an impact
on the affective domain of learning, an important area of candidature that was discussed in Chapter 2. Land et al. (2008, p. x) describe negotiating threshold concepts as being “troublesome”, referring to Perkins’ (1999, p. 8) notion of troublesome knowledge, which may seem initially to be “inert, ritual, conceptually difficult, and foreign” to the learner.

In addition to troublesome knowledge, there are troublesome attitudes to, and emotions associated with learning that fall into the affective domain of learning. Baillie and Johnson (2008, p. 137), by way of example, introduce the idea that in a particular subject at the undergraduate level, not only are threshold concepts troublesome because they involve a shift in a learner's thinking, but there also are troublesome emotional aspects to learning and mastering attitudinal threshold concepts. Such emotions concern fears arising from uncertainty, ambiguity and lack of self-confidence. Crossing conceptual thresholds by doctoral candidates may, therefore, be considerably more complex than simply crossing conceptual barriers in a particular subject or discipline. Of particular relevance to candidates is that, for learners, there are also threshold “epistemes” (Perkins, 2006, p. 42), which are tacit ways of understanding that shape how knowledge is established in a discipline. When these epistemes are not understood or made explicit to learners, they cannot “play the game knowingly” (Perkins, 2006, p. 40), resulting in them experiencing uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity. Along similar lines, Savin-Baden (2006, p. 162) reported that many undergraduates and members of academic staff at one university in the United Kingdom felt stuck when their intellectual progress was hampered; they described feeling that they were in a negative place, rather than in a space for intellectual growth and scholarly development. Parry (2007, p. 127) raised similar concerns about doctoral candidates, finding that candidates reported, “believing for considerable periods during their candidature that they were not intellectually capable of completing a doctorate.” She noted also that when candidates have to mimic understanding, it results in their feeling intellectually inauthentic and inadequate as scholarly members of a particular academic community. The importance of candidates learning such conventions or epistemes cannot be overestimated. This observation raises the question of how candidates might perceive such challenges in their learning and also what kinds of measures supervisors might take to support them. Such questions are addressed in the present investigation.
The transformation that occurs when intellectual thresholds are crossed may be sudden or may be protracted over a period of time. Doctoral candidates may have to face the lack of understanding that they experience in candidature for considerable periods of time, and, according to Trafford (2008, p. 275), despite feelings of self-doubt and lack of self-confidence, they must renew their enthusiasm for their research and hold their determination to complete the award of the PhD.

The threshold concept framework may provide an insight into candidates’ needs for clarity and certainty in their knowledge making, particularly in the beginning stages of candidature. Due to the isolating nature of candidature, which Parry (2007, p. 49) found to occur particularly in fields of knowledge where individualism is a characteristic, such as the humanities and in areas of theoretical science, clarity and certainty in knowledge making may be difficult for candidates to achieve. She found that in these circumstances, candidates considered intellectual and emotional support from supervisors to be very important. Similarly, Kiley (2009, p. 300) found that collaboration between candidates and supervisors, access to strong academic communities and the experience of a supportive research culture were important in assisting candidates to move through a state of transition with a new sense of confidence, or in other words to interpret epistemes or field specific conventions. In the present investigation, the supervisor’s role will be examined in guiding and supporting candidates while they are experiencing being in a liminal space.

A key theme in the literature relating to the threshold concept framework concerns the need for teachers to create learning environments that will support learners as they struggle to master threshold concepts. A feature of such supportive learning environments, according to Cousin (2008, p. 263) is that they provide “learner safety.” The notion of learner safety may be particularly important when learners encounter troublesome knowledge and feel intellectually and emotionally ‘stuck’, as a number of researchers have described (see, for example, Meyer & Land, 2006, p. xiv and Kiley, 2009, p. 293). The term, ‘learner safety’, is highly reminiscent of Rogers’ (1961, p. 115) construct of the “safe relationship”, referring to the need for the helping professional to establish a supportive psychological environment for the client in order to create necessary learning conditions. The notion of a safe psychological learning environment is explained further later in this chapter, but it is worth noting
here that the parallel notions of learner safety and supportive learning environments each raise a question about how supervisors might achieve such objectives early in candidature.

Developing a supportive learning environment may apply particularly well to higher-order knowledge making and discovery, including at the level of the PhD. Cousin (2008, p. 263) argues that experiencing cognitive discomfort associated with crossing threshold concepts, with the accompanying unavoidable feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, is normal in all transformative learning. Lipman-Blumen (2001, p. 132) asserts, “... anxiety is a remarkably complex force ... and ... is an invariable accompaniment to serious change. Its appearance need not signal that we are in trouble, but rather that the process of change is under way.” Meyer and Land (2006, p. xiv) take this notion of normalising the feelings of learners further and assert that while the learner may not be in trouble, knowledge that is transformative ought to be troubling. They suggest that teachers in higher education ought to help learners to face up to and be more confident in dealing with the anxiety, self-doubt and frustration experienced during learning. In terms of doctoral supervision, threshold concept mastery and the associated liminality experienced by candidates may be viewed as a paradox: supervisors may be expected to provide learner safety and to establish supportive learning environments while at the same time urging their candidates to see the troublesome nature of candidature and the accompanying experience of anxiety and uncertainty as normal and as an inevitable part of the liminal learning journey. In this regard, threshold concept theorists differ from a purely humanist view that it is essential for teachers to create a safe learning environment in order for learning to occur. Proponents of humanism, such as Rogers and Freiberg (1993), Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1961, 1969), describe the safe learning environment as a necessary condition for learning, but they do not address how to deal with the unavoidable difficulties and concerns that learners experience. The importance of the threshold concept framework to the present investigation lies in its capacity to shed light on the approaches or strategies that supervisors might use to help their candidates to negotiate smoother transitions across doctoral threshold concepts.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Considerations

The threshold concept framework has affinities with and draws on social learning theory, particularly the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on situated learning, and Wenger (1998) on communities of practice. These theorists have, in turn, drawn on Vygotsky’s (1997, p. 32) concept of “the zone of proximal development”, which concerns the gap between what a learner knows and can do, and what the learner can potentially achieve with assistance from a more knowledgeable mentor. There are clear similarities, according to Cousin (2008, p. 264), between the experience of a learner of being in the zone of proximal development and a learner experiencing a state of liminality as proposed by Meyer and Land (2006). These similarities are particularly relevant to doctoral study because each concerns learning by doing with others which was identified as essential at the doctoral level by Parry, (2007). Similarly, many researchers (see, for example, Becher, 1989 and Parry, 2007) observed a type of novice and expert and/or mentor relationship between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor, and the importance of the immediate institutional research community. Such authors also describe candidature as being a period of transition. The transition from novice to expert evidently is a transformational journey of being stretched to achieve understandings that are just beyond an individuals’ reach. There is also the sense that knowledge is gained or discovered in a non-linear fashion that may be experienced as ambiguous and uncertain, particularly at first. In this manner, the importance of the social context to the candidates’ development of a scholarly identity needs to be considered in the investigation.

A considerable part of supportive learning environments at the doctoral level is the role that the academic community plays in the doctoral candidate’s learning during candidature. The principles of situated learning advanced in Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation suggest that a learner’s participation in communities of practice supports learning and facilitates socialisation into the community of practice. Cousin (2008, p. 266), for example, explains how learning in university occurs by generating “communities of students and academics researching together.” Both legitimate peripheral participation and liminality connect ontological changes with epistemological changes, where “new understandings are assimilated into the learner’s biography, becoming part of what he knows, who he is and how he feels” (Cousin, 2006, p. 135). Likewise, in terms of doctoral candidature, Parry (2007, p. 53) argues that candidates’ learning is a socio-semiotic phenomenon:
it is “socially-based” where “doctoral students are inducted to the complex values, norms and conventions of academic specialisms.” Several researchers also describe approaches to establishing and nourishing departmental research enclaves for their doctoral candidates (see, for example, Cullen et al. 1994).

**An existential humanistic view of supervision**

Liminality and the threshold concept framework both resonate strongly with the existential humanistic approach adopted in the present investigation. Each provides insights into the difficulties that doctoral candidates may experience in the affective domain during candidature and the need for their supervisors to provide intellectual and emotional support. In terms of the affective domain of learning during candidature, Yalom’s (1980, p. 10) argument that existential concerns “play an extraordinarily important role at every level of individual psychic organization and have enormous relevance to clinical work” appears to be especially pertinent to doctoral supervision.

When doctoral study is viewed as a liminal space, it is possible to see how issues and concerns that doctoral candidates may experience might be highly consistent with key existential concerns. An existential humanistic view of peoples’ experiences of the world is that beneath the symptoms of peoples’ issues and concerns lie deeper or “ultimate concerns” (Yalom, 1980, p. 8) that humans face, such as: freedom, choice, isolation and meaninglessness. The notion of freedom, choice, and taking responsibility for their candidature experience may have relevance for doctoral candidates as they progress through candidature, and for supervisors as they respond to individual candidates’ needs for guidance and affirmation during candidature. While there are some institutional milestones imposed on candidature, such as, proposal writing, confirmation of candidature, regular reporting on progress, thesis submission, and the appointment of examiners and examination processes, the nature of knowledge making during candidature is far less straightforward. According to Trafford (2008, p. 274), “doctoral study contains challenges which candidates may not have met in previous studies or research”… particularly, the “difficulties in learning about and using conceptualisation.” For many candidates and supervisors, a tension may easily arise between the candidate’s need for structure, which they would require from their supervisor (see, for example, A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 274), and the
necessity, in existential terms, of the candidate confronting the ambiguity and lack of structure inherent in undertaking a doctorate. In other words, the candidate moves away from dependence on the supervisor towards intellectual and emotional independence. Along these lines, Walker et al. (2008, p. 94) argue that, for the candidate, becoming an independent scholar increasingly means taking responsibility for doing independent research and writing during the candidature. Walker et al. (2008, p. 98) also noted that in good mentoring, supervisors were intentional in their promotion of independence among candidates in order that candidates became responsible for their own learning. Walker et al. (2008) argue that intentionality is a critical supervisory quality, which,

… entails deliberately making visible and explicit those aspects of scholarly and professional expertise that are typically taken for granted and thus unarticulated … It requires that faculty not only be expert but understand their expertise well enough to conceptualize the whole, and break the whole apart into constituent components … (p. 91)

Along similar lines, the existential psychotherapist, Spinelli (2005, p. 112), asserts that the practice of intentionality provides the helping professional and the client with the freedom to choose the meaning given to an experience of reality.

There is evidence that doctoral candidates may feel a tension between their experience of intellectual, and, perhaps, social isolation and their need to be connected to an intellectual mentor and their academic community. It is widely accepted that doctoral candidates “find the nature of the work intellectually and often physically isolating” (Parry, 2007, p. 77). Stubb et al. (2011, p. 34) found that many doctoral candidates need to feel that they are becoming competent researchers and that they are also becoming valued members of their academic community. More importantly, they observed that a core source of empowerment for participating candidates in their study was “feelings of meaningfulness” that candidates typically described as “a sense of contribution, belonging, and worthiness” (Stubb et al. 2011, p. 41).

Spinelli (2005, p. 9) argues that all people are driven to attempt to make sense of and impose meaning on their experiences of the world. In these terms, the doctoral candidate may be faced with making sense of and attaching meaning to the
uncomfortable emotional aspects of their liminal experiences during their candidature, such as feelings of anxiety, in order to make progress during the doctorate. Henkel and Vabø (2006, p. 127) have identified patterns of change across different “academic cultures, in which higher education has accumulated different configurations of meaning and purpose that have shaped the academic profession … resulting in different understanding of roles and different self images on the part of academics.” It follows, then, that the manner in which supervisors make meaning of their experience of doctoral supervision may impact also on the development of scholarly identities among candidates, even if not all candidates pursue academic careers.

There is a strong parallel between Becher’s (1989) view of the importance of academics sharing personal values, beliefs and attitudes of their specialism and Yalom’s view of the importance that an individual knows and understands the personal values, beliefs and attitudes that allow them to make sense of their experiences in the world. Yalom’s (1980, p. 10) contention is that it is only when an individual intentionally searches for meaning and purpose in alignment of these values, beliefs and attitudes that they will discover and affirm their own ‘ways of being’ in the world. This contention is consistent with the notion of academic identity development, which, according to Henkel and Vabø (2006, p. 130), is centred on particular knowledge traditions that shape how individual academics define themselves.

‘Ways of being’ in the supervisory relationship

A range of scholars from higher education (see, for example, Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 48) and existential psychotherapy (see, for example, Spinelli, 2005, p. 112) have used the term ‘ways of being’ to describe the values, beliefs and attitudes that a person brings to their relationships. The notion of ‘ways of being’ in the supervisory relationship provides a way of thinking about the meaning and value that doctoral supervisors may place in the way they communicate to candidates within the supervisory relationship. It also provides a way of thinking about the dispositional qualities of supervisors, and how doctoral candidates might perceive these. In terms of ‘ways of being’ in the supervisory relationship, a supervisor might be expected to seek to provide a relational space for their candidate out of a deeply human desire to engage with the candidate, challenge, and provide alternative ways of thinking about
issues and concerns that are inherent in doctoral candidature. In this sense, Walker et al. (2008, p. 102) assert that the supervisory relationship is more likely to flourish when based on the qualities of “respect, trust, and reciprocity.” They argue that these qualities within the supervisory relationship have the advantage of reducing the chance of power differentials becoming so great that the relationship is no longer effective (Walker et al., 2008, p. 103). Typically, a supervisor’s focus in the supervisory relationship might be solely on the candidate achieving intellectual goals throughout candidature. Yet, there is another dimension to how the supervisor and the candidate encounter each other, relate to each other and experience a particular tone in the relationship, which is concerned with the affective domain of the supervisory relationship. The affective domain of the relationship may influence how candidature is experienced, and, potentially, have an impact on doctoral outcomes. Therefore, in the present investigation, the tone established in highly valued supervisory relationships is important to examine. The reported experiences of participants may also add insights into how candidates and supervisors negotiate the power differential in their relationships.

In Chapter 1, the parallels between what happens in the supervisory relationship and what occurs between the helping professional and client in helping relationships were raised. Researchers (see, for example Bartlett & Mercer, 2000, p. 196 and Wisker et al., 2008) have argued that doctoral supervision has in common with the helping professions the roles of mentoring, coaching and tutoring that occur in typical one-to-one relationships between mentor and mentee or expert and novice. In the context of the helping professions, Spinelli (2005) argues that, irrespective of the individual helping professional’s model or approach, it is the quality of the relationship with the client that plays an important role in achieving a successful outcome for the client. Working on the quality of the relationship means that instead of focusing only on outcomes for the client, the focus would remain upon the ways in which the helping professional’s values are embodied in their ‘ways of being’ in their relationship with the client. The focus on ‘ways of being’ in the supervisory relationship may be seen as relevant to the supervisor’s role to providing support in the supervisory relationship, particularly regarding emotions, such as anxiety, that candidates typically experience during candidature. As argued earlier, strong feelings such as anxiety may make candidates intellectually and emotionally vulnerable in their
supervisory relationships. In order to work well and productively together, it may be expected that supervisors would cultivate supportive 's of being’ in their relationships with candidates, in order to protect candidates from the vulnerabilities that are inherent in supervisory relationships. However, to date this topic has not been addressed empirically, so both the nature of candidate vulnerability and of supervisory responsibility warrants investigation.

Research to date on the roles of supervisors and on the necessary skills required in doctoral supervision concern, in the main, supervisory actions that do not directly address the dispositional qualities of supervisors, or how those qualities are perceived and experienced by doctoral candidates. Spinelli (2005) points out that knowledge experts primarily focus on their actions in their practice, or upon doing-type behaviours. He posits that actions are where expertise can best be demonstrated. Relating Spinelli’s argument to doctoral supervisors, it follows, then, that the challenge for supervisors is to consider their expertise from the point of view of how their actions and behaviours are experienced and interpreted by their candidates. The expertise of the supervisor is then framed by the notion of 'how I am being with my candidate?'

Yalom’s (1980) ideas about ways of being in the helping professional relationship may be applied to a supervisor-candidate relationship. Yalom (1980) wrote:

> What are these throw-ins, these elusive, ‘off the record’ extras? They exist outside formal theory, they are not written about, and they are not explicitly taught. Practitioners are often unaware of them. The critical ingredients are hard to describe, even harder to define. Indeed, is it possible to teach such qualities as compassion, ‘presence’, caring, extending one self, touching the client at a profound level, or that most elusive one of all – wisdom? (p. 4).

Kline (2009, p. 32) takes a different view of such ‘off the record’ qualities, arguing that in the coaching relationship, qualities such as these are not elusive and may be experienced and practiced in the relationship. She asserts that in the context of training professional coaches, dispositional qualities, such as encouragement and appreciation of the client, can be explicitly modelled during the training, and practised until they become inherent traits. In a similar fashion, if such important dispositional qualities can be openly discussed and even modelled during the professional
development of supervisors, then, perhaps, supervisors may be better able to embed these qualities in their supervisory practices.

An important aspect of supervisors’ ‘ways of being’ with their doctoral candidates concerns the themes of candidate autonomy and independence and the amount of direction given by the supervisor during candidature, as was identified in Chapter 2. From an existential humanist perspective, the helping professional would be expected to help the individual to take responsibility for their learning, change, growth and development. Yalom (1980, p. 262) uses the concept of “locus of control” as a measure of an individual accepting personal responsibility and control of desired outcomes within the relationship. Yalom asserts that individuals who accept responsibility for achieving positive outcomes have an internal locus of control, and those who expect the helping professional to take responsibility for outcomes have an external locus of control. Taking personal responsibility, Whitmore (2002, p. 33) claims, is crucial to high performance by individuals. The notion of ‘locus of control’ sits well with the empirical literature on supervision as candidates move on the continuum of dependence to independence during candidature. In relation to doctoral candidature, the degree of candidate autonomy and independence is potentially important for both the performance of the supervisor within the supervisory relationship, and for the candidate in achieving doctoral outcomes. According to Doloriert et al. (2012, p. 743), the responsibility for directing and producing a thesis should remain with the candidate and not be assumed by the supervisor. In the present investigation, the theme of autonomy in the supervisory relationship and issues and concerns about dependence, therefore, need to be investigated. The reported experiences of participants may add insights into the ways in which candidates and supervisors negotiate where candidates are on the continuum of dependence and independence as candidature progresses.

Establishing a learning environment

A strong resonance may be seen between Rogers’ (1961, 1969) conditions for establishing a learning environment in facilitatory relationships, including those found in education, and the requirements for supportive doctoral supervisory relationships. While each facilitatory relationship is certainly unique, Rogers (1969, p. 106) argues that there are certain “attitudinal qualities” that are required to be present in the
facilitator, in order for a personal relationship to be established that facilitates learning and personal growth. Rogers posits that these attitudes of the facilitator, in spite of personality differences and styles of intervention in mentoring or teaching, give rise to the development of ‘safe’ interpersonal relationships that can facilitate significant learning or personal growth. Furthermore, Rogers (1969, pp. 105-106) argues that the facilitator’s attitudinal qualities are equally, if not more, important to learning outcomes than the facilitator’s theoretical orientation, conceptual knowledge and technical skills. Rogers (1969, p. 9) identified three core attitudes, or qualities in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner that he argued are necessary in providing a psychological climate suitable for the “facilitation of significant and self-reliant learning.” Further, Rogers (1961, p. 37) argued that the extent to which a facilitator creates such a relationship with a student, “the student will become a self-initiated learner, more original, more self-disciplined, less anxious and other-directed.” Curiously, while each of Rogers’ (1961, 1969) core attitudes of facilitators have found their way into the literature on doctoral supervision being referenced either directly or indirectly, Rogers’ existential humanistic perspective has, to date, not been explicitly cited. It, therefore, is appropriate to explore these essential core attitudes in sufficient detail so that their application to supervisory practice at the doctoral level may be considered.

The first attitudinal quality is congruence or “realness in the facilitator of learning” (Rogers, 1969, p. 106), where the facilitator is able to be transparent and free of defences, able to be intellectually and emotionally present with the learner, and to be without roles, posturing or facades with the learner. The intention of the facilitator is to be perceived as trustworthy – where being trustworthy does not depend on the facilitator being “rigidly consistent but … be dependably real” (Rogers, 1961, p. 50). This quality of ‘realness’ in the facilitator, Rogers argues, allows for a direct, personal encounter with the learner. This condition correlates with the importance of developing a close personal connection with doctoral candidates that Doloriert et al. (2012) assert is conducive to developing positive and effective doctoral supervisory relationships. Furthermore, Arnold (2009, p. 59) argues that congruence is a critical supervisory quality in building rapport with doctoral candidates. Congruency in the supervisor may also raise the levels of respect and trust between supervisory pairs that
Walker et al. (2008, p. 102) and Cotterall (2011, p. 521) regard as critical in fostering mutual responsibility and independence in the relationship.

The second attitudinal quality is “unconditional positive regard” (Rogers, 1961, p. 283). Rogers (1969, p. 109), which means here that the facilitator is wholly non-judgmental of the learner and expresses a warm, positive, caring and accepting attitude towards the learner. Furthermore, regardless of what he or she thinks or feels about the learner’s positive and negative expressions of behaviour, the facilitator never implicitly or explicitly threatens to take this attitude of positive regard away from the learner. Spinelli (2005, p. 169) points out that in order to hold another person in unconditional positive regard, Rogers adopted “an unequivocally optimistic view of human nature.” From Rogers’ position, the positive potential of human beings means that they are – “socialized, forward-moving, rational and realistic” (Rogers, 1961, p. 91). Spinelli (2005, p. 169) adds to this view of human beings, describing the human drive for self-actualisation as the urge to “extend, become autonomous, develop, and mature.” These characteristics may be necessary to underpin the attributes of creativity, responsibility and leadership that, according to Walker et al. (2008, p. 61), are critical for doctoral candidates to develop during their doctoral study. Rogers’ key point, which is relevant to doctoral supervisors, is that the facilitator unconditionally trusts in the capacity of the learner to develop. Walker et al. (2008, p. 112) found that candidates feel more empowered when supervisors express confidence in them. However, the notion of the supervisor embodying such unconditionally positive attitudes towards their candidate, and how they demonstrate trust in the candidate’s potential to succeed, are matters that have not been examined to date in the literature. The approach taken in the present investigation may provide relevant insights into the ways in which supervisors provide support to candidates.

The third attitudinal quality identified by Rogers (1969, p. 111) is known as “empathetic understanding”, wherein the facilitator accurately senses the learner’s fear, anxiety and confusion, understands and experiences the learner’s process of learning as if they were the learner, and chooses remarks and a tone of voice that conveys a sharing of the learner’s feelings. Both Wisker et al. (2008, p. 15) and Arnold (2009, p. 59) highlight the importance of empathy towards the doctoral candidate in developing and maintaining the supervisory relationship. The tone of
supervisory conversations is explored in the present investigation. The effect of this tone on conveying the supervisor's empathy towards the candidate may have significant implications for developing supportive supervisory relationships, but its importance remains to be demonstrated.

Rogers (1961, p. 115) terms the facilitatory relationship that complies with his core conditions a “safe” relationship. He asserts that in a safe relationship individuals move away from fixedness, rigidity, defensiveness and remoteness of feelings: they become more open, flexible, accepting of feelings and experiences, and experience a closeness with the other. Researchers, notably Walker et al. (2008, p. 10), have named many of these characteristics and behaviours as being necessary in doctoral education in order to create the conditions in which intellectual risk-taking is possible. Bender (2006, p. 304) argues for the importance of the culture of the intellectual community that makes the department “a safe place for all faculty and students.” In their study of academic departments, Walker et al. (2008, p. 11) found that embedded within the culture of an academic community is a “hidden curriculum” characterised by “real” partnerships between supervisors and their candidates. Further, they found that this ‘hidden curriculum’ was enormously influential in the intellectual and professional formation of doctoral candidates.

According to Rogers (1969, p. 112), facilitators do not always have the attitudes that create his core conditions for significant learning to take place. Becher (1993, pp. 145-146) noted that while doctoral supervisors may have expert knowledge of their field, they do not always have the necessary interpersonal skills to be an effective supervisor. Along similar lines, Styles and Radloff (2000, p. 212) argued that supervisors need the necessary skills to address the issues surrounding the management of the affective domain throughout all stages of doctoral candidature. A facilitator who can consistently create these conditions, according to Rogers, is “a person who is psychologically mature” (Rogers, 1961, p. 56). It could be expected, then, that the presence of attitudinal qualities in doctoral supervisors that are conducive to forming safe relationships, along the lines described by existential humanists such as Rogers, might provide some insights into effective supervisory practice. The present investigation, therefore, will explore the dispositional qualities
of doctoral supervisors to identify any similarities or, indeed, differences with Rogers’ attitudinal qualities that create safe relationships.

**Providing critical feedback**

The ways in which supervisors provide critical feedback to their doctoral candidates and how candidates perceive this feedback is especially pertinent to the particular tone created in the supervisory relationship. The tone of the relationship gives rise to how candidates perceive the relationship as being supportive of their doctoral research. Rogers (1969, p. 43) argued that the process of creating a psychological environment that supports learning is impacted either positively or negatively by the manner and tone in which the facilitator provides critical feedback, and by how the learner perceives the appraisal of his or her work. Rogers (1969, p. 43) argued that critical feedback by the facilitator must be “of the work, not the student as a person.” Therefore, the facilitator’s negative feedback does not indicate to the learner “that they are bad, lazy, incompetent, stupid” … nor does it indicate the facilitator’s “like or dislike of the student” (Rogers, 1969, p. 43). The supervisory role requires the supervisor to appraise and make critical judgments of the doctoral candidate’s work throughout candidature; and candidates need to develop the ability to receive the feedback in a positive manner. However, the manner and tone in which critical feedback is given on the candidate’s progress in their candidature and, particularly, on the development of their academic writing, may have a negative impact on the candidate’s self-confidence in their scholarly ability. Confidence is an important attribute for doctoral candidates to develop, according to Lovitts (2007, p. 19), if they are to achieve high-quality doctoral dissertations. Doloriert et al. (2012, p. 744) found that when supervisors gave technical feedback in a positive manner it played an important role in developing increasingly independent candidates and developing interdependent supervisory relationships. According to Walker et al. (2008, p. 104), critical feedback may be regarded as a cornerstone of the supervisory relationship: it facilitates the candidate’s trust in the supervisor’s ability to guide the candidate’s developing scholarly expertise. Down, Martin and Bricknell (2000) and Li and Seale (2007, p. 521) found that critical feedback delivered with sensitivity develops the self-confidence of the doctoral candidate and builds their trust in their supervisor. Since most people regard any criticism as negative, Costa and Kallick (1995, p. 46) argue that critical feedback can only be perceived positively under conditions of mutual
trust. The Doloriert et al. (2012, p. 740) study shows that candidates who have high levels of trust in the supervisory relationship have higher levels of confidence in themselves. They also reported that candidates’ felt more empowered in the supervisory relationship and increasingly more independent in their candidature. On the issue of the importance of trust in learning relationships, Rogers (1969) concludes that:

> Trust is the important ingredient, which the facilitator provides … the trust he feels in the capacity [of the individual] to develop their human potential … cannot be faked. It is not a technique. The facilitator can only be as trusting as he in fact is. Thus, he may be able to trust, and give freedom, in a very restricted area in which he is not risking much. But if it is real and complete, even in a narrow area, it will have a facilitating effect upon the [learning] process. (p. 75)

It might be expected that supportive supervisors would provide critical feedback that fosters the candidate’s confidence, and which would allow the candidate to express their ideas confidently, as an integral part of the development of their independent scholarly expertise.

**Concluding remarks**

This chapter has drawn a connection between Rogers’ (1961, 1969) approach to the facilitatory relationship between a helping professional and a client (Rogers, 1961) or a facilitator and a learner (Rogers, 1969), and the supervisor’s role in the doctoral supervisory relationship. A central theme in Rogers’ work is the importance of the kind of facilitatory relationship that can provide a “safe” environment for significant learning, growth and change (Rogers, 1961, p. 167). Rogers’ approach to learning relationships is useful in understanding the nature of supportive doctoral supervision because creating a ‘safe’ learning environment may be equally important in the doctoral supervisory relationship. This approach may be particularly relevant in light of the emotional experiences of doctoral candidates in response to the liminal challenges they face as they master doctoral threshold concepts during candidature. The need to understand the role of the supervisor as a facilitator concerns supervisory attitudes and ways of being towards the candidate that may have considerable influence on the candidate’s learning, changing identity and intellectual development. Other than Wisker et al. (2003, p. 391), who draw on Heron’s (1990) interventions for
facilitators in the helping professions, and McMichael and Garry (1990, p. 13), who draw on Rogerian concepts to frame the conditions for learning in the doctoral supervisory relationship, there is no research to date that directly draws upon existential humanism as a lens through which to view doctoral supervision.

The nature of the reportedly successful doctoral supervisory relationship, in the light of an existential humanist lens, needs to be empirically investigated and this has yet to be achieved. First, liminality and the threshold concept framework may provide an insightful way to explore the difficult emotional experiences of transformation that doctoral candidates undergo, and the nature of the support that supervisors may be expected to provide. Second, humanism may offer insights about supervisors’ self-awareness of their ways of being in their supervisory relationships; awareness of their interpersonal skills that they bring to the relationship; and awareness of the effect of their attitudes towards their candidates on candidates’ self-confidence and motivation during candidature. Third, existentialism may illuminate how candidates seek to interpret and understand the significance of their experiences during doctoral candidature. It may also illuminate the values, beliefs and attitudes informing how supervisors make meaning of the work of supervision and how they develop a particular relationship that provides support to their candidates.

In order to accommodate these personal and highly sensitive aspects of supervisory relationships, an ethnographic approach was adopted in the investigation. The following chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in the present investigation. It outlines the research design, methodology and conduct of the investigation.
Chapter 4
Methodology

The liminal experience of doctoral candidature, as was argued in Chapter 3, is characterised by intellectual and emotional difficulties. Candidates may experience strong feelings that include anxiety, and fears about uncertainty and ambiguity. They may also experience intellectual and emotional isolation and need the support of their supervisors in order to achieve the required doctoral outcomes. These intellectual and emotional difficulties, and how supervisors provide their candidates with support in the supervisory relationship, are largely subjective. They are difficult to verbalise, and, therefore, difficult to observe and document. They may, however, be inferred from candidates’ reports of their experiences of candidature and of the value of their supervisory relationships in helping to overcome the difficulties they may experience.

An interpretivist approach to the collection of data was required in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the difficulties candidates experienced, and the nature and importance of the support provided by supervisors. Ethnographic interviewing, as described by Spradley (1979), was selected as a data-collecting technique, and the methodological framework adopted for the investigation was that of Naturalistic Inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic Inquiry is well suited to research about issues that are highly specific in terms of their context and that may also be tacit in nature.

This chapter describes the research design and methods used in the present investigation. The chapter begins with a discussion of the methodological foundations underpinning the investigation. The research design, data collection and data analysis are then outlined. The measures taken in adopting ethical research and in planning for and establishing trustworthiness of the data collected in the investigation are explained in full. An independent auditor’s report verifying the data collected, and the interpretation of it by the researcher, is presented in Appendix A.

Methodological foundations

The present investigation is underpinned by the epistemology of constructivism. A constructivist stance takes the view that a meaningful understanding of reality is based on the interaction of experience and ideas, and is therefore socially constructed.
Chapter 4: Methodology

The investigation is interpretive in theoretical perspective since the researcher seeks not only to discover and describe the dispositional qualities that well-regarded supervisors bring to their supervisory relationships, but also to interpret and give meaning to the data, which in turn gives rise to emerging themes concerning the nature of highly valued supervisory relationships. Relationships are reciprocal endeavours, and so they concern whatever each party brings to the relationship. In the present investigation, however, the focus was on supervisory qualities, rather than on PhD candidates’ qualities, for two key reasons. First, it is a means of delimiting and providing a finer focus to the investigation. Second, since supervisory relationships may be considered to inherently represent an unequal power balance, as explained in Chapter 2, it is assumed that supervisors have the larger role in determining the tone of the relationship. In order for the researcher to develop meaningful interpretations and to see reality from the point of view of others, empathetic understanding is required. In this regard, the present investigation uses the concept of verstehen, associated with the writing of Weber (1864–1920), which refers to the systematic interpretive process in which the researcher seeks to relate to and develop an empathetic understanding of the culture of others.

The methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was chosen to provide the framework of the research because it is well suited to documenting thick, rich descriptions such as the tacit nature of the issues concerned. Naturalistic Inquiry also utilises a range of criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of the reported findings. The present investigation closely examines the individual cultures of supervisory relationships in the context of their natural settings in a university site. Patton (2002, p. 81), for example, argues that ethnographic inquiry assumes that “any human group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture.” Typically, the ethnographer is fascinated with and desires to understand other peoples’ lives, therefore, rather than studying people, ethnographic approaches to data collection and analysis concern learning from people. Higher education institutions develop their own essential cultures; therefore, the investigation required an ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis, which is also appropriate to Naturalistic Inquiry.

The theoretical framework is consistent with the data collection and analysis framework known as grounded theory (see, for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 2000;
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Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory emphasises an inductive approach to the interpretation of data whereby theory is generated from the data, rather than by the researcher imposing on the data a particular theoretical lens. Therefore, the present investigation adopts a constructivist approach where grounded theory begins with a hunch, as Patton (2002, p. 128) outlined. Any theoretical perspectives deriving from the present investigation are both grounded in and are emergent from the data set. Any meanings that are attributed to participants’ experiences of reality are constructed from the data and confirmed by the participants concerned. In this way, new knowledge is co-constructed through an interpretive, negotiated process between the researcher and each of the participants.

Research design

A literature review informed the structure of the present investigation and the research design. The research design in the present investigation adopts Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) methodological approach, known as Naturalistic Inquiry. Guba (1978) first identified Naturalistic Inquiry as a discovery-oriented methodological approach in which the researcher minimises manipulation of the setting for an investigation. In the present investigation, it was necessary to explore supervisory relationships in their natural setting with no pre-ordained expectations about the research findings. The researcher here declares herself to be a doctoral candidate with particular views on her own experiences of candidature. At the same time, she declares the sincere aim to represent and give voice to the experiences of the participants in the investigation. She has striven to be self-aware of the intrinsic values, beliefs and attitudes held by her towards the phenomena under scrutiny; and to declare them in this dissertation. She has been self-aware of any bias towards whatever emerged in the investigation, and she has mitigated this bias by being committed to being open to understanding the phenomena from the perspectives of the participants, and to report on those perspectives with integrity.

The present investigation took fully into account Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) five premises of Naturalistic Inquiry. The first is that reality exists only as people construct it, and because people are diverse, realities are individualistic, so many different understandings of reality may be held by those experiencing a phenomenon. The second premise requires the researcher and the participants to be wholly
integrated in the research endeavour, so that their relationship is interactive. The outcomes of the research are co-created by the researcher and participants. The third premise mandates that only ideographic interpretations of the data are possible, in which the researcher seeks to understand specific and subjective phenomena and does not attempt to generalise the outcomes of the research to other contexts. The fourth premise requires that no attempt can be made to determine causality because the nature of the interaction between the researcher and what is researched is mutually influential. The fifth premise concerns the notion that all human investigation is driven by the researcher’s underlying values, beliefs, attitudes and ways of seeing the world, which means that the investigation is inherently value-laden. The values, beliefs and attitudes of the researcher and each of the participants are integral to the research process and openly influence any findings from the research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) specify a range of coherent and interdependent characteristics that guide the implementation of Naturalistic Inquiry. An explanation of how these key characteristics were operationalised in the present investigation now follows.

The present investigation was conducted in the natural setting where supervisory relationships develop and play out. The natural setting is “a setting that is not contrived, manipulated, or artificially fashioned by the inquirer” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 102). The underlying premise for conducting the research in its natural setting derives from the notion that meaning cannot be made, or human realities understood, separately from the time and context in which they occur (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 189), and, therefore, independently of the culture in which they are experienced. Consequently, all of the interviews with supervisors in the present investigation were conducted in the venues where supervision normally takes place, such as supervisors’ offices or departmental meeting rooms at the site university. Interviews with candidates were conducted, in the main, where these participants would normally carry out their doctoral studies, such as candidates’ rooms at the site university, their laboratories or departmental meeting rooms. In one instance only, where the candidate was an external student, the interview took place in the candidate’s home. For two other external candidates, for their convenience, the interviews took place using the
Skype telecommunications technology, thereby enabling the researcher and the participants to observe and read each other’s body language and demeanour.

The human is the most appropriate instrument, according to Lincoln & Guba (1985, p. 39), for collecting and analysing research data. In the present investigation, therefore, the human was used as the main data-gathering tool. Lincoln and Guba argue that all data-collecting instruments, such as questionnaires, are value-laden. However, only human instruments have the high level of flexibility and perception that is required to adapt to the complex and changing realities that are encountered in interpersonal interactions during fieldwork. Further, they argue that only the human instrument can recognise and process the effect on the research of biases that accompany values, beliefs and attitudes, and negotiate meanings that are mutually constructed between the researcher and the participants. In the present investigation, the researcher was able to summarise data collected during the interviews, and to present those summaries to the participants for verification, clarification, correction, negotiation or amplification as participants directed. Only two participants requested that a minor correction be made to this summary. A report of the findings, insights and key themes of the investigation was also submitted to participants for their information and to which they could provide feedback. These techniques provided opportunities to explore unexpected responses from participants, empowering both participants and the researcher, and enabling deeper insights into the nature of the supervisory relationship as interviews progressed.

Humans are, to date, the only instruments that have the ability to engage interpersonally with research participants to build on insights gained by non-verbal means. Polyani (1983, p. 20) introduced the notion that “tacit thought forms an indispensable part of all knowledge”, thereby legitimising tacit knowing as the basis upon which most interpretations and insights emerge in post-positivist research. According to Spradley (1979, p. 93), much of the interaction between a researcher and the individual participants occurs at the tacit level and their knowledge may even lie “outside their awareness”… and, therefore, the researcher … “has to devise ways to discover this tacit knowledge.” The researcher may then, where possible, be able to explicate that knowledge in a way that makes sense and rings true when communicated to others. The nature of the tacit knowledge communicated between
candidate and supervisor became a focal point in the present investigation, in which two epistemological dimensions of *Naturalistic Inquiry* are particularly salient. First, the framing of the research issues, methods, interview questions and documentary data draws on the values and beliefs of the researcher. Second, the influential relationship between the researcher and the participants is legitimate, and the researcher depends upon each participant to co-construct and negotiate a declared version of reality.

Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used in the present investigation. Qualitative methods use inductive analysis and are adaptable to dealing with value-laden, multiple realities as several researchers explain (see, for example, Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The qualitative research methods of data collection used in the present investigation included: interviews, conversations, documents, the collection and analysis of relevant supporting documents, the review of related literature, and the researcher’s field notes, memoranda and research journal.

In the present investigation, a purposeful sampling technique, described by Patton (2002, p. 236) as “critical case sampling”, in which a relatively small number of cases are purposefully selected, based on their meeting specific criteria, was used to recruit the participating supervisors. The advantage of this technique is that “information-rich cases” that are highly likely to illuminate the questions in the investigation are deliberately selected for depth of understanding rather than breadth of understanding that might facilitate generalisation (Patton, 2002, p. 230). As Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 201) explain, the rationale of the present research approach is “not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalisations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavour.” In the present investigation, the critical case sampling technique for selecting participants aided the generation of rich, thick and deep descriptions of the reportedly highly valued supervisory relationships. These rich descriptions enabled theory development from detail provided by participants. Using the constant-comparative method outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), raw units of information were coded and then grouped into categories representing the emerging themes. In this way, the researcher was able to identify similarities and differences in the data set, and particular patterns that seemed important to investigate further, together with outliers and negative cases, in the phenomena being studied. It was always intended that the research design should be open, flexible and responsive to
the growing data set, so that it could evolve appropriately as the data set and the researcher’s understandings developed over time.

**Site of the investigation**

Data for the investigation were collected across several campuses at a medium-sized research-oriented Australian university. The university currently provides programs of study across fields that include Humanities, Business, Health, Education, Law, Science, Engineering, Tourism, and Information Technologies. The university is a publicly funded, self-accrediting institution that awards degrees and diplomas up to and including the PhD level. In 2015, while data were being collected, there were 433 PhD candidates enrolled either internally or externally at the university, whether full-time and part-time.

The investigation did not require the comparison of different cultures of doctoral supervisory relationships across different institutions. It was conceived as an in-depth investigation to understand the deepest recesses of the “private life” (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 29) of particular PhD candidates and their supervisors during supervisory relationships and the “private spaces of a doctoral supervisory relationship” (Shield & McCormack, 2010, p. 299). The present investigation was confined to one university on the grounds that universities in Australia have in common that they are self-accrediting institutions that are accountable to the Australian government for the maintenance of the highest international academic standards. The university concerned requires examination of doctoral theses by three external examiners, of whom at least one must be international. The site institution was also chosen for the convenience of access to highly experienced supervisors that it afforded, because it also permitted the inclusion as participants of a sufficient number of doctoral candidates from across a representative range of academic fields of study. Being a medium-sized research-oriented university, the selected site was broadly representative of the characteristics of government-funded universities in the Australian higher education sector. The site hosted a range of participating supervisors and candidates whose experiences of doctoral supervision might well shed light on the nature of highly valued supervisory relationships.
**Stages of data collection**

The data collection stage had a number of steps, including: an in-depth initial interview with each supervisor and, independently, with one of their candidates, member checking of the interview transcripts, documentary data collection and confirmatory interviews to check interpretations and ask clarifying questions. In order to verify findings and insights and negotiate outcomes, participants were supplied with a report summarising the findings and insights in the investigation. All the participants reported that they agreed with the findings and insights represented in the report. A few participants included comments on the report. Using these comments, the researcher judiciously made nuanced adjustments to key insights.

At the design stage of the present investigation it was not clear what would be the key themes reported by supervisor-candidate pairs regarding the nature of their supervisory relationships. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 59), research design, data collecting, coding and analysis are “tightly interwoven processes” that are recursive in nature. In the present investigation, the researcher moved between these elements and the literature to ensure congruence in the research.

**Recruitment of participants**

Once the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee approved the present investigation (see Appendix B), data collection began. First, participants had to be recruited. The selection criteria were that: the participating supervisors needed to have some experience in supervising doctoral candidates, in order to have gained a reputation of being successful in supervision; they needed to be currently supervising at least one PhD candidate who had already verbally agreed to participate in the investigation, in order to see how the relationship progressed during the time of engagement; and both the supervisor and the candidate were required to hold a positive view about their supervisory relationship: further, they needed to be willing to share confidentially with the researcher their experiences in those relationships.

To take the first step in recruiting participants, a senior academic member of staff with a long history at the site university, including two terms as Chair of the Academic Board, and who had held other senior positions, agreed to write a letter introducing the researcher to 12 experienced supervisors known to him, inviting them
to participate in the investigation. The 12 supervisors were drawn from Becher’s (1989) four broad disciplinary groupings; that is, at least two supervisors from each of the Applied Professions, the Natural Sciences, the Social Sciences and the Humanities. It was considered that this range of disciplinary fields would accommodate any emerging contrast between disciplinary cultures that may exist in the supervisory relationships, even though this was not a focus in the investigation. Next, the researcher sent an e-mail invitation to the 12 supervisors who had said they would consider participating in the investigation (see Appendix C), stating the purpose of the investigation and outlining the extent of the commitment that their involvement would require. Once supervisors had indicated their willingness to participate in the investigation, and could identify a PhD candidate willing to participate, an introductory letter (see Appendix D), along similar lines to that sent to the supervisors, was sent to the candidates. The tone of these initial contact documents was considered to be particularly important in providing participants with a first impression of the investigation and of the researcher, in order to begin to establish trust and rapport. The researcher then contacted each of the participants by telephone to discuss the investigation, address any questions or concerns, and arrange a date, time and venue for the initial interview.

It was difficult to persuade experienced supervisors to participate in the present investigation. Of the 12 supervisors approached and who met the selection criteria, eight agreed to participate. The reasons four of them gave for their non-participation, or reluctance to participate were the pressure of research and burdensome teaching commitments. Further, with some of the supervisors who were approached, there were also some indications of concern about having what they regarded as being a private relationship scrutinised. These supervisors came from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds. The four supervisors who declined to participate in the investigation were sent an e-mail thanking them for their initial interest.

Initially, the number of participants in the present investigation was eight supervisors and eight of their candidates. After the initial interview with one candidate, it became apparent that the candidate had an equally strong relationship with both his principal and co-supervisor; upon advice from the candidate, the co-supervisor was invited to participate in the present investigation. There were nine supervisors (5 male and 4
female) and eight candidates (4 male and 4 female). This brought the total number of participants in the investigation to seventeen.

An important ethical requirement was to protect the anonymity of the participants. Therefore, a coding system of letters to identify the discipline of participants and a number to link supervisors with their particular candidates was used. A table showing the disciplines of participants and their code letters and number for the purposes of the investigation is presented in Appendix E.

**Approach to interviews**

Consistent with *Naturalistic Inquiry*, the approach to interviews that was taken in the present investigation followed the recommendations for ethnographic interviewing outlined by Patton (2002, p. 343) and Spradley (1979, p. 58). Eight experienced principal supervisors and one co-supervisor from the site university were interviewed individually about their experiences of their doctoral supervisory relationships. Eight doctoral candidates were also interviewed individually about their experiences of their current doctoral supervisory relationships.

It was important to establish rapport with participants during the initial interviews. Building rapport is a complex process that depends on a cluster of interpersonal skills. Rapport in the present investigation, as Spradley (1979, p. 46) recommended, was sought to be achieved through “asking questions, listening instead of talking, taking a passive rather than an assertive role, expressing verbal interest in the other person through giving encouraging and supportive responses, and showing interest by making eye contact and other non-verbal means.” The approach to interviewing, therefore, was to use probing rather than leading questions to elicit clarification of participants’ statements. For example, one question asked of candidates was: “How would you describe the tenor of the conversation during supervisory meetings? Prompt: “How do they make you think, feel and behave?” Establishing rapport also requires creating an environment in which participants may feel relaxed and comfortable. Therefore, as described earlier, the interviews were carried out in the natural settings of each of the participants. Particular care was taken to ensure privacy (such as closing doors to venues) so that participants could speak confidentially and without interruption.
Initial interviews with participants ranged between 45 minutes and 70 minutes in duration, and were guided by a semi-structured schedule of interview questions that related to the research questions for the investigation. The questions on the interview schedule were devised with a view to generate broadly framed answers to the three research questions outlined in Chapter 1. A semi-structured interview approach ensured that the discussion could be informally conducted. Furthermore, it allowed both the supervisors and their candidates to be consistently asked about the same areas of interest. During the interviews, candidates were encouraged to describe what they thought and felt about their supervisory relationships. They were asked to name the supervisory qualities they experienced in their supervisory relationships. Each candidate was able to provide thick, rich description about their experiences of their supervisory relationships. When supervisors were asked to describe the dispositional qualities they believed they embodied in their supervisory relationships, they surprisingly seldom found it difficult to accurately name those qualities they brought to their supervisory relationships. Supervisors were on the other hand exceedingly articulate about the nature of their supervisory relationships and their preferred supervisory practices. They were able to clearly describe the underlying values, beliefs and attitudes that motivated them to behave as they did in supervisory meetings and more generally in their supervisory relationships. During the interviews, the researcher probed and explored within the broad inquiry areas to elicit thick, rich descriptions from both supervisors and candidates.

Following completion of the first two interviews, one with a candidate and the other with a supervisor, the interview schedules were slightly modified. To fit with the premises of Naturalistic Inquiry’s approach, adjustments to the interview schedule were made, all of them fairly minor, in order to achieve clarity, precision, as well as more fluency. Typical revisions were made by rewording and rearranging the order of questions to improve their clarity and the logical flow of the interview. During these first interviews a few key issues and concerns emerged. Therefore, to shed light on these, a section was added to both the supervisor’s and candidate’s interview schedules, asking participants to comment on words or phrases associated with their supervisory relationship, namely: power differentials, candidate dependence/independence, co-creation, reciprocity, and scholarly identity, academic culture and community. The final interview schedule for supervisors is found in Appendix F, and
for candidates in Appendix G. With permission from each participant, the interviews were digitally recorded, as unobtrusively as possible, using a high-quality mp3 recorder. The recordings were later uploaded onto a computer.

The period immediately after an interview is considered to be critical to the rigour and validity of qualitative inquiry, according to Patton (2002, p. 383). In the present investigation, observational field notes of the researcher’s impressions of each interview were made immediately after the interview took place to ensure that observations of the interview would be accurately recalled and then documented. These notes were then dated and filed. In addition to the interviews and field notes, memoranda were made and a researcher’s journal was kept to supplement the data set by way of triangulation, member-checking and to inform the independent auditor. The journal contained, as Spradley (1979, p. 76) suggests, “a record of the researcher’s experiences, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise.”

A professional transcriptionist was employed to assist the researcher with transcription. To ensure consistency of transcription and the accuracy of the transcript, a set of transcription rules was established, following the principles stated by Mergenthaler and Stinton (1992). The interviews were transcribed manually within 24 hours of each interview to ensure researcher recollection of events, and “to uncover areas of ambiguity or uncertainty”, as prescribed by Patton (2002, p. 383). Member checking of the transcripts for accuracy followed as soon as possible after the interview had taken place. Each of the participants was given an opportunity to make amendments to their individual transcripts, although very few amendments were requested. All amendments were incorporated according to the participants’ instructions. The transcripts were then considered ready for analysis. Further measures were taken to enable member checking: these are reported later in this chapter.

**Documentary data**

In addition to the interviews, and contributing to the approximately six to seven hours of individual engagement, candidates and supervisors were asked to provide a selection of documentary sources of information that they believed provided an in-depth understanding of the complex nature of their supervisory relationship. The
documentary material consisted of written communications, such as e-mails sent and received between supervisors and their candidates, and written critical feedback from supervisors to their candidates on drafts of their developing thesis chapters. The final piece of documentary information that was collected towards the end of a ten-month period of engagement with participants was a piece of reflective writing in which participants were asked to provide a short summary of their experience of their supervisory relationship up to that point (see Appendix H).

The process of documentary analysis was based on Strauss and Corbin’s (1990, p. 62) method termed “constant comparative method of analysis.” The majority of the documentary data showed high levels of consistency between what was reported by supervisors and that which was reported by their candidates. However, in the case of one supervisor-candidate pair, on reading the supervisor’s written comments and critical feedback to the candidate on a draft chapter in the thesis, the tone of the feedback seemed negative to the researcher, ranging in parts from seeming challenging to confrontational, and at times, impatient, incredulous, exasperated and so on. This tone appeared to be at odds with the supportiveness and successfulness of the relationship reported by the candidate at recruitment. On checking the discrepancy the candidate reported not experiencing the supervisor’s tone as being negative in any way. The candidate apparently did not feel discouraged or diminished by the supervisor’s tone and typical communicative comments. It appeared that a risk to the accuracy of the investigation’s data integrity might have emerged. It became obvious that correctly interpreting the tone of e-mail communications between supervisor-candidate pairs and supervisory feedback and comments on drafts of the candidates’ writing could be difficult and that the tone of written data could be misleading to the researcher. It was impossible to always accurately assess or interpret the participating supervisors’ tone in their written communications with their candidates. In fact, it became apparent that the candidate interprets the tone of the supervisor’s comments and feedback through the filter and in the context of their experience of the supervisory relationship. The experience of data collection using e-mail communications is consistent with the work of Bradbury-Jones, Irvine and Sambrook (2007, p. 81) when they reported that analysing e-mail communication within a supervisory relationship could be extremely complex.
As the above example shows, the methodological challenge to the researcher concerned the extent to which the documentation data were valuable for triangulation purposes. To address this challenge, meticulous member checking became essential in order to verify or refine the researcher’s interpretation of any documentary data. Only then could the researcher use the documentary data to validate and cross check findings from the interview data.

**Planning and establishing trustworthiness**

Planning for, and establishing, trustworthiness is critical to the methodology in the present investigation. According to Patton (2002, p. 275), the naturalistic researcher must strive to be “balanced, fair, and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities.” While objectivity, reliability and validity are the criteria for rigour in positivist research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that rigour in post-positivist research is addressed through planning and executing data collection and data analysis methods that incorporate strategies and techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. In *Naturalistic Inquiry*, therefore, the researcher must implement strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in the design. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002, p. 5) argue that it is the responsibility of the researcher to build into the research design measures to ensure such outcomes. To ensure trustworthiness in the present investigation, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985, p. 219) criteria were followed. They specify the need for a thorough implementation of prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis and member checking, to establish credibility; and for providing access to an audit trail, to establish dependability and confirmability. The implementation of these trustworthiness measures for the investigation is now outlined.

**Prolonged engagement**

To achieve prolonged engagement in the present investigation, the research design allowed for an appropriate amount of contact time in the field. Individual participants were required to engage with the present investigation for about six hours over the period of approximately a year. Initially, it was planned that all contact with participants would be face-to-face. However, two supervisors selected candidates to
participate in the investigation who were studying externally, and who lived at a distance from the site university. Contact with these participants was made by means of interviews using Skype technology, supplemented by e-mail discussions. Relevant documents were exchanged with these participants by attaching them to e-mails.

An initial face-to-face interview with participants of approximately one-hour produced rich, descriptive data. Subsequently, the researcher sent participants an e-mail with an attachment of the transcript of their interview for checking for accuracy. The transcript was sent again to participants, this time containing the researcher’s clarifying questions and comments using tracked changes in order to seek further clarification on participants’ insights about their doctoral supervisory relationships. Following the initial interview, further contact was made with all participants through telephone calls and e-mail communications to query specific aspects of the content in documents, such as the written supervisory feedback to candidates on their thesis writing that participants had supplied. All participants responded to these communications and provided clarifying statements and comments. A second face-to-face interview of approximately 30 minutes was considered necessary and was held with two candidates and one supervisor. The data collection was, therefore, “emergent”, with the researcher being open and flexible to adapt the direction of inquiry as understanding deepened and as situations changed (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

In the present investigation, the approximately six hours spent with each participant over a period of approximately ten months was considered to be consistent with Spradley’s (1979, p. 51) recommendation of six to seven hours of interviewing with each participant. This period of engagement with participants enabled the researcher to become steeped in the culture of the participants’ supervisory relationships, and to build and maintain the trust of the participants. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 257), “the ultimate credibility of the outcomes depends upon the extent to which trust has been established … with each respondent.” Trust is fragile and easily broken, so vigilance in building and maintaining trust was required throughout the present investigation. Building and maintaining trust were, therefore, essential incremental tasks over the period of engagement with the participants: from the initial e-mail and telephone contact, continuing through to being reliable around keeping and being on time for interview appointments and keeping confidentiality, to building rapport and
providing participants with the final report of the summary of the research findings, insights and emerging themes. The lengthy data-collection period also allowed the researcher time to reflect on the issues, claims and concerns that had been raised in the investigation.

**Triangulation**

Data triangulation (see, for example, Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219) was used as a technique whereby data may be verified across sources, data sets and time. Various methods were employed in order to collect data from different sources: through supervisor and candidate interviews and the analysis of documents that were conducted and supplied over an approximately ten-month period. For example, in the initial interview, supervisors described what they believed to be the key qualities that enabled them to develop rapport in their supervisory relationships. Upon later supplying a summary of their experience of the supervisory relationship, supervisory qualities were compared with the descriptions in the interview data. Inconsistencies between the data sets, where they occurred, were clarified and confirmed in follow-up conversations with supervisors. Another example of using diverse sources of data is when candidates were asked what they believed were the supervisory qualities that built rapport in their relationship, their responses were used to triangulate with what supervisors had said about themselves during their interviews.

**Peer debriefing**

Peer debriefing in the present investigation occurred during the data collection period through weekly supervisory meetings with the researcher’s principal supervisor. Peer debriefing occurs, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) when the researcher interacts with a colleague for the purpose of exposing the investigation to his or her scrutiny in order to reveal any weaknesses that might otherwise remain concealed. In the present investigation, regular presentations of the status of the research, including changes made to the research design and discussions of findings were made to a fellow PhD candidate, whose methodological approach was also *Naturalistic Inquiry*, but whose topic lay outside that of doctoral education. These non-involved, yet professional opinions were invaluable. They allowed the researcher to check emerging interpretations of findings, proposed adaptations to data collection methods.
and analysis strategies to meet changes and challenges encountered, so reducing researcher bias, and revealing blind spots in insights obtained.

**Negative case analysis**

Negative case analysis proved to be important to the data analysis process in the present investigation. Negative case analysis is a process of searching for elements in the data that are anomalous in some way, or do not support the emerging themes in the findings. It permits the researcher to test and refine the emerging understanding of the phenomenon through grappling with cases that do not fit in with the patterns identified. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 187) argue that negative cases do not indicate an error in the evolving theory but rather provide possible variation to the researcher’s thinking. In the present investigation, some participant responses differed markedly from the responses of most of the others, presenting the opportunity for negative case analysis. These cases were used to revise the interpretation of the data until all outlying data fit with the dominant pattern or theme.

One example is illustrative. The supervisory relationships were selected on the basis that they were perceived as being highly valued by both the candidate and the supervisor. Through prolonged engagement with one of the candidates, it gradually came to light that his relationship with his supervisor was less supportive than he initially had thought it to be, and this circumstance had adversely affected his confidence in his ability to make the required intellectual gains during his candidature. This negative case enabled the researcher to achieve a deeper understanding of what qualities supervisors bring to the relationship in order for it to be perceived as supportive.

**Member checking**

Member checking is where “data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members … from whom the data were originally collected” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). It is a crucial technique for establishing credibility. In the present investigation, participants were asked to check the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretations of their contributions to the data at numerous points in the investigation. These included: when interview transcripts were checked for accuracy and participants were able to make changes; when the researcher wrote notes inline
and comments were inserted electronically in the transcripts; when clarifying questions were asked about the interview data that participants could agree with or provide clarification and comments; when interpretation of and meanings given to the documentary data were verified with participants; and when the emerging themes from the data were presented in a summary report that was submitted to participants for comments, agreement, disagreement, clarification and confirmation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 212), “knowledge is power that can be used against the very people from whom the knowledge was generated.” Therefore, negotiating the outcomes by means of member checking reduced significantly any opportunity for the exploitation of participants. The majority of the participants expressed their full agreement with the summarised findings and insights of the present investigation. One supervisor queried a minor aspect of the summary, which concerned whether supervisory dispositional qualities may be learned and practiced in supervisory relationships. On careful consideration, the researcher adjusted the summary to restate that the dispositional qualities of supervisors may both be innate and intuitive, and additionally, supervisors may learn and practice bringing certain qualities to their supervisory relationships. There is a narrow distinction between the researcher being in control of the investigation, and, as far as possible, honouring the input of participants.

**Audit trail**

A research audit trail was maintained throughout the investigation, its purpose being to ensure that interpretations were based on an adequate appraisal of the data. The audit trail allowed access to relevant materials that provided a clear and accessible record that would enable the interpretation of every ‘fact’ to be traced back to the original sources of data. Six categories of material were assembled: the research proposal giving the background and intentions of the present investigation; the development of the semi-structured interview schedule; recordings and transcripts of the interviews, field notes and documentary data; data-reduction and analysis through coding and theme development; a reflexive journal of notes, log of day-to-day activities, a personal log and the process of making methodological changes to the research design; and data reconstruction and synthesis into a summary of findings, interpretations, themes and conclusions. An independent auditor reviewed original sources of audio recordings to determine the accuracy of transcription of interviews,
records of member checking, the interpretation of documentary data and the researcher’s methodological journal that records the iterative process of changes to foci, methodological decisions made and organisation and analysis of data. The independent auditor’s letter of attestation can be seen in Appendix A.

**Data saturation**

It was part of the research design in the present investigation that data collection would continue until “data saturation in the form of data redundancy” was reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 188). Prolonged engagement with the 17 participants was shown to reveal extensive and rich descriptive data. Of particular importance was the richness of the interview data that was gathered. The participants were open, candid and articulate about their supervisory relationships, and were well able to reflect on and respond to the open-ended questions of the researcher. Supervisors and candidates, apparently without conferring with each other, verified and confirmed the information that each gave about their supervisory relationship. As the time of engagement went on and participants supplied the various forms of documentary data to the researcher, their understanding of the issues in the topic of supervisory relationships grew and the depth of reflection in their reporting of their experience of supervisory relationships increased.

Once all the documentary data was received from the participants and the information extracted and analysed, it became apparent that an appropriate and sufficient amount of data that was comprehensively representative of the culture of supervisory relationships across the four broad disciplinary groupings had been gathered. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006, p. 59), if the participants are properly selected, it is usual that data saturation occurs “within the first 12 interviews.” In the present investigation, data saturation meant that no new categories of data had been created by the addition of new data; the elements in the categories were deemed to have an appropriate base of information; and the relationships between categories had been established and validated and supported by member checks and triangulation across data sources and over time. At this point in the investigation, and because engagement with the 17 participants had continued for approximately ten months, the researcher made the methodological decision that data saturation had been reached, and, therefore, no further recruitment of participants was undertaken.
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Coding and inductive analysis

The next step in the investigation was coding and inductive analysis of the data that had been collected. The main sources of data available for analysis were the interview transcripts and the documentary data. As reported above, code letters (according to broad disciplinary grouping) and numbers were used to de-identify participants and so protect their privacy. The fieldwork data collected in the interviews were labelled according to the date of interview, code name and discipline of the participant. This procedure facilitated a cross-referencing system, allowing individual participants to be traced so that interviews to confirm findings and insights could be conducted later in the investigation. Text analysis was conducted in the same way as the interview transcripts. All analysis, checking and auditing was done manually. See Appendix I: An example of analysis and coding of data.

A strategy of inductive data analysis and creative synthesis to develop grounded theory was used in the present investigation. The researcher became immersed in the details and specifics of the data generated in order to discover, interpret and build themes and patterns in the data. Also, following the precepts of grounded theory of data analysis, the data were analysed inductively. The researcher acknowledged the multiple realities emerging from the data and theory was developed from this perspective, rather than working with a priori theory or variables when making sense of the field data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Using the “constant comparative method of analysis” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62), the researcher made comparisons, noting similarities and differences in order to conceptualise, name and categorise the data through open coding, followed by axial coding, in which the data were put back together in new ways according to major themes.

First, the data were broken down into manageable units. Using line-by-line analysis, words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs that seemed important to the researcher were identified, conceptualised and named. Initially, the interview questions provided a framework by which to compare responses. Second, through asking questions, the concepts were grouped into categories. Third, making connections between the categories to generate themes created relationships in the data. Fourth, going back and checking these deductions against the data verified the relationships generated.
These steps appear to be complex, but, while they were purposeful, in fact, they seemed to the researcher to happen naturally, and as a matter of course. By way of example, from open coding (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61) of the interview data, it was clear that all the candidates reported suffering from some degree of anxiety during their candidature. When all the references to anxiety were extracted, themes were developed, such as conceptual difficulty, uncertainty, ambiguity, isolation, and transitions in the developing scholarly identity. When these terms were axially coded (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96) using all data sources (interviews, documents and field notes), it was striking that, while all candidates experienced anxiety, they reported ways in which their supervisors’ support mitigated these feelings of anxiety, as will be extensively discussed in Chapter 5.

The final phase of analysis was to use the broad themes to form the basis of building grounded theory. An important aspect of a grounded theory method of analysis is the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity, which according to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 75) concerns awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data through attributes of the researcher, such as having creativity, responsiveness, insight (the ability to give meaning to data) and understanding (the capability to separate what is important, from what is not). As Morse et al. (2002, p. 5) state: “It is these characteristics of the researcher that are crucial to the attainment of optimal reliability and validity.” In the present investigation, the researcher endeavoured to maintain theoretical sensitivity at all times, in order to conceptualise a descriptive story about the dispositional qualities of well-regarded supervisors that they embody in their supervisory relationships, as is reported in Chapters 5 to 8.

**Proximity to the research**

A problem that needed to be addressed was the researcher’s proximity to the present investigation. The researcher was a PhD candidate investigating the experience of supervisory relationships. In this context, in studying the experiences of one’s peers, one is to an extent studying one’s own experiences. When a researcher is familiar with the cultural scene that is being studied, the language and terms used may not catch their attention and important information might be overlooked. Spradley (1979, p. 50) argues that excessive proximity to the research may present a problem to the researcher: that of their holding limiting assumptions based on their familiarity and
experience. According to Spradley (1979, p. 50), it is necessary to examine whether proximity to the culture impedes the researcher making insights about the culture. In the present investigation, it was important to reflect on whether the researcher’s perceived experience of doctoral supervision was being assumed as ‘the reality’ for all.

The researcher’s bias due to her proximity to the research was vigilantly guarded against. The researcher was not in any of the relationships, therefore, there was much to be learned about the non-verbal forms of interpersonal communication within each individual relationship. The researcher’s stance was to want to learn from, and be informed by the participants, in order to understand the meaning of their unique experiences. It was not to pass judgement on supervisory performance. Furthermore, the researcher’s proximity to the culture of supervision meant that she could relate to many of the issues raised by participants, enabling empathetic understanding, and building rapport. Each supervisory relationship had similarities and differences and the goal was to generate thick, rich and descriptive information on which key themes could be based.

**Ethics approval and ethical considerations**

In compliance with the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee’s approval requirements, participants were provided with three important documents before data collection started: an overview of the investigation giving the background and purpose of the investigation; an information sheet, providing details of the ethical and confidentiality procedures and what their engagement in the investigation would mean in terms of the nature of the tasks and the time commitment required; and the informed consent form. This last document gave participants choices around recording the interview, and made them aware that they could withdraw from the investigation at any time and for any reason. No participants did withdraw from the investigation.

At the outset of the initial interview, and in compliance with the requirements of the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee, individual participants were given a printed copy of the informed consent form to complete and sign. In the case of the two candidates who lived at a distance, and where Skype
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interviews were conducted, the informed consent form was sent to them by e-mail a few days before the interview was to be held and signed forms were faxed to the researcher before the interview was held.

For research to be ethical, no harm should come to the participants. In Chapter 2, the supervisor-candidate relationship is described as a power relationship, particularly because candidates rely on the goodwill of their supervisor to support and facilitate their achievement of successful doctoral outcomes. Therefore, especially for the candidates, there needed to be assurance that their involvement in the investigation would cause no adverse effect on their relationship with their supervisor. The researcher’s developing relationship through prolonged engagement with each of the candidates was positive, and led to trust, confidence and candour in the researcher-participant conversations. Further, the member-checking process was a safeguard against any such possibility. Furthermore, the independent auditor saw no reason to doubt the researcher in providing details about participants’ true experiences of their supervisory relationships. Assuring participants of the confidentiality of the data obtained and their anonymity in any reporting of the data was an essential ethical dimension of the researcher-participant relationship. The entire database of interviews, documents, field notes, memoranda and a journal was kept in accordance with the confidentiality requirements of the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Approval Number ECN-12-235.

A less obvious ethical consideration is that supervisors were being asked to reveal normally undisclosed, and highly protected aspects of their doctoral pedagogy and practice. To do so in any meaningful or deep way would require them to be open and candid with the researcher. Supervisors needed to be confident enough in their supervisory practices and in their relationship with their candidates to risk their candidates’ sharing with the researcher negative feedback about the supervisor or making potentially critical remarks. Triangulation among supervisor and candidate participants using the interview and documentary data was employed through member checking and no leading questions were asked. Instead, the interview questions were open ended as described by Spradley (1979, p. 46) for this purpose, and then member checked with each participant to ensure the exact meaning by the participant was recorded and that the researcher’s interpretation of resulting themes accorded with
participants’ intentions. These were sensitive issues that required an exemplary ethical approach, because the majority of supervisors were at professorial or associate professorial levels that have strong connotations in academe in terms of professionalism. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 212), negotiating outcomes with participants provides a means of preventing exploitation of participants. Further, member checking played an important role in developing trust and rapport between the participants and the researcher. Each participant was able to check the accuracy of the transcript of their interview and make changes to the transcript. In addition, through second interviews and communication by e-mails, participants were able to check and contribute to the constructions of knowledge and meaning as they emerged in the data collection and analysis process. Such negotiated outcomes were essential to establishing credibility in the eyes of the participants.

It was always intended that the participants in the present investigation should be empowered by learning more about their own supervisory experience, in the case of candidates, and their supervisory practice, in the case of supervisors. Candidates reported that it was empowering to have had an opportunity to talk about their experience of their supervisory relationship. Candidates also acquired a better understanding of their supervisory relationships, and the academic conventions that must be observed and tacitly mastered. In this vein, they described what it meant to be socialised into an academic culture and their academic community during their candidature. Supervisors were also empowered, because they were able to reflect on their supervisory practices and foster greater professional self-awareness. Through exposure to the key themes raised by the research, they developed a deeper knowledge and understanding of supervisory qualities promoting successful supervisory relationships. Supervisors reported being better able to discuss, understand and share best practice in supervision concerning key emotional aspects in candidature that are largely unaddressed in the literature to date.

**Concluding remarks**

This chapter has presented in detail an account of the research design and method for the present investigation. *Naturalistic Inquiry* was considered to provide a suitable framework to an investigation that required an understanding of the culture, experiences and issues associated with doctoral supervisory relationships. With its
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blend of constructivist epistemology, interpretive theoretical perspective, and ethnographic approach to data collection, a naturalistic approach allowed for flexibility and at the same time provided the rigour of the design, data collection and analysis strategies that ensured trustworthiness of the findings.

In the following four data chapters, excerpts from the individual interviews and documentary data are used extensively in order to privilege the voice of the participants as they shed light on the elements of highly valued doctoral supervisory relationships as experienced by candidates and their supervisors. These four chapters provide an account of the participants’ experiences of the liminal space of candidature (Chapter 5), supervisory ways of being in the relationship (Chapter 6), core values, beliefs and attitudes (Chapter 7), and reciprocity and valuing academic community (Chapter 8).
Chapter 5

The Liminal Space of Candidature

This chapter and the following three chapters report findings from the investigation. Insights and themes to emerge from the data are outlined and evidenced by illustrative extracts from both the individual interviews and documentary data. All four data chapters necessarily privilege the voices of the participants because, as was explained in Chapter 1, this investigation principally addresses candidates’ and supervisors’ experiences of the dispositional qualities that well-regarded doctoral supervisors embody in their supervisory relationships. The identities of all participants have been protected as was explained in Chapter 4. Appendix E shows how participants were coded to facilitate the tracking and reporting of quotes.

The chapter begins with the participants’ accounts of candidates’ experiences of liminal states during their candidature. It makes reference to the relevant literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 which shows that doctoral candidates may experience candidature as creative and empowering, though at times they may also experience unsettling feelings of anxiety and loss of confidence in their intellectual abilities as developing scholars. There follows a detailed explanation of candidates’ and supervisors’ views about the anxiety, ambiguity, and uncertainty experienced by candidates and of the ways in which candidates made the transitions needed to cross intellectual thresholds. The chapter concludes with an account of how the nature of supervisors’ dispositional qualities and ‘ways of being’ in supportive supervisory relationships mitigated, to some extent, according to candidates’ claims, their feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and intellectual and emotional vulnerability as developing scholars.

Difficulty with troublesome knowledge and processes

An emerging theme concerns challenges that candidates experienced with difficulties with knowledge and processes that fall into the cognitive domain of candidature. Most of the participating candidates and supervisors reported that candidates faced intellectual challenges throughout candidature that were also highly emotional experiences. A supervisor described the difficulties of candidature in strong terms,
illustrating the difficult intellectual challenges that candidates face in terms of intellectual ‘stretching’:

I think a PhD is one of the most difficult endeavours that most students will ever undergo. The challenges are substantial. I often say to students I’m not sure we ever again reach that level of intellectual stretch that you really need, particularly when you’re in that phase of analysing your data and trying to pull the ‘so what’ out of it. (SSS2)

In addition to difficulty with troublesome knowledge, a few participants referred to the difficulty that candidates’ experienced with troublesome processes during candidature, such as understanding the nature and purpose of conceptual frameworks in the thesis. One candidate described his feelings of discomfort about his ability to think and work at a conceptual level:

I cannot get this concept in my head, link these two concepts together, or get some of the stuff in order in a scholarly fashion. My confirmation was awful, it turns out that I did not have a clue what I was talking about. So, if I am going to be asked difficult questions or asked about theory that I have not considered yet, that makes me feel very on edge and guarded. (HC1)

This candidate also described how he felt frustrated that he was unable to cross the threshold to conceptualisation:

At the end of my first year of candidature my supervisor and I had reached an impasse. That is the word she used. She didn’t know how to get me through a hole in my understanding of the theory, and I didn’t know how to communicate that gap with her, so we’d reached this point of frustration. The relationship was very difficult. She said you have to get the theory right, but I did not understand how she was using the terms. I think we both felt like we were bashing our heads against brick walls. (HC1)

Importantly, the candidate perceived his supervisor as also feeling frustrated and that she was unable to assist him to move forward intellectually, which made their relationship very challenging. This candidate’s report of his supervisor’s inability demonstrates that even though members of an academic community may share an understanding about the important role of conceptualisation in doctoral study, because knowledge is often tacit, it remains unstated and is not easy to convey to candidates at a conscious and practical level. The difficulty that the candidate reported with making progress at a conceptual level is consistent with Trafford’s (2008) observation that in
addition to troublesome knowledge in a candidate’s specialism, doctoral candidature as a learning process also has its own threshold concepts. Trafford (2008, p. 274) contends that developing a conceptual framework is often troublesome for candidates, and that they are “unable to create a framework for use in their own research.” Parry (2007, p. 77) also found that when the process of conceptualisation takes a considerable length of time to master it “… can seriously jeopardise a student’s motivation to keep going.” In the present investigation, the above candidate’s description of emotional discomfort shows the ways in which the supervisory relationship is challenged. Evidently, supervisors are also affected by their candidate’s emotions and may be required to make meaning of the uncomfortable feelings experienced by their candidates.

A regularly reported difficulty concerned the academic writing required to meet the standard required at the level of the PhD thesis. One candidate explained how developing his academic writing was a particular concern to him:

There are times when it felt really tough. There have been aspects of my PhD that I have found very difficult, especially with developing my writing. (HC2)

Many participating candidates reported greatly appreciating their supervisor’s understanding of the emotional discomfort they experienced with difficult aspects of candidature. A candidate illustrated the nature of her supervisor’s understanding, encouragement and support:

She understood the difficulty and what I was actually going through. She told me to hang on in there, because we all go through this sort of process. (HC2)

The supervisor’s choice of words appeared to set a tone in the supervisory relationship that conveyed to the candidate that she had experienced a similar process of learning and, therefore, could understand the candidate’s feelings. This description is consistent with Rogers’ (1961, p. 284) condition of “empathetic understanding” in the facilitator towards the learner, which he regarded as a critical factor in developing the necessary learning environment for significant learning to take place.

A candidate reported on her experience of intellectual difficulty and the feeling of wanting to give up during her candidature. She relied heavily on the encouraging
nature of the support she received from her supervisor to make intellectual progress in
her candidature:

He never dropped the baton. I on the other hand, would say I cannot do this and he
would say, “Yes you can, just keep going. Now all you have to do is this, and why
don’t you send me three pages by next Tuesday.” So, he held the line. I found it hard to
do ... It is a humbling process. … I am a better woman, a better academic, and [a] better
thinker because of [experiencing] this difficulty. (SSC1)

Another candidate explained that she felt particularly well supported by her
supervisors when they acknowledged her difficulties in solving problems presented
during candidature, and when they suggested alternative approaches to the problem:

There are times when it is tough. Supervisors can’t necessarily change that or take that
away, but they can acknowledge that for you and support you by giving you …
different ways of thinking about things, and different approaches. (SSC2)

Several of the participating supervisors reported that they handled their candidate’s
difficulties in the cognitive domain of candidature by acknowledging to candidates
that they have strong negative emotions about these difficulties and by providing a
steady commitment of support to their candidates. A supervisor described how he
viewed his role as providing personal support to his candidates:

Candidature is an emotional cycle. So, you have to sit down with the candidate when
they’re panicked, be calm and just work through things systematically. (APS2)

The tone of this supervisor’s description shows his availability to address his
candidate’s emotional responses to difficulty in candidature and to communicate well
with the candidate concerning emotional issues, qualities which are consistent with
and Wisker (2005, p. 51), who all refer to the need for supervisors to have excellent
communication skills in the supervisory relationship. Further, in the case of the above
supervisor in the present investigation, he made a connection with his candidate on a
personal and emotional level, which Kandlbinder and Peseta, (2001, p. 3) found to be
important to candidates in their experience of support in successful supervisory
relationships.

There was a strongly emotional dimension to the ways in which many participating
candidates reported their experiences of crossing intellectual thresholds during
candidature. Making intellectual progress was important to candidates’ perceptions that they were becoming more confident and independent during candidature. A candidate reported how in passing her confirmation of candidature presentation she felt like she had crossed an emotional threshold:

There is something, on an emotional level, like a threshold, with getting through the candidature assessment that made me feel a lot more confident and independent. It [the process of confirmation of candidature] was quite an affirming type of process, I found. (APC1)

This candidate’s description of feeling affirmed by her success in her confirmation of candidature shows how achieving this milestone made her feel more self-confident, which she linked to a shift in her relationship with her supervisor: to one where she felt more independent. This description is consistent with the importance of the candidate’s developing independence to maintaining a healthy balance of power in the supervisory relationship, as referred to in Chapter 2. Concerning the notion of emerging candidate independence, a participating supervisor described the importance of her role in facilitating the critical emotional shift to where candidates feel confident that they can achieve doctoral outcomes:

For many … [candidates] … the emotional journey is arduous. It is tough on most PhD students. There are not a whole lot of things in your life where you say from time to time, I cannot do this. The [supervisory] relationship in those situations becomes critically important because it is my job to facilitate the shift where they recognise and own that they can do it. (SSS2)

In order for participating candidates to successfully negotiate the intellectual challenges and emotional difficulties presented by candidature, they clearly needed and valued unswerving supervisory support. Supervisory support was characterised by acknowledging and understanding the intellectual difficulties that candidates experienced during their candidature. Evidently, a supportive supervisory relationship that facilitates the necessary shifts for candidates to feel more confident in owning their candidature with a growing sense of scholarly authority is personal, empathetic and committed.
Troublesome emotional aspects of candidature

All participants acknowledged that all of the participating candidates experienced some anxiety in the affective domain of candidature, in addition to the difficulties they experienced in the cognitive domain. A number of the participants reported that these anxious feelings concerned ambiguity, uncertainty and transitions in candidates’ scholarly identity formation that occurred during candidature. In Chapter 3, it was discussed how existential concerns, such as anxiety, are rarely discussed in the relevant literature. Candidates and supervisors reported the ways in which they made meaning of these existential concerns and feelings experienced by candidates.

Anxiety, ambiguity and uncertainty

All the participating candidates reported experiencing some feelings of anxiety during their candidature. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 points out that candidate anxiety is an inherent part of the PhD terrain for many candidates (see, for example, Stubb et al., 2011, p. 33). A candidate conveyed how difficult she found the constant anxiety during her candidature:

It is difficult … it is relentless. It never goes away, even on Christmas day we think we should actually just read that last chapter! It is like having homework that is never finished. Sometimes, I dealt with the anxiety better than others did, but it is a long, hard, lonely trail. (SSC1)

Another candidate described how at every stage of candidature there were different challenges, all of which made her feel anxious:

The key anxieties were the ethics thing that was quite challenging – it did take me months and months to get mine approved so that was quite stressful. Another thing that caused anxiety … is I did not have the data to move forward. There were delays with some of the interviews … that made me quite anxious. I knew I would never get it done in three years, but it really blew out and especially when you are working with government departments, there is pressure on it being finished because they part-funded the scholarship. In addition, near the end there is this huge amount of pressure to finish. You have it all written, but in my case, it was over the word limit. I had to get it back and that made me very anxious, … and I thought, “I can’t do this”. (SSC2)

This candidate also reported that her anxiety remained constant throughout her PhD journey. In addition to the practical challenges that presented in her investigation, she
reported having feelings of anxiety about not being on schedule, which had an impact on her levels of confidence that she could complete her PhD. A supervisor pointed out that candidate anxiety could be debilitating, intimating that it could have the effect of impeding the candidate’s progress in candidature:

I think the anxiety is there throughout the journey. Anxiety can be really debilitating for the student. (SSS2)

A candidate described the way in which her anxiety was reduced by her supervisor’s skill in breaking down a problem into manageable steps, with achievable goals. The candidate reported:

He helps me by taking an overwhelming big thing or problem I have, and helping me to break it up into manageable parts, and outlining things a little bit more. That takes some of the anxiety away. (NSC2)

Another supervisor explained that difficulties in the personal life of the candidate could also produce anxiety during candidature:

The nature of the anxiety varies from stage to stage during the thesis. I reckon that anxiety coming from matters outside the thesis is usually greater than anxieties to do with the thesis. Because it’s a long period of time that you’re tied with this thing especially if you’re doing it part time, and there’s a lot that goes on in people’s lives. (SSS1)

Presenting another point of view on the issue of candidate anxiety and its impact on candidature, a supervisor reported that the different challenges posed by the stages of candidature had accompanying anxieties for candidates. He had a more complacent view of anxiety as being a normal part of the research process:

With anxiety… there are going to be tensions … at different points in the process of candidature, and that is the nature of doing a research degree, it is just inherent. (APS1)

Adding to the notion of anxiety as inherent in the research process, another supervisor argued that to some extent anxiety was a necessary part of the candidate’s intellectual development:

To some extent, there is a role for intellectual anxieties in the whole scholarly endeavour. In this process of PhD candidature, they have to encounter something difficult and overcome it. (NS1)
These descriptions show that there is a fine distinction between a normal amount of anxiety due to engaging in a scholarly endeavour that, as Meyer and Land (2006, p. xiv) argue, ought to be challenging if it is to be transformative, and anxiety that hinders the intellectual progress of the candidate. As Trafford (2008, p. 274) points out, doctoral candidates must approach and master threshold concepts in candidature, in order to make progress in the journey towards “doctorateness.” In the present investigation, evidence from participating supervisors suggests that the supervisory relationship provides a learning environment that helps candidates to face up to and deal with the anxiety and self-doubt experienced during candidature.

While anxiety may well be an inevitable part of doctoral candidature, a number of insights emerged that illuminate and advance the literature concerning candidate anxiety. One key source of difficulty for a few candidates was the fear of ambiguity, or lack of clarity, about what they were doing, or how they were proceeding in their research. These candidates reported that they found the tacit nature of learning from their supervisors to be profoundly ambiguous because of the inability to check understandings verbally with them, which in turn exacerbated their feelings of anxiety. One candidate explained how anxious she felt about not understanding her supervisor’s academic values and priorities:

There is a certain obscurity to some of the [supervisory] conversations, and [one needs to work out] priorities and values that take a while to understand, and that make[s] you anxious. [Also], not understanding what are the priorities and values of the endeavour.

(APC1)

Lack of clarity about the supervisor’s priorities and values as well as a lack of clarity about the PhD itself provides an additional aspect to the ambiguity felt by candidates during doctoral candidature. The reported feelings of anxiety of participating candidates are consistent with Land, Meyer and Smith’s (2008, p. xi) contention that undergraduate learners need to learn the “often tacit games of enquiry or ways of thinking and practicing inherent within specific disciplinary knowledge practices.” Spinelli (2005, p. 114) from an existential point of view argues that ambiguity is “disquieting” because of the sense of meaninglessness that this feeling may invoke. In the present investigation, a participating candidate explained that she viewed candidature as a journey in which her intellectual capacity was expanding. This
description illuminates how important to making progress in candidature is the candidate’s process of making meaning of fear of ambiguity:

I did try to remain calm and say, I am unclear about what is going to happen, but it is out of my control, … there is not much I can do about this. You have to have patience. Moreover, knowing it is a journey [is important], and you are not doing a PhD just as a means to an end, to produce a thesis. It is supposed to be a personal journey for you in terms of expanding your thinking and knowledge. (SSC2)

In addition to ambiguity, several of the candidates reported experiencing anxiety as a result of feelings of uncertainty, mostly resulting from self-doubt about their ability to successfully achieve the standard required for the PhD. One candidate described her lack of self-confidence as an on-going crisis:

There is always present, to a greater or lesser degree, a crisis in confidence and the resulting anxiety that this crisis creates is something that I monitor, but basically have to endure. (SSC1)

Another candidate spoke for many when she linked her lack of self-confidence to negative feelings concerning self-worth about her intellectual capacity:

The anxiety is very much about your worthiness, and whether you just haven’t got sufficient capacity to really engage in that level of work. (APC1)

One participating candidate reported experiencing anxiety and self-doubt about whether he measured up to what his supervisors required of him in candidature, particularly what was required for him to achieve within the requisite timeframe. He explained his feelings of inadequacy in this way:

… there is anxiety around feelings of inadequacy and meeting the deadlines and pleasing people [his supervisors]. (HC1)

This candidate’s explanation resonates with Parry’s (2007, p. 127) finding that for considerable periods of time during candidature, many candidates perceive that their skills do not match the demands of candidature, and that some believe they are pretending they are intellectually capable of completing a doctorate, but also fear that they are not.

While candidate anxiety clearly related to fears about a lack of intellectual confidence and scholarly capability, some candidates also reported experiencing anxiety because
they were emotionally vulnerable to critical feedback from their supervisors, and from the wider academic community. One mature doctoral candidate who was highly experienced in her profession described how the repeated risk taken in exposure her intellectual vulnerability to her academic community made her feel anxious:

Candidature involves a lot of conferencing as well, standing up repeatedly and discussing different aspects of the doctoral work at international conferences, and also writing for peer reviewed journals, which is sort of anxiety provoking. There is self-disclosure, there is self-exposure, as you are asked repeatedly to discuss your topic and project in all aspects, and justify it, and be knowledgeable about all the contributors in the field. That is very anxiety provoking. (APC1)

While most of the candidates reported experiencing an uncomfortable state of ambiguity, which accompanied them throughout their candidature, they stressed the importance of the supervisor embodying certain reassuring attitudes, such as belief in the candidate’s ability, which could largely mitigate such negative feelings. A candidate, for example, gave expression to feeling empowered by her supervisors’ trust and confidence in her ability to succeed:

I came into the PhD without having a strong academic background. So, they took me on, a bit of a risk there. I felt like I did not know all the answers in terms of where I was heading, but there was always a sense of complete trust and faith in me, affirming that I would get there in the end. Her trust empowered me to find the right ways [for] myself. (SSC2)

Another illustrative example on the importance of the supervisor’s belief in the candidate’s scholarly ability is shown in an e-mail communication between a candidate and his supervisor. The candidate had been accepted to present a paper at an international conference. The candidate wrote:

FYI! Accepted for paper presentation. (HC1)

The supervisor replied:

Congratulations! You have to live up to it now. (HS1)

The candidate reported that instead of feeling supported when the supervisor challenged him to do well with the presentation, he interpreted in the tone of the supervisor’s e-mail a considerable lack of faith in his ability to succeed, which left him feeling defensive and less trusting of her. This communication illustrates how
vulnerable candidates may be to the underlying messages they perceive through their supervisor’s choice of words and tone in their written communications. This candidate went on to explain:

I was quite excited by the acceptance and was passing on the news. I was pleased by the first line of her response, but, I did not know what to do with the second line, about having to live up to it now. I did not know how to read it. It seemed to suggest that I would not be able to live up to the responsibility/privilege/opportunity of the conference presentation. I was somewhat deflated by her response. I think this [exchange] explains my lack of self-confidence and defensive stance towards my supervisor at this point. I lost some of my trust in her. (HC1)

Another candidate reported that her supervisor’s faith in her ability to succeed in spite of her lack of experience helped to relieve her feelings of anxiety, and enabled her to make progress with her research investigation:

I was not very experienced in the field of my topic. It has been a big learning process all the way, and my supervisor had faith in me. That somehow took the pressure off. That helped relieve my anxiety, for me to be able to move forward. (NSC2)

In order for candidates to have the self-confidence to make progress during candidature they evidently needed to perceive that their supervisors believed in their potential to succeed. The emerging theme concerning the supervisors’ trust in his or her candidate’s intellectual ability to succeed in their candidature provides a better understanding of the ways in which supervisors provide support to candidates. These ways of support are consistent with Biggs and Tang’s (2007, p. 33) argument that a teacher’s feedback sends powerful messages, either positive or negative, that have effects on a student’s expectations of success. In the present investigation, participating supervisors’ positive beliefs in their candidates aligns closely with Rogers’s (1961, p. 283) condition of “unconditional positive regard”, demonstrated by supervisors having an optimistic view of the candidate’s intellectual and emotional potential to develop during candidature. Further evidence on the importance of the supervisor trusting in their candidate’s ability to succeed to developing supportive supervisory relationships, and on building candidate confidence, is presented in Chapter 7.
A few supervisors reported that some candidates yearned for clear direction from their supervisor during candidature. One supervisor explained his response to his candidates’ needs for his direction in this way:

Some students are looking for very clear direction and a hierarchical relationship, giving them the illusion of safety. The students I work best with will have their own views and approaches, and they should be allowed to express them. (NSS1)

These descriptions of supervisors’ responses to candidates’ fear of the ambiguity that is inherent in doctoral candidature are strongly consistent with Lee’s (A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 274) recommendation to supervisors that, concerning the issue of dependency, less control and direction of the candidate empowers the candidate to become more autonomous and have more control of their candidature.

The reported expressions of feelings of anxiety, and fears around ambiguity and uncertainty experienced in candidature, show the important impact of the affective domain on the self-confidence of candidates concerning their scholarly ability to make intellectual progress. Clearly, a delicate balance is required between the supervisor believing in the ability of the candidate to potentially succeed in achieving doctoral outcomes, and in encouraging greater candidate independence.

**Candidates’ scholarly identity formation**

An emerging theme concerns the role of supervisors in candidates’ perceptions of their scholarly identity formation during the different stages of candidature. Not all doctoral candidates become academics, however, it is well documented in the relevant literature (see Henkel & Vabø, 2006; Becher & Trowler, 2001) that candidates’ learning involves a process of developing their research capabilities and scholarly prowess. Furthermore, McAlpine, Jazvac-Martek and Hopwood (2009, p. 108) found that there was a “broad range of formative day-to-day experiences that were experienced as contributing to a developing identity as an academic.” In the present investigation, a few participating supervisors reported that they were aware of their role in initiating their candidates to academe, if that was what he or she wanted. A supervisor described her role in assisting candidates in the process of learning that occurs during candidature:
Inducting is the word… What I do [for my candidates], well, almost it is a rite of passage, which is very different to having been an undergraduate [student]. The student makes it through a rite of passage in becoming the doctor of philosophy. I have already done the becoming and made that journey and now I can assist the student to do the same. (HS2)

Another supervisor spoke strongly about the importance of the supervisory relationship in beginning the process of developing the candidate’s scholarly identity. She explained:

I think that the [supervisory] relationship for them is quite critical for that whole identity formation to take place. To come to understand what it is to be a researcher and a scholar. The relationship allows the student to explore that, to model that a bit, to take the parts that are relevant and leave the bits that are not. I think the relationship really has many functions quite beyond getting them to the finishing line. I think it is how they form as a scholar. (SSS2)

The above description shows that for many participating supervisors the preferred process of assisting the candidate’s scholarly identity to develop took place within and through the relationship with their supervisor. This insight is illuminated in more detail in Chapter 8.

A few supervisors described the ways in which candidates arrived at new levels of understanding of self as a scholar, and the importance of their having confidence in that developing scholarly identity, particularly, through publishing scholarly articles. A supervisor illustrated this point:

The scholarly identity needs to happen in students. I think it comes from that self-respect of knowing that you have done a good job and that the way I think, and what I have published has benefits for a whole range of reasons; but part of it is that beginning feeling of prowess in their scholarliness. (APS1)

In contrast, a few participating supervisors reported that attempting to develop a scholarly identity was anxiety inducing for candidates. One supervisor described her perception of her candidates’ feelings of anxiety:

The process of becoming a scholar is scary. It makes candidates nervous, and anxious, because you are judged, big time. (HS2)
A small number of supervisors identified with their candidates’ sense of risk-taking in becoming a scholar. They identified, particularly, with how they might be judged as they exposed their intellectual abilities to their supervisors and academic community. Similarly, another supervisor described what it felt like to be judged by the academic community:

Coping with criticism can be stressful. Even you as the supervisor may think that their work is going okay, and someone will read it and throw another angle at it that you hadn’t thought of, which is always useful, but then you have to think, “how do you get around that one?” (APS2)

Evidently, supervisors may also feel intellectually vulnerable to being judged by the academic community because a candidate’s failure to achieve the required standard of work, such as in their academic writing, can reflect negatively on the supervisor. Assisting the process of developing scholarly prowess included the supervisor challenging the candidate to make the required intellectual progress. A supervisor explained the subtleties of the way a candidate’s lack of self-confidence was linked to his dependence on the supervisor in the area of his academic writing. This supervisor described having to ‘push’ her candidate towards independence:

The only time I see him being dependent is with his writing, where he lacks confidence. There has to be a point at which you have to push this person onto their feet. You cannot enable that helpless behaviour, because if you allow it, they will become too dependent on you when that is no good for anyone. (HS3)

The same supervisor further illuminated her attitude towards pushing the candidate’s intellectual thinking to a higher level:

Pushing also means to push their thinking forward – not challenge the candidate’s thinking, but push it further, challenge them to develop it more. (HS3)

The description of ‘pushing’ shows the way most participating supervisors lead and encouraged candidates to think conceptually. The notion of challenging the candidate to become independent is consistent with Doloriert et al.’s (2012, p. 734) argument that in order to minimise dependence a supervisor has to manage the tension between a “directorial” approach, where there is limited candidate autonomy, and a “laissez-fair” approach, where there is minimal supervisory intervention and maximum student autonomy.
A few supervisors reported that they were aware that there is both a cognitive and an affective domain in the supervisory relationship, and of the need to be empathetic in facilitating the required intellectual progress in their candidates. A supervisor explained how important it was to know when to stop intellectually pushing the candidate:

Every PhD student that I work with has had a different capability, if you like. What is really important is to recognise when a student has peaked and to stop pushing. I think that is an art more than a skill in being able to recognise how much is enough for now and how much is enough full stop. And knowing that for this student, this is a phenomenal outcome. Even though compared with this other student, it may not reflect the same level of higher order thinking, or the same hallmarks of a highly scholarly piece of work. (SSS2)

This description demonstrates the supervisor’s intuitive ability to recognise that there is a distinction between intellectual limits at the time, and limits overall. While challenging the candidate is an important role of the supervisor in the supervisory relationship, supervisors pushed each of their candidates to their individual intellectual edge, while at the same time providing empathetic understanding and encouragement, knowing intuitively when to stop pushing, at least for the time being.

A few participating candidates also spoke about feeling intellectually ‘pushed’ by their supervisors. One candidate explained that feeling ‘pushed’ was useful in dealing with her anxiety about her ability to make intellectual progress and succeed in her candidature:

My supervisor deals with my anxiety by focusing on the work, not indulging it, but setting frameworks, pushing me out of my comfort [zone]. That does not sound like helping with the anxiety, but it helps prove my capacity. (APC1)

Another candidate appreciated the manner in which his supervisor ‘pushed’ him to make intellectual progress, and which did not give him negative feelings about his ability as a candidate:

When it is necessary to correct me he will do it. If it is not necessary he will not do it. And the way he does it, the communication is never pushing me hard, or make[s] you feel bad, just very smoothly he corrects your key point. (APC2)
Yet another candidate explained that he felt pushed in his scholarly development by his supervisor:

My supervisor said, “I want a paper for this conference, so write a paper.” Well, how do I go about that? So, I mean pushing me in that sense. However, a pivotal quality is her empathic understanding of being able to know what drives the passion in me and how to get the best out of me, which buttons to push. (HC2)

In this instance, the candidate demonstrated his understanding that being intellectually pushed was targeted towards producing a conference paper, which had the capacity to vastly improve his self-confidence, both intellectually and emotionally. Importantly, this description shows that because the supervisor’s challenge to the candidate was combined with her empathetic understanding, the candidate was able to receive it in a positive manner. Additionally, feeling known and understood by the supervisor had an important impact on the way the candidate experienced his supervisor’s challenge as encouraging him to do his best. These candidates’ descriptions are reminiscent of Rogers’ (1961; 1969) argument that the facilitator’s attitude of empathetic understanding is essential in creating a climate for intellectual and emotional progress to take place, as was discussed in Chapter 3. The notion of a climate for learning is also pursued by Biggs and Tang (2007, p. 48) who refer to the quality of the teaching-learning relationship as the “climate of the relationship”, or the way a student feels about the relationship.

**Manifestation of mindfulness traits**

The majority of participating supervisors displayed many dispositional qualities that include what Siegel (2010, p. 180) calls “mindfulness traits.” Mindfulness traits such as empathy, and being aware of and intentional about behaving in a nonjudgmental and sensitive way are key traits in the helping professionals, according to Siegel (2010, p. 78). Without exception, the participating supervisors in the present investigation described their awareness of how important the quality of the supervisory relationship was to facilitating the intellectual development of their candidates. Taking this awareness further, about half the supervisors described the way they took responsibility for setting the tone for a supportive relationship. One supervisor described the way this worked:
There are going to be tensions at different points obviously, as the nature of a research degree is, and that’s just inherent. So, whatever is in our relationship should not add extra stress [for the candidate]… So, there is a responsibility of taking a lead role and helping them find a way to develop. (APS1)

Another supervisor consciously paid careful attention to listening well. He explained the way in which this strategy supported his candidates, particularly regarding their feelings of anxiety:

My style of developing a relationship is to encourage people to talk. Firstly, so that I can know what is going on and secondly, so that they have an opportunity to get the anxiety off their chest. And often through this process, if I am disciplined and don’t interrupt too much, then often they will see their way through the anxiety [for] themselves by talking about it, without me saying anything. (SSS1)

This supervisor’s awareness of the importance of having well developed listening and questioning skills is again consistent with Wisker et al.’s (2008, p. 81) observation that supervisors need excellent communication skills.

A key strategy that one-third of the participating supervisors employed in their supervision was to tell candidates that the difficulties they were experiencing during candidature were normal. This strategy was very effective in reducing candidates’ feelings of anxiety. This practice is typically used in the context of therapeutic relationships. In the field of neuropsychology, for example, Siegel (2010) explains that when an uncomfortable emotion, such as anxiety, is explicitly and accurately named, the mind is able to make sense of the emotion, and the uncomfortable experience of that emotion is reduced. Siegel terms this process that occurs in the brain “name it, to tame it” (Siegel, 2010, p. 189). In the present investigation, without explicitly using the terminology of ‘name it, to tame it’, these participating supervisors intuitively used this technique to help candidates to make meaning of their feelings of anxiety. A supervisor explained:

Often it is performance-related anxiety. The best way to address that anxiety is to name it and look for every opportunity I can to normalise what they are experiencing. Sometimes it is enough for me to say, “this is hard, and most students find this hard.” (SSS2)
Another supervisor reported how he turned candidate anxiety into a positive motivator. He described naming anxiety as a way of potentially preventing candidate anxiety from becoming debilitating:

If we are aware that [anxiety] is likely, we can actually prevent it by forewarning them as much as we can and just being sensitive. I think anxiety is what gets us out of bed in the morning so, without that, who would be mad enough to do a PhD? So we turn that into productive energy, into an oriented action, rather than passively coping with it. Also telling students that this is natural. (APS1)

Yet another supervisor explained that he used his strategy of naming anxiety as normal for candidates to experience during candidature as a means of reassuring his candidates:

They often have anxieties that you do not normally know anything about. Sometimes they will come out and talk about them. I just talk about the anxiety, and say that is the way it goes, keep trying. (HS1)

Using the same strategy of naming candidates’ emotions to ameliorate their effect, another supervisor named the feeling of wanting to give up towards the end of candidature as normal for candidates:

Even the three years full-time tenure is a long and intense thing. If you talk to most academics, they will tell you that at some point in their PhD they were ready to pack it in. That is normal, and I try to explain that to my students. (NSS1)

Siegel (2010, p. 180) argues that individuals who exhibit “mindfulness traits, such as awareness, and are able to describe with words the internal world, are the ones who can most robustly name it, to tame it.” In the present investigation, the majority of participating supervisors fitted well with this description of mindfulness. They were aware of, and able to name accurately their candidates’ anxieties, which appeared to mitigate those anxieties in candidates.

**Tone of critical feedback**

The majority of candidates reported that an important communication skill displayed by the majority of participating supervisors was their ability to use a positive tone with which they gave candidates critical feedback on their intellectual progress, and on their progress in developing their academic writing. A candidate reported:
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The most relevant stuff to me is direct feedback about the work that I have done. Overall, I feel pretty good. My relationship with my supervisor is friendly, productive, positive and constructive. I always get a lot of good ideas from talking with him. (NSC1)

Another candidate explained that his relationship with his supervisor allowed him to experience critical feedback on his academic writing as stimulating his creativity:

She's just forcing me to articulate more concisely. [She] challenges my thinking and how to articulate my ideas and thoughts in a more concise way … forcing me to get to the heart of the problem. But it's come out of that relationship, in challenging me to think more creatively. (HC2)

An international candidate described his emotional response to the positive tone of his supervisor’s feedback on his academic writing:

Now for overseas students, writing is always a problem, we are trying our best to do that. [My supervisor] very nicely told me you shouldn't write it like that. I find this very, very helpful to me. (APC2)

A key nuance to the way candidates reported perceiving critical feedback was that the manner and tone of the supervisor’s feedback was distinctly positive, and candidates experienced this positivity as encouraging. The insight about the importance of the supervisor’s manner and tone is consistent with Biggs and Tang’s (2007, p. 34) argument that the ways in which teachers communicate to undergraduate students, what they say and how they say it, contains tacit messages that instil expectations about success and failure that are critical to the students’ motivation to persist with learning. In the present investigation, a few participating candidates who claimed that they lacked self-confidence reported that they found their supervisor’s praise about their writing lacked credibility. However, carefully focused encouragement about how to improve candidate performance was a successful strategy to build candidate confidence. A candidate described her experience of feedback as practical encouragement from her supervisor, which she claimed was far more beneficial than generic praise would have been:

My supervisor rarely praised me. Maybe once or twice he said to me, this is well written, but he frequently encouraged me. If he had praised me, I would not have believed him. If he had said, “you’re great, you’re wonderful, you’re marvellous”, I would not have believed him. So, I learnt from him the difference between praise and
encouragement. Encouragement was much more important to me and valuable to me than praise. (SSC1)

The different value to the candidate between praise and encouragement is consistent with Rogers’ (1979, p. 74), assertion that when a person is judged, even positively, such as when praised, they believe they can fail. Also, Biggs (1991, p. 25) argues that personal praise of a student is not helpful for them to learn how to improve their performance. An e-mail communication from a supervisor to his candidate shows the way in which the tone of this supervisor’s communication was encouraging and supportive:

Thanks for the methods section and text for ethics application. It is looking good and I think the whole project is looking increasingly solid and deep. I have added comments and suggested [minor] editing. I hope that they all make sense. Nothing to worry, just detail that will help the ethics application work. (NSS1)

The manner in which this supervisor enacted encouragement was to focus on specific tasks and approaches that the candidate could undertake in small, practical steps. The key to encouragement seems to be to acknowledge specific strengths of the candidate’s work, and to do so “succinctly, since too much is hard to believe”, as Kline (2009, p. 62) argues. The reported encouragement from their supervisors mitigated to a degree some candidates’ claims about anxieties relating to confidence, self-doubt, and intellectual and emotional vulnerability as developing scholars.

There is also a tension for supervisors between giving encouraging critical feedback and allowing their candidate to take responsibility for their thesis. One candidate explained her view of this tension:

Although it is a shared undertaking on many levels, it is your dissertation, you have the full responsibility that it proceeds and is successful. (APC1)

Similarly, a supervisor explained his view on who had the greater responsibility for progressing the PhD:

With a PhD student, they’re the ones that have to see the big context better than I can see [it]. They have got 100% responsibility. (SSS1)

Another supervisor reported a different point of view on the responsibility for successful PhD outcomes:
... you are responsible, really, in the end, for that student’s success. I mean reasonably responsible. If they adamantly won’t listen to you, then I abrogate responsibility, but given they’re doing their job. (HS1)

The different expressions about shared responsibility show that there is a delicate balance required in the tension in the relationship between the candidate’s responsibility for receiving critical feedback from their supervisors and for doing the work of a PhD, and the responsibility of supervisors for the tone of the critical feedback and for providing encouraging support to their candidates.

**Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, various emotional responses to the troublesome aspects that candidates encounter during candidature have been explored. Notably, candidates experienced difficulty with making knowledge gains and with particular processes of candidature, and they experienced discomfort in relation to feelings of anxiety, particularly, those feelings concerning ambiguity and uncertainty during candidature. They made personal meaning of these experiences through perceiving that they were making intellectual progress during candidature, and that this progress occurred with, and through, the unswerving support of their supervisors. Importantly, supervisors were also required to make meaning of their candidate’s experiences of difficulty, because these uncomfortable feelings affected the supervisory relationship.

The existential humanistic perspective of conceptualising supervision in terms of making meaning of experiences of being in the supervisory relationship has provided important insights about the role of supervisory dispositional qualities in the supervisory relationship. Dispositional qualities, such as being empathetic, were found to be particularly important in developing a supportive learning environment for their candidates. The supervisory practice of acknowledging and accurately naming the emotional difficulties for candidates and explaining that the associated feelings were a normal part of candidature was a useful strategy in providing support. Supervisors’ practices of having faith in their candidates’ potential and trusting them to succeed resonate strongly with humanistic theory on person-centred learning. Particularly, the supervisors’ trust in the candidate’s ability to develop intellectually aligns closely with Rogers’ (1969, p. 109) condition of “unconditional positive regard”. Rogers argued that facilitators who are successful in facilitating learning
have an attitude towards the learner of accepting and trusting in the learner’s capacity or potential to learn. In the present investigation, participants reported on the important role of supervisors’ encouragement in building candidate confidence, both in their ability to progress intellectually, and in building their confidence in the relationship as a reliable means of support.

Supervisors claimed to be aware of the importance of the relationship in supporting the process of developing their candidates’ scholarly identity, and took responsibility for the role they played in this aspect of candidature. A key insight was that doctoral supervisors displayed “mindfulness traits” (Siegel, 2010, p. 180), such as, being aware, sensitive, empathetic and nonjudgmental of their candidates, as they challenged their candidates to make the required intellectual progress during candidature.

The following chapter will present the empirical data that illuminate supervisory ‘ways of being’ in the supervisory relationship. In particular, it will provide evidence for the dispositional qualities that supervisors bring to the supervisory relationship, in order to bring into relief the way in which these qualities tacitly develop supportive supervisory relationships that are marked by respect and trust.
Chapter 6

‘Ways of Being’ in the Supervisory Relationship

This chapter presents a review and analysis of the data collected on supervisory dispositional qualities that constitute their ways of being in highly valued supervisory relationships. The term ‘ways of being’ refers to the manner in which a supervisor relates to their candidate and the ways in which the candidate perceives the qualities they embody in the relationship. It is important to note that the focus of the interviews was on the dispositional qualities that supervisors bring to their supervisory relationships, not on models and styles of supervision, or personalities of the supervisors. Importantly, the majority of participants perceived very similar supervisory qualities as supportive in the relationship, regardless of different models, styles, personalities of supervisors and indeed, regardless of disciplinary differences of supervisors.

The relevance of the non-verbal aspects of communication to successful interpersonal communication and the development of rapport between a doctoral candidate and a supervisor were established in Chapter 2. Additionally, the relevant literature on the personal attributes and professional behaviours that are characteristic of successful supervisors was discussed. However, little is known about the ways in which these characteristics are expressed non-verbally through dispositional qualities that are tacitly experienced by candidates. This chapter reports on participants’ experiences of these qualities. It also reports on the relevance of an existential humanistic perspective to the ways in which supervisory pairs perceived and made meaning of their experiences of being in a supervisory relationship.

The chapter begins with the participants’ accounts of the role of the professional expertise of the supervisor in doctoral supervision. It then presents participants’ claims that the supervisory relationship was important to assisting the candidate’s progression in candidature. Attention is given to the ways in which supervisors’ dispositional qualities facilitate non-verbal communication that creates a positive tone and rapport in the relationship. An account is given of supervisors’ ability to be congruent, or ‘real’ in the relationship, as was discussed in Chapter 3. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the implications to supportive supervisory
relationships of supervisors’ intentionality in embodying certain dispositional qualities in their relationships with candidates.

**Professional expertise**

The majority of participants reported that the professional expertise of the supervisor was important to candidates making intellectual progress in their candidature. One candidate commented on the importance to her scholarly development of being able to access her supervisor’s academic knowledge and experience:

> I was there to learn and develop through this experience, so it was important that I took the knowledge and experience of my supervisor and ask for it. (SSC2)

Another candidate explained that his supervisor’s professional experience was an important component of his supervision:

> He has vast professional experience, which was essential to me. I have not had any sort of direction that I had not thought was useful and intelligent. (NSC1)

Yet another candidate appreciated the nature of her supervisor’s research knowledge and experience:

> My supervisor brings in a lot of research knowledge and experience. He seems to have a large capacity to see a big picture in a small detail, and think about what may be involved in it besides the obvious, and how everything might link together. (NSC2)

A supervisor also described her professional expertise in supervision in terms of her knowledge and experience:

> At the beginning, you will have more knowledge and experience than the candidate. They trust you to draw on that and give them good advice to get them going. (APS1)

Most of the participating supervisors had substantial experience in supervising candidates. A supervisor described the way his broad academic experience had given him a deeper understanding of the dynamics in supervisory relationships, and shown him ways to manage conflict:

> I have had to manage disputes between candidates and supervisors, or it can be between the supervisor and candidate and the ethics committee, or other institutions. This experience benefits me in my relationships with candidates. (APS2)
Chapter 6: ‘Ways of being’ in the supervisory relationship

This supervisor’s report of managing conflict in supervisory relationships points to the importance of the supervisor having strongly developed interpersonal communication skills. The need for such skills is consistent with Grant’s (2003, p. 175) argument that supervision differs from other forms of teaching and learning in higher education in its requirement for supervisors to have high levels of both professional expertise, such as intellect, professional experience and research knowledge and expertise, and interpersonal relationship building skills.

Importance of the supervisory relationship

All participating supervisors claimed that the supervisory relationship was important to successful supervision. A supervisor explained that for him, maintaining the relationship was intentional:

I think the relationship is central. Adult relationships are the conscious ability to form and maintain relationships under difficult times. (APS1)

Another supervisor described the importance of the relationship in terms of the value candidates placed on the relationship:

For some [candidates] the supervisor is as important as the thesis, the quality of the relationship is really very important. Some [candidates] have said how important the interpersonal relationship is as the reason for them getting through. (SSS1)

In their reflections about their supervisory relationships and the role of the supervisory relationship in providing them with an enriching study experience, all participating candidates reported that the relationship was important to their making progress in candidature. A candidate described in strong terms the importance of the supervisory relationship to her candidature:

… foundational, fundamental, yes, absolutely important, ... it is the journey! (APC1)

The claims of participants on how important the supervisory relationship was to the supervision of candidates and to candidates making progress in their candidature confirm the assertion of many authors, including Wisker (2005; 2012) and Kiley (2011b), that the relationship is central to successful supervision, as was discussed in Chapter 2.
Many participants described the various ways in which the relationship was important to their making progress in candidature. A few candidates described a high level of personal support as being critical to making progress in candidature. One candidate explained:

[The relationship is] critical. I do not know how you can get through [candidature] if you do not have those important relationships in terms of what is an incredibly demanding journey. Your own drive, perseverance, and hard work gets you so far, but it is the relationship with my supervisors and the levels of personal support that gets you through. (SSC2)

Another candidate also expressed how having a good relationship with her supervisor was critically important to the continuity of her learning during candidature:

The nature of the relationship is very important, critical. If you have a good relationship, doing a difficult job is made easier. If you have a difficult relationship, well … my colleagues, my fellow students, groaned and complained bitterly about their supervisors and changed supervisors and it disrupted their learning. (SSC1)

The view of all the participating supervisors was that the relationship was pivotal in candidates progressing successfully during candidature. Many of these supervisors perceived that understanding their candidates’ needs was an important aspect to the success of their relationships. A supervisor commented, using strong terms:

I think the relationship is ‘make or break’ for your success in doing your PhD. I fundamentally believe that. I feel for students where they do not perceive the relationship as understanding their needs. (SSS2)

A few participants used the term, ‘safe’, to describe the supervisory relationship. The notion of an intellectually and emotionally ‘safe’ environment as a prerequisite to learning, growth and change was raised in Chapter 3. A candidate identified particular supervisory qualities, which she reported made the relationship feel safe:

I feel safe in the relationship. I feel that he likes me, that we have a positive relationship, we are friendly, and there is warmth in the relationship. (SSC1)

A supervisor explained that good communication was critical to developing and maintaining a safe supervisory relationship:
The [supervisory] relationship should be a place of safety; to talk about, not just at structured points but right through, and have grounding conversations about how happy and satisfied we are with what's happening and about being clear that we've got the same vision. (APS1)

These descriptions show that there are attitudinal elements and dispositional qualities in supervisors, such as friendliness, warmth, and the ability to communicate well, that create an emotional environment that candidates perceived and experienced as ‘safe’, and in which the relationship could flourish. This perception of ‘safety’ strongly aligns with Rogers’ (1961, p. 115) concept of the “safe” facilitatory relationship, which according to Rogers is essential for significant learning.

The link between candidate anxiety and a lack of self-confidence in his or her intellectual ability was discussed in Chapter 5. A key insight reported by many participants was that encouragement is an important supervisory quality that provides candidates with support and that develops candidates’ self-confidence. This section presents in further detail how, in all but one of the supervisory relationships reported, the relationship was instrumental in building candidates’ self-confidence in their perception of themselves as developing scholars. One candidate described her feelings of confidence in the relationship:

If they [her supervisors] were talking about things that I did not quite understand, because I felt confident in the relationship, I felt confident to say, “Can you explain that?” … Through that, you build a deeper [scholarly] understanding. (SSC2)

This candidate claimed that it was her confidence in the relationship that gave her the self-confidence to be intellectually vulnerable with her supervisors. The insight that candidates need to feel comfortable to share negative feelings, such as fears of inadequacy and be in a close, personally secure supervisory relationship sheds further light on Styles and Radloff’s (2000, p. 212) finding that “some students may consider they are the only ones to feel negative, and that it would be unwise to admit these feelings in case supervisors are offended or think the student weak or not capable of doctoral level work.”

The majority of participating supervisors reported that they understood the importance of fostering a candidate’s self-confidence as a developing scholar. A
supervisor explained that his role was to give his candidates confidence concerning their scholarly work:

[Supervisory] relationships can break down. For example, the candidate can lose confidence in themselves … when a supervisor says rewrite that and rewrite that. It happens if supervisors get too demanding. From the candidate’s perspective, they are looking to you to provide that guidance, assurance and confidence in themselves. I’m always trying to give candidates the confidence to see that their work is ready, and getting it published. (APS2)

This expression is consistent with the work of Walker et al. (2008, p. 112) who argue that an effective strategy is for supervisors to have “enormous confidence in students … it is enabling like nothing else.” Another supervisor explained that she built her candidates’ confidence through having empathy:

My supervisor was really distant, and took ages to send me things back. I lost confidence, hugely. So, my supervision is very empathetic, and I give them confidence. (HS2)

The reference to distance in the relationship as not being conducive to building the candidate’s confidence is consistent with Sinclair’s (2004) assertion that a distant relationship with a supervisor does not provide the majority of candidates with the necessary guidance and support. Sinclair (2004, p. 7) refers to a “hands off” or distant approach that some supervisors take that leaves the candidate largely to their own devices, which is only successful in the minority of cases where the candidate is already “self-confident, independent, knowledgeable and skilled.” Sinclair asserts that supervisors who take a “hands on” approach that is more close and interventionist have more effective supervisory relationships (Sinclair, 2004, p. 7).

A further nuance to building candidate self-confidence is the importance of candidates’ reported feelings that their supervisor understood them. One candidate did not feel understood by his supervisor. He reported that this perception had negatively affected his self-confidence in his intellectual ability:

I do not think she understands me. I would say that has a lot to do with my lack of confidence more than anything does. (HC1)

Another candidate described how her relationship with her supervisor had helped her to gain confidence to take ownership of her academic writing:
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You have to establish your relationship with your supervisor that privileges your body of study in that relationship. I guess the key is to have the confidence to know that it is your study, and that you have to write it. My relationship allowed me to set those sorts of understandings in place. (APC1)

The notion of the supervisor having faith in the candidate’s potential to succeed was raised in Chapter 3. Trusting in the potential of the candidate’s intellectual ability to develop explains the ways in which many supervisors built their candidates’ self-confidence in developing their scholarly abilities. A supervisor explained that her trust in a candidate’s ability to develop academically was an important factor in building the self-confidence of candidates:

One of the … difficult things for students, very often, is they are stepping out of being fabulous practitioners in one domain that they have come to know and be confident in, very often into a different [academic] domain. Whether it is articulated or not, while the relationship is building, you have to attend to their confidence levels. You have to trust that they can do it. (SSS2)

Similarly, another supervisor described how having confidence in the candidate’s ability to succeed in candidature helped to build trust in the relationship:

For some candidates, the supervisor is as important as the thesis, so the quality of the relationship is very important. The high level of trust that is placed in the supervisor is trust on technical grounds. But more important, it is trust on interpersonal grounds. Their trust is based on my … confidence that they can do it if they put their minds to it. (SSS1)

In stark contrast, one supervisor reported that she had a more negative perception of her candidate’s progress, and described being constantly concerned and worried about the progress that he was making:

I am certainly always very concerned that the student is progressing, and what I feel is continually improving, changing, and moving. If they are not, I begin to get worried. (HS1)

This supervisor’s candidate reported that he perceived from her non-verbal communication that she lacked confidence and trust in his ability to succeed:

I have sometimes felt from my supervisor, “I don’t think you know what you’re doing” or “you really haven’t got this together.” Those things may have been true, but I didn’t
feel like my supervisor was confident I could get through it, and trusted that it would be good in the end. (HC1)

These descriptions show that in this supervisory relationship, the supervisor’s lack of confidence in the candidate’s potential to succeed had a critical impact on the candidate’s confidence in himself, and in his belief that he had the ability to succeed in achieving doctoral outcomes. Evidently, positive attitudes from the supervisor, such as trusting in the candidate’s potential to succeed in achieving the required doctoral outcomes, were important to building candidate confidence as they progressed and developed as scholars. This idea is consistent with Rogers’ (1961) argument concerning facilitators of learning that:

… underlying all the facilitator’s behaviour is the trust he feels in the capacity of his student to develop their human potential. This trust cannot be faked, it is not a technique, the facilitator can only be as trusting as he is, if it is real even in a narrow area it will have a facilitating effect on the development, growth and change in the student. (p. 75)

The majority of participating candidates in the present investigation reported that they were confident about their ownership of their doctoral theses, and that their supervisors had faith in their ability to succeed in achieving doctoral outcomes. Many of the participating supervisors reported that they were aware that candidates needed a high level of self-confidence in order to complete the PhD. For some of these supervisors, the act of developing candidates’ confidence in their growing scholarly expertise could only occur within an empathetic and supportive supervisory relationship. This insight adds nuances to the work of Walker et al. (2008, p. 112) who report that candidates are empowered when their supervisors have confidence in their intellectual abilities as developing scholars.

**Interpersonal communication skills**

Many of the participating supervisors reported certain dispositional qualities and attitudes that they claimed were responsible for effective communication in the relationship. One supervisor described the tacit nature of effective communication in the supervisory relationship in terms of her ability to read body language:

People who are good communicators … understand how people are; we intuit how they are feeling. We read body language, we read what’s being said and what’s not being
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said and tone of voice and, you know, presence. … It’s not aura, but you pick up the visual. … It is not just about having good written communication. It is the semiotics of the body I suppose, body language and that way of communicating. (HS3)

Another supervisor described ease and trust as the key qualities that developed rapport in the relationship. She also remarked on her difficulty to explain how she enacted these non-verbal qualities in her supervisory relationships:

The ability to make people feel at ease, and to trust me and to tell me things is important. I actually do not know how I do this. [Laughter] … and in some ways I do not want to know. (HS2)

Several candidates reported that they experienced their supervisory relationships as overwhelmingly positive. An international candidate described how his supervisor picked up his tacit cues and responded in an appropriately positive manner:

He knows that I have a language problem, so he always writes down things. He can see that I cannot say something and he looks at my face and sees that I cannot understand. He says, “Okay, I can write that down more clearly.” This makes me feel very comfortable. (APC2)

A few participating candidates reported that their supervisors’ positivity was important to their making progress during their candidature. One candidate explained that his supervisor used tacit cues to encourage him towards scholarly excellence:

Sometimes, he prepared food for me in his office and this makes me feel very comfortable. There is no pressure. He says, it is good, your research. He never directly indicates that it is better for you to publish … or, you had better present at the conference, but he always encourages me attend doctoral symposia or a conference. Other supervisors say you have to, and they are pushy, pushing. I feel always encouraged to do my best. (APC2)

Another candidate described the relationship as being friendly, productive and constructive, which he claimed allowed him to think creatively about his thesis:

My relationship with my supervisor is positive. It is friendly, productive, and constructive. I always get good ideas from talking with him. (NSC1)

Clearly, supervisor friendliness, as different from being in a friendship with the candidate, is conducive to supervisors’ developing an environment for learning, similar to Rogers’ climate for significant learning (Rogers, 1969, p. 164). Further, this
candidate’s response is consistent with Rogers’ (1969, p. 163) argument that the facilitatory relationship fosters the freedom for a person to be himself, which he argued is a critical ingredient in a learner’s creative thinking and work.

A few supervisors reported that encouraging candidates so that they felt more positive about their candidature was intrinsically rewarding to them and that they valued creating a positive tone in the relationship. A supervisor reported how encouraging candidates was rewarding to her work in supervision:

It’s really rewarding when I have student attend a supervision session and [they] say, “I don’t get this”, or “I’m over this, I don’t understand this” or “I don’t know where to take this” or “I can’t make sense of this”, and to have an hour, hour and a half with the student that encourages them to get up with a spring in their step and walk out the door and say, “I can do this. I know what to do next and I’ll have this back to you by next Tuesday”, and away we go. (SSS2)

A candidate reflected on how his supervisor’s understanding of his personal situation had helped create a positive tone in the relationship, which had encouraged him to persevere in his studies:

A couple of years ago I had a major accident. I took a bit of time off and he was very understanding and positive, which has been really helpful. If they can understand what is going on outside your academic life … and have an allowance for it, that permits you to take the time to fix up whatever it is, heal yourself, and then come back to the study. (NSC1)

Further qualities reported by a few supervisors that brought a positive tone to the relationship were patience, tolerance and having faith in their candidates’ intellectual potential. A supervisor explained that she applied such qualities in her conversations with candidates:

I think we need to be patient. I have had to learn to be patient. There are times when a student sits with me and I think I have had this conversation five times before and here it is again. So learning to have that conversation in a positive way so that the student will say, “I know, but I still haven’t got it.” So, being patient, tolerant, recognising that students will reach their potential. (SSS2)

The notion that supervisors learn and improve how they supervise while doing the work of supervision has important implications for the ways in which dispositional qualities might be cultivated in supervisors, when they are given opportunities to
reflect on their practice. This insight is interesting in the light of Vilkinas’ (2008, p. 297) finding in an exploratory study of ways supervisors assisted candidates’ in their theses preparation that supervisors were “task-focused and were not able to deliver paradoxical roles; nor were they able to reflect on their supervisory capabilities and learn from those reflections.”

**Empathetic understanding**

An important emerging theme concerns supervisors’ empathetic understanding towards their candidates. More than half the participants reported that supervisors had empathy for the difficulties their candidates’ experienced during candidature. One supervisor described how important it was that she listened to her candidate with empathy:

> I am empathetic with my candidates. I grew up with empathy. I guess that makes me a good listener. (HS1)

Another supervisor explained that her empathy towards her candidates was critical in developing a supportive relationship:

> I am very sensitive, that is why face-to-face meetings are good, and that is why it is difficult with external students. I empathise, and this supports my students. I have really good working relationships with my students. (NSS2)

The majority of participating candidates reported experiencing the empathetic understanding of their supervisors in terms of receiving personal support. A candidate explained that she felt personally supported by her supervisor’s understanding of her personal difficulties at a certain point in her candidature:

> My supervisor is very supportive, both with the thesis and with me personally. I had a baby during my candidature and he had reflux, so I took six weeks off. My supervisor was very understanding and supportive. (SSC2)

Another candidate described her view of her supervisor’s empathetic understanding towards her:

> He has a great empathy with personally understanding my situation, and how life and research are not separate. He understands that you are a person in amongst all this, and not an automaton. (NSC2)
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One candidate reported that her supervisor understood how she was feeling and that he had responded kindly to her feelings:

A couple of times he would say to me, “you are really tired, put the thesis aside and go home.” And I thought, ok … I needed that. (SSC1)

Another candidate commented that his supervisor understood the problems he experienced, and was always willing to help him:

He understands my problems and he always does his best to help me. He finds people who can help you deal with the issues, such as financial issues to attend a conference, for example. (APC2)

Yet another candidate linked empathy and compassion with the rapport he experienced in his supervisory relationship:

We have a good rapport. What has been good would be his empathy and compassion. He … is always very understanding of the setbacks that have come along, and has helped me get around them. (NSC1)

The ability of the majority of participating supervisors to empathise and convey empathy in their supportive relationships is consistent with the work of Wisker et al. (2008, p. 15) and Arnold (2009, p. 59) who argue that supervisory empathy towards the candidate builds rapport in the relationship. According to Barrett-Lennard (1981, p. 92), empathy is the ability to sense the thoughts, emotions and struggles, such as fear, anxiety and confusion of another person and feel it, not as your own, but as if it were your own. Within the professional relationship, many participating supervisors in the present investigation gave both personal and professional support to their candidates. These supervisors appeared to choose remarks, and a tone of voice, that conveyed empathy towards their candidate. They were caring about their candidate’s emotional state. Empathetic understanding was an important supervisory quality in the manner in which supervisors expressed and conveyed their personal support, and in developing supportive relationships. This theme is consistent with Rogers’ (1961, p. 284) condition of “empathetic understanding” in facilitators, which he argues is an essential attitude for creating learning environments. The evidence concerning empathy, which illuminates the tacit nature of the support provided by supervisors and tacitly perceived by candidates, aligns well with Siegel’s (2010, p. 78) argument that empathy is a key factor in all supportive helping relationships.
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Emotional intelligence

A suite of supervisory qualities emerged that a few participants termed ‘emotional intelligence.’ One supervisor-candidate pair perceived that the supervisor’s emotional intelligence was important to developing their supervisory relationship. The supervisor explained that his emotional intelligence concerned interpreting and responding to signals from candidates, and being focused on meeting their needs:

[Supervision] is entirely about emotional intelligence. You read what is right for the person and respond. You focus on the outcome and it is just a question of how we are going to get there. Sometimes you try different ways. (SSS1)

The candidate described qualities in her supervisor, such as kindness, accessibility, and patience, which she associated with his emotional intelligence:

The important qualities that made our relationship successful were kindness and accessibility. He was available to me, even when he was travelling he would get back to me in e-mails. So, it has got mixed up qualities in it. He was patient and kind - emotionally intelligent. (SSC1)

Another candidate felt that her supervisor understood her, and knew how to respond to her in order to get the best outcome for her. She described aspects of his emotional intelligence in terms of his having the wisdom to know how to respond to her personal situation:

He knew me, he understood me, and so he knew what state I would be in. He had that emotional intelligence, the wisdom, to know … to release the pressure valve that I am putting on myself. He realised that would be the way to get the best results. (NSC2)

Consistent with the relevant literature, notably with the works of Doloriert et al., (2012, p. 736), and Lee (A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 275), emotional intelligence was a useful way to conceptualise certain dispositional qualities of participating supervisors who developed supportive relationships with candidates. Qualities, such as being understanding, and being able to respond to the candidate at a personal level, that constitute having emotional intelligence can be linked to Rogers’ (1961, p. 56) observation that a person who can develop and maintain a supportive facilitating relationship is “psychologically mature.”
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**Attitudes to time-pressure**

A key aspect to creating a positive tone in the supervisory relationship that emerged from the data concerns the amount and quality of time given to candidates in supervision. The majority of candidates reported that their supervisors gave them enough quality time and that this perception had a positive effect on their relationship. In contrast to this evidence, Harman (2003, p. 328) found that by far the most frequent complaint of candidates was that their supervisors were too busy to give adequate time to them when help was needed. In the present investigation, participating supervisors all had demanding schedules; yet, in their communication with their candidates many supervisors gave candidates the non-verbal message that they had time for them. A candidate described his experience of his supervisor’s attitude towards the time taken to communicate with him in supervision. He contrasted his experience of regular time spent with his principal supervisor, which had a positive effect on their relationship, with the paucity of time spent with his co-supervisor, which he reported was an issue:

> My co-supervisor is extremely busy and I might meet with him maybe a few times a year in his office, or at a conference. But, I have no regular communication with him. Currently this is a big issue for me. With my first supervisor, I have regular communication. I write e-mails to him every day, he e-mails me every day, and when necessary we meet in his office. (APC2)

One candidate mentioned that her supervisor’s workload meant there was less time than she would have liked for supervision. This supervisor, who had an unusually big workload (over 15 postgraduate students at any one time), explained that he found that the time pressure in his job made supervision stressful:

> I really enjoy supervision, but it is stressful because of all the other pressures. I cope, but I do not manage it. (NSS2)

This supervisor’s candidate explained that while he was interested in her research, he was not always accessible to her. She expressed the wish that she could have had more time with her supervisor:

> The hardest thing that I find is the time-pressure. If there was anything that I would change it would be my supervisor’s workload. I would say that he is not always accessible. It is not that he is not interested, or that he would not like to spend more
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time, but it is obvious that the time-pressure is the reason why we might not talk over things as much as we could. (NSC2)

The time-pressure placed on supervisors through heavy workloads raised a concern for a few participants regarding the university’s policies that they believed were not supportive of doctoral supervisory practice and doctoral study. One candidate pointed out that his supervisor’s workload left him feeling abandoned:

But, she has a conference to organise. One of the other women had taken leave so she took on her work. So, where is the time for me? There are times when I feel somewhat abandoned by her. Her position and workload within the university requires a level of input that to a certain extent excludes me, or should I say places me further down the food chain. Her priorities lie elsewhere. Although I accept that, I do at times resent it. And I resent the university for the pressures that they place on their staff. (HC2)

There were a number of other aspects to the issue of time-pressure in candidature. The overall view of participating supervisors was that supervision was heavily time-consuming. A supervisor acknowledged that supervision required a great deal of patience and commitment to working many hours with the candidate:

To do a good quality thesis you have to be thorough. A thesis is a very meticulous document. You are starting, a bit like Michelangelo, with a big block of marble, there is nothing there, and you can turn that into a David, or something. The analogy is that you are working with the candidate. It is not something that you do in a hurry. So, you have to have a lot of patience. It is time-consuming and you have to be prepared to spend a lot of hours. (APS2)

The majority of participating candidates reported that supervisors gave generously of their time to their candidates, both in quantity and quality. A candidate reported that she perceived her supervisor as generously giving her his time during her candidature:

He was intellectually, personally and through giving me his time, generous to me, and I have deep appreciation of that. (SSC1)

A supervisor explained that her interest in her candidate’s project was a personal investment of her time, which strengthened the quality of her supervision:

I think you have to take a vested interest in the concept and the conceptual framework of the work in more than an academic way. I always personalise everything, which takes time and I think that is a strength. (HS3)
The notion of supervisors investing time in their candidates is consistent with the argument of Walker et al. (2008, p. 107) that supervisory relationships require an “investment of time” by the supervisor. It is also consistent with Golde’s (2000, p. 220) finding that the amount of time spent, the quality of the interactions, and a sense of care from the supervisor to the candidate were all characteristics of successful supervision. In the present investigation, many of the participating supervisors made the investment of their time on a personal, as well as a professional level. The amount and quality of time given in supervision was indicative of the value supervisors placed on their supervision and which gave meaning to their professional work with candidates. When interacting with his candidates, a supervisor described how good learning occurred from both the quantity and the quality of his time spent in listening:

I spend a great deal of time listening … making a good effort to let the student talk as much as possible, about what they are doing and thinking. I do that because I think that the experience of trying to articulate ideas is important to the student. They make progress by trying to work through their ideas. I push them to keep talking about what they are thinking. Through listening to themselves for an extended period, they often find things that they had not anticipated. (SSS1)

One supervisor described how she ‘slowed down’ in order to build rapport with her candidate. She reported that she consciously stopped and focused on her candidate:

It is easy to be busy and kind of not hear. I think that the act of listening … leads to rapport, leads to trust, and an effective relationship. I think it has a lot to do with stopping and focusing, and it is important to do not only if there is a problem. (HS1)

Many of the participants noted that a supervisor’s attitude to time, and time-pressure constraints, played a big role in creating a positive tone in the supervisory relationship. Several supervisors placed value on making the time-consuming commitment of getting close to their candidates. One supervisor explained:

It becomes a lifetime thing because you spend a lot of time and are very close to that person, maybe closer than just about your wife, or anybody. There’s been a lot of hours talking to a person, reading their work and trying to get inside the mind of the person, to figure out what they’re really trying to say and do, and understanding their motivation. (APS2)

The characteristic of closeness in the relationship reported in the present investigation aligns with Doloriert et al.’s (2012, p. 740) finding that candidates highly value
having a close, personal relationship with their supervisors and that a distanced form of supervision has a negative influence on the relationship. In the present investigation, many of the participating candidates reported feeling valued both as a person and that their supervisor valued their project. This perception was based on the quantity and quality of the time they spent in supervision. A candidate described that she felt valued by her supervisor when she made time for her:

She’s a very, very busy woman, but she will still make time for you and make you feel like you are valued. What I am doing is important to her and she is important to me as well. (SSC2)

Another aspect to the time-pressure issue was that it takes time to achieve doctoral outcomes. Several supervisors articulated the importance of taking a long-term view of the PhD process. They reported that the process of the intellectual work that took place in the candidate’s mind could not be rushed. A supervisor explained that the value of candidature lay mainly in the process of developing intellectually:

It took him two or three years to shift his whole thinking. By his own admission he says “I now think differently, I have a much more nuanced understanding of what I am trying to do.” He can talk quite openly about his intellectual process, and I think that is an important step. The three-year PhD does not allow enough time for that kind of intellectual development to take place. (NSS1)

Similarly, another supervisor explained that producing research that makes a significant contribution to the discipline required reflection on the deeper issues in the thesis, which all took time:

Most candidates think that once you have punched all your data up, that’s it. But, you spent three years collecting data, and you have not thought about what you have done. I suspect there is a minimum of six months of reflection, once you’ve got it all, to think through what it all means and how does this add to my discipline and what are the contributions that I’m making … I do not think that comes quickly, it comes from a period of thinking over. Nearly every candidate rushes at the end and that is often one of the [examiner] comments that you see. (APS2)

One supervisor had a somewhat cavalier attitude to the university’s deadlines placed on candidates. He reported that he understood pragmatically the constraints that deadlines placed on candidates, but that deadlines during candidature did not always
take into consideration a candidate’s personal circumstances. He described his response to this situation:

To me the deadlines are not very important. If the student comes in and life is getting ragged at the edges, I see no reason why we should look at the deadline next week and say we are going to stick to it. I have a very fluid sense of time. I think this obsession with deadlines is anti-intellectual. They do not make a lot of sense, though I can see some practical reasons for them. (NSS1)

The majority of participating supervisors had a particular attitude towards time in their relationships with their candidates. While acknowledging time as a concern, these supervisors slowed down, and prioritised giving both a high quality and quantity of time to their candidates. This attitude to time might be termed “ease” (Kline, 1999, p. 52). Kline (2009, p. 52) calls this attitude to time in professional coaches, “ease, freedom from internal rush and urgency.” Kline argues that in the professional coaching relationship, for the coach “to pay attention with a heart and mind at ease is what produces results” in the client (Kline, 1999, p. 70). The ability in these participating supervisors in the present investigation to foster an easeful attitude towards time spent with candidates has implications for how successful supervisory relationships are developed and maintained.

The majority of supervisors reported giving their candidates the time to talk, and they paid attention and listened with an intention to understand their candidate’s ideas. Arnold (2009, p. 63) points out that a key characteristic of successful supervisors and helping professionals, such as psychotherapists, is that they are active listeners. Arnold emphasises that doctoral supervisors and helping professionals provide a space for the candidate or client to think with imagination and openness, which is facilitated by a particular attitude to time - what Ogden (2005, p. 1265) calls “time to waste.” In the present investigation, these participating supervisors had taken the time to personally get to know their candidates and their contexts well. These data show that supervisors’ easeful attitudes to time-pressure fostered a positive tone in the supervisory relationship. As a result, candidates felt that they were both personally valued and that their work was important professionally. The majority of candidates greatly appreciated the quantity and quality of their supervisor’s time given to them in supervision. In existential humanistic terms, the supervisors chose to have an ‘easeful’
attitude in their dealings with their candidates. Clearly, the quality of ease as a ‘way of being’ in the relationship was important to them in their work of supervision.

**Congruence**

An emerging theme concerns the ability of the majority of participating supervisors to be congruent in the supervisory relationship. These participating supervisors reported that they engaged in a direct personal relationship with their candidates. As was discussed in Chapter 3, Rogers (1961, p. 61) named this ability in facilitators, “congruence”, which he described as being without façade, playing a role or hiding behind a professional front. In the present investigation, one of the attributes of congruence was the participating supervisors’ ability to be open with their candidates. The majority of supervisors reported on the importance of being open with their candidates. One supervisor was aware of his thoughts and feelings towards his candidate, and described being emotionally open with his candidate. He explained how important his openness was to the relationship:

> I try and cultivate in terms of that professional boundary, that it is okay to disagree, and it is even okay to be cranky with each other, as long as you’re open about it and come back to the relationship. (HS1)

Another supervisor explained that he related to his doctoral candidates personally through being open to and respecting the knowledge and skills they bring to their candidature:

> I have an assumption that these people are often very smart and know more than I do. There is some specialist expertise that I bring, wider perspectives. I can build up their sense of ideas. I think it is a matter of respecting and being open to what the student has, and relating to them personally on those terms. (NSS1)

A few supervisors described their attitudes to the relationship as the ability to be ‘human.’ One supervisor described what she meant by being ‘human’ in the relationship:

> I learned that if you trust in your students’ capacity to manage all those other things, they can say, “Look my mother’s in hospital”, or “My child’s got this, so how do we make this work?”… to be able to be human, very human and recognise that shared humanity. (SSS2)
Another supervisor also described the nature of being human in the relationship:

Although there is a power relationship, this is not the old fashioned lecturer/God, professor/God type one. I start from the humanness of the relationship. So there is an attitude towards the students that there is a mutual relationship there. (NSS1)

Many of the supervisors reported that they did not think of themselves as being intellectually above their candidates, but rather, they described an attitude of humility and equality in their shared humanity. These supervisors had the ability to be open to learning from and with their candidates, which was based on an attitude of respect towards their candidates. A supervisor explained that he enjoyed learning from his candidates, despite his superior expertise in his knowledge area:

Sometimes I will learn things about the area of my supposed expertise that I didn’t know before, and that’s very pleasing. (SSS1)

A few participants named humility as an important supervisory quality in supportive supervisory relationships. One supervisor explained that her respectful approach in her communications with candidates required her to embody an attitude of humility:

To be able to communicate, to be a little humble in our own approach, to be as respectful as we can possibly be and convey that. (SSS2)

A candidate recognised and valued the quality of humility in her supervisor:

It is not uncommon in academia for people to posture, to strike poses, and to let you know how clever they are. My supervisor never does that. He is unassuming. In fact, he is quite humble in many ways. He does not assert himself but he is not weak, he is very strong and he has authority. He is almost mild mannered, but he is certainly direct, and he holds [intellectual] power very gracefully. (SSC1)

Supervisors’ humility allowed them to be open and imperfect, or ‘human’ in their relationships with their candidates. Humility was a key quality that allowed these supervisors to be congruent in their supervisory relationships. An important insight is that these supervisors’ descriptions of qualities of openness, respect and humility provided an intellectual and emotional environment for respectful and trusting relationships to flourish. This insight strongly aligns with Rogers’ (1961, p. 282) argument that people trust each other when they sense this quality of congruence; that they are dealing with an open person, not with a polite or professional front.
Intentionality

In the present investigation, participating supervisors were asked in the initial interview if they intentionally employed qualities that promoted rapport in the supervisory relationship. The process of reflection and articulation did not always come easily to supervisors as they responded to this question. Several supervisors reported that they consciously embodied certain qualities and were able to intentionally create opportunities to practice and develop certain qualities in order to produce the desired outcome of a supportive supervisory relationship, which they believed was important to every candidate’s success. A supervisor explained that he was conscious of the qualities he brought to the relationship:

I am very conscious of the qualities I bring and my role in the relationship. I am becoming even more conscious of the centrality of the relationship to the candidate’s success. (APS1)

Another supervisor explained that he had got to know himself well as a supervisor, through observing his peers, and through training:

I am well aware of the qualities I bring to supervision. I have read books and been to training. The best is to see what your peers are doing, and pick up tips on what will work for you. (APS2)

A supervisor who spoke for many, commented on being conscious of the quality of her listening to candidates:

I consciously am trying to really listen, where you are actually listening and responding in some way. You are trying to hear what it is, not what the words are saying, just sort of deep listening. (HS1)

Another supervisor explained that it required his discipline to listen well:

I am, particularly if I discipline myself, a good listener. I consciously practice the art of listening. (SSS1)

Other participating supervisors reported that they were conflicted about the notion of intentionality in their practice of supervision. They were not sure if their qualities were innate, or perhaps intuitive, rather than intentionally embodied in the supervisory relationship. A supervisor explained that she did not consciously think
about what she was doing in her relationship with her candidate. She described her qualities as innate:

I do not think about it. This is how I am. This is how I live my life; this is how I am in all my dealings with people. It is not something I assume in the supervisory relationship; it is just that I cannot do it in another way. I think teaching for thirty years … is where I have honed my skills. No, now that I think about it, I have always had it. I think if you do not have the qualities of empathy, understanding, intuition, communication and a little bit of charisma thrown in, I don’t think you can fake it. You cannot fake those things. Either you have them, or you do not. (HS3)

Another supervisor reported that he did not intentionally act in certain ways with his candidates, but that his behaviour was innate or intuitive. He explained that his values as a teacher informed his relationships with candidates:

My behaviour is innate, or intuitive, I think … the underpinning philosophy of wanting to promote my candidates as individuals, comes from my philosophical underpinning as a teacher. (NSS2)

Other supervisors reported that the qualities they brought to the relationship were both intentional and innate. A supervisor explained how this occurred:

I would like to think that the qualities I bring to the relationship are intentional! But, I rather suspect that it is just something that I do. I sometimes have to be quite deliberate about actually giving them space to open into because I get enthused and then I will start chattering. So there is some intentionality, but mostly it is just what works, it is how I respond. (NSS1)

Another supervisor explained:

I think I am conscious of the fact that I have these qualities. I think I have these qualities in all my teaching. But when I am actually doing it, I am not thinking, “oh, I am being empathetic” or, “I had better be empathetic here.” Being of certain maturity allows you to understand that you innately have that as a quality. (HS2)

One supervisor initially felt that the notion of being intentional detracted from her understanding of herself as being authentic in the relationship. She then concluded that the qualities she brought to the relationship with her candidates were both intentional and innate:

I am predominantly not intentional, although I think very consciously about what I do that makes that relationship work. I have had to reflect on that at length. In terms of
building rapport, I do not see the relationship that I have with my PhD student as in any way different to the relationship I might have with somebody else who comes in and I have a discussion. Not at the level of rapport anyway. My instinctive answer to your question is that it is both intentional and intuitive. I do think about it, but predominantly no, I think it is always a fairly authentic engagement. (SSS2)

Intentionality is a key existential concept that takes the view that a person’s attitude and values in response to his or her experience in the world are their choice and, therefore, their responsibility. It follows, then, that intentionality provides meaning for people, and provides a particular way in which individuals express themselves in the world. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in terms of doctoral supervision, intentionality is important for the “purposeful participation” of supervisors in their practices in supervision (Walker et al., 2008, p. 91).

A number of nuances concerning the intentionality of supervisors in doctoral supervision became apparent. About half the participating supervisors reported that they did not intentionally employ certain qualities in the relationship. However, all the participating supervisors were conscious of their qualities in so far as they were intentionally building rapport and connecting with the candidate in order to meet the candidate’s needs. Clearly, attempting to build the relationship was highly intentional. These participating supervisors were consciously reflecting on their practice. This insight is consistent with Siegel’s (2010, p. 36) argument that for the helping professional, such as psychotherapists, intentionally attuning to clients (being aware of their clients’ thoughts and feelings and responding appropriately) is an important factor in successful therapeutic relationships. In the present investigation, a participating supervisor explained that the values that underpinned the rapport she developed with her candidates were the same in all her relationships:

I do not think that there would be anything in the dynamic with my student in PhD supervision around rapport, that I would value any differently or practice any differently … than I would in any other relationship. (SSS2)

Another supervisor explained that his values, beliefs and attitudes, which he termed his ‘philosophy’ in life, were the same that underpinned his work as an academic, and provided meaning to his work in supervision:

I, hopefully, apply the same principles, philosophy, and level of input to every student, whether they are an undergraduate project student, a master’s student, or a PhD
student. I am passionate about things, and the philosophy that underpins my existence is that I want to contribute more than I take from the planet during my lifetime, and there are various ways of doing that in my supervision. One is at a personal level and my support for postgrads, but one is at a professional level in terms of the science that I produce. I look at both these aspects as an investment into future academia. These things are very clichéd, but they are actually things that are meaningful to me. (NSS2)

These descriptions show that supervisors had practised rapport-building qualities in the relationship such that they had become embodied traits. They had qualities that were steadily present (non-intentional) and they had skilful methods of working that they used to meet individual candidate needs (intentional). In short, these supervisors embodied particular qualities in each relationship, although what they did with each candidate in supervision differed from candidate to candidate, based on what individual candidates needed. From an existential humanistic perspective, supervisors intentionally and intuitively employed certain qualities in their supervisory relationships, because they valued a certain ‘way of being’ in the relationship.

**Concluding remarks**

This chapter has presented the participants’ perceptions of a range of supervisory dispositional qualities that they reported experiencing in their supervisory relationships. The existential humanistic approach to the investigation has necessitated a focus on ‘being’ qualities, rather than on the ‘doing’ skills of supervisors. Most of the participating supervisors’ expertise lay in bringing particular dispositional qualities to the relationship that candidates reported were supportive. These qualities are highly consistent with Rogers’ (1969) necessary conditions for creating an environment for significant learning, as was discussed in Chapter 3. These ‘ways of being’ in the supervisory relationship were based on supervisors’ values, beliefs and attitudes that gave meaning to their work with their candidates. Adopting an existential humanistic approach enriches and extends knowledge on the manner in which supervisors develop supportive supervisory relationships in a number of ways. The theme of supervisors building candidate confidence, which was discussed in Chapter 5, has continued to be important in this chapter. Supervisors were acutely aware of the importance of their attitudes towards candidates in the delicate task of providing critical feedback that would progress the candidate’s thinking, while at the same time building their confidence in their intellectual ability to succeed in their
candidature. Supervisors also were intentional in their desire to foster closeness with candidates, be encouraging and have faith in their candidate’s potential ability to succeed, in order to build candidate confidence.

This chapter raises two implications for doctoral supervisory relationships. First, is the critical importance of the quality of the presence of the supervisor in developing supportive relationships, and the ways in which the supervisor forges a connection with the candidate through embodying certain dispositional qualities. Second, is the awareness of the supervisor that their attitudes in the relationship affect the candidate’s ability to be successful in their candidature, and that they intentionally cultivate the qualities that develop supportive relationships.

Generally, in facilitating change in the client in the helping professions, the focus, according to Siegel (2010, p. 245), is on exploring the “deep sense of interpersonal integration between the practitioner and the client.” In doctoral supervision, where the focus is on the candidate achieving doctoral outcomes, a focus on the supervisory relationship as facilitating doctoral outcomes is a radical new thought. It is important to note that there are critical differences between the doctoral supervisory relationship and relationships in the helping professions. The most notable of these differences is that the supervisory relationship is not a healing relationship. Another difference is that the doctoral supervisory relationship is concluded at the end of candidature, while in the helping relationship the client decides when the relationship is to be concluded. Nonetheless, the notion that there are similarities between doctoral supervisors’ attitudes towards their supervisory relationships and those of facilitators in helping relationships, as raised by Arnold (2009), is supported by the findings reported in this chapter. There were aspects in supervisors’ attitudes and behaviours towards candidates, such as developing and maintaining trust in the relationship and the high value supervisors placed in developing and maintaining a ‘safe’ psychological environment, that resonate strongly with the nature of the engagement between the helping professionals and their clients. This insight raises a question concerning the importance of the development of supervisors’ interpersonal communication skills as part of their professional competence that will be discussed in Chapter 9.
In the following chapter, the empirical data will be presented related to the core values, beliefs and attitudes that underpin the qualities of respect and trust that supervisors embody in supportive supervisory relationships.
Chapter 7
Core Values, Beliefs and Attitudes

This chapter presents a review and analysis of the data on the core values, beliefs and attitudes that inform the dispositional qualities that supervisors bring to their highly valued supervisory relationships. These values, beliefs and attitudes were shared by the majority of participating supervisors who had varying personalities and styles of supervision, and across a range of disciplines. Emerging themes concerning supervisory attitudes to diversity in candidates, and concerning matters related to the perceived power differential in the supervisory relationship are reported. Insights regarding supervisory dispositional qualities that underpin these values, beliefs and attitudes are then presented.

Attitudes to diversity in candidates

All the participating supervisors experienced a range of diversity in their doctoral candidates. One aspect that was reported as important by all of the supervisors was the variability that characterised candidature. A supervisor reported that he experienced a great range of difference amongst his candidates, and that the tone of his supervisory meetings with individual candidates was also variable:

The tone of supervisory meetings is very varied. I don’t think it’s possible for me to generalise a great deal across the range of students I have supervised. (SSS1)

This description of variability in the tone of supervisory meetings resonates with another supervisor’s explanation, that even within one relationship, the tone of the conversation in meetings would vary, depending on what the candidate needed from the supervisor:

The tone of supervisory conversations will vary from meeting to meeting. There is no single conversation at that level. It may be upbeat if someone has done some great work and found something new. At other times, it may be a bit more critical, about the performance, or if they have not thought things through. (APS2)

Another supervisor reported that she experienced all her candidates as being different, requiring different ways for her to approach the relationship:
Every one of my PhD students has been different, and I mean every single one them.

(SSS2)

Due to the variability in candidates, a supervisor noted the importance of viewing each candidate as an individual, with the tone of the supervisory conversation varying according to the individual’s needs:

The tone varies. I think it is trying to recognise the student as an individual, the individuality of their context, rather than as part of the PhD machine. (NSS1)

In these descriptions, supervisors explained the phenomenon of variability in terms of the individual differences they encountered in candidates. By being aware of difference, and by being able to respond appropriately to the variability they encountered in their candidates, supervisors showed an attitude of openness to diversity that was a key attribute of these supervisory relationships. A typical response to the diversity encountered in their candidates was that participating supervisors reported approaching each candidate as an individual with different needs, requiring from them an appropriate, individual response. A supervisor understood difference in terms of being engaged with candidates as individuals:

I think it is the recognition of the construction of that individual engagement with each student. It is different from every other one. (NSS1)

Another supervisor explained that he actively set out to discover each candidate’s thinking and motivation, in order to equip himself to deal with problems arising in the candidature, and, if possible, to prevent them arising in the first place:

Every single student is different, so I approach each one differently in terms of personal interactions, because I know their personalities are different. I probe to find out how they think and what motivates them, and where I think problems in the future might occur. (NSS2)

The majority of participating supervisors reported that they were able to deal effectively with the variability they encountered in candidature, and respond appropriately to their candidates’ different personalities, backgrounds and contexts. These supervisory attitudes to diversity played a key role in the manner in which supervisors interacted with their candidates and in how the supportive relationship developed. One supervisor noted that ‘emotional intelligence’ was required to respond appropriately to individual candidates:
Chapter 7: Core Values, Beliefs and Attitudes

It’s a matter of responding to the individual. It’s entirely about emotional intelligence and trying to read what is right for the person. (SSS1)

Another supervisor described the importance of using her intuition to work out different approaches to her supervision of candidates:

All the students I’ve had have all been totally different people and I have approached it in really different ways. You need to be fairly intuitive about how you deal with your student. (HS2)

The quality of respect emerged as a key attribute of supervisors in managing differences in candidates and variability in candidature. Many supervisors understood that each candidate had differing capabilities in achieving doctoral outcomes, and approached such differences with respect. A supervisor explained:

Something that is important is a respect for difference. We talk about higher order thinking and learning, scholarship, and writing. Every PhD student that I work with has had a differing capability, in each of those areas. (SSS2)

Another supervisor explained that he needed to understand the differing expectations and needs of candidates in order to respond respectfully to each candidate:

I have to respect the student for whatever they are bringing. That then means you have to understand what their expectations and their needs are. (NSS1)

These descriptions show that doctoral supervision is a diverse and complex experience for supervisors. Nuances in the ways supervisors viewed the diversity of candidates emerged. A few supervisors raised the notion that supervision required mentoring each candidate differently. However, these supervisors also argued that there were specific qualities to mentoring, such as empathy, which they utilised in every relationship. A supervisor explained how these paradoxical dynamics of difference and sameness played out in the relationship:

You are a mentor and that means for each person it is different. There is not a formula, yet there are some formulaic things, like being empathetic. (HS2)

Another supervisor reported that equality was an important principle to have in responding to variability in supervision:
I do not see supervision as a uniform thing, but the principles that I try to use in terms of equality are there for everyone. (NSS2)

These descriptions show that supervisors viewed each relationship as unique; yet, they could see that there were common elements to all supportive supervisory relationships. This paradox is consistent with Rogers’ (1961, p. 37) argument that each relationship a facilitator forms with a client is unique, but that there are common attitudes and behaviours of facilitators in all successful facilitating relationships. Similarly, Amundsen and McAlpine (2009, p. 335) found that there were “constants, but with variation” in the manner in which supervisors worked with candidates.

Many participating supervisors described being conscious of changing their style of supervision in response to their candidates’ needs, for example, by becoming less directive of candidates as the candidature progressed. A supervisor described this phenomenon:

> Initial conversations might be a little more directive at the beginning, when I think a student is looking for some structure. I think the tenor of the supervisory relationship changes over time and becomes less directive. (SSS2)

Another supervisor explained that he consciously developed his candidates’ independence through diminishing the amount of direction he gave his candidates:

> My perception is that supervisors are probably more directive at the beginning of the project, to help establish the groundwork, create the networks, and link them to the project people that are operating in the space. Then, I try deliberately to give more independence to people, so they do not become reliant on me to do all their thinking as we go along. (NSS2)

These descriptions of supervisors who changed their supervision styles to meet their candidates’ needs echo Doloriert et al.’s (2012, p. 734) argument that supervisors need to be able to adapt their behaviour and style of supervision to meet their candidates’ needs, which may vary between candidates and at different stages of candidature. However, the participating supervisors in the present investigation intentionally set out to change their style of supervision to meet candidates’ needs and they were able to deal positively and respectfully with variability in supervision that was mainly caused by the high level of difference in their candidates.
Openness and flexibility

Several participants noted that participating supervisors were capable of being open and flexible in their relationships with their candidates. These qualities played an important role in equipping supervisors to deal with the extent of differences they encountered in their candidates. A supervisor described the need to be open to changes in direction in the candidate’s research:

I am always open to change, because if research does not change, it is not done properly. (NSS1)

Another supervisor valued both the qualities of openness and flexibility in her supervisory work:

Another quality that I hope I have until the day I stop breathing is openness to learning. I think supervision is very much a two-way process. A good PhD student, any PhD student keeps you on your toes and you need to be flexible. (SSS2)

A few candidates described how much they valued their supervisor’s openness and flexibility, and that these supervisory qualities were important factors in developing a successful relationship. One candidate explained:

My supervisor has an openness to hear what I’ve got to say. (HC1)

Another candidate thought that his supervisor’s flexibility allowed him to respond to, and meet his needs:

My supervisor understands my personality and the certain restrictions that I have in my life. Rather than being too much of a taskmaster about things, he has got some flexibility there, which I think is really important. (NSC1)

The majority of supervisors had a common focus and goal, which was to meet the individual candidate’s needs. They adapted their supervision according to each candidate’s needs, while at the same time using their repertoire of skills to reach their targeted outcomes. A supervisor reported:

It comes down to what the student needs in the relationship and the whole (supervision) package. We run with that in whichever direction it’s going to take. (NSS1)

Another supervisor reported that he adapted his style of supervision to suit candidates and in order to develop rapport with them:
For some students it is inclusiveness and egalitarianism that develops a good rapport, and for some it’s very clear direction and a sense of the hierarchical relationship. (NSS2)

One supervisor described openness as the ability to listen to a candidate, and accept new ideas, which also required his patience to listen carefully to the candidate:

I think to build a relationship there is an openness to listen to the candidate’s ideas and to be accepting of new ideas. At the doctoral level, it is about coming up with new ideas, so you have to be open to what the candidate is really trying to say. In the beginning, it is a bit like sifting for gold in a pan. There is all this knowledge and information, but what is the research idea that is really going to do something? So, being patient to work with them [is important]. (APS2)

Another supervisor described important qualities that enabled openness:

Being open means I bring integrity, honesty, and transparency to my relationships with candidates. (NSS2)

A few participating supervisors raised the notion of humility as the underlying quality that allowed them to be open to changes in direction during candidature. A supervisor described:

In supervising, you need to be reading their work, you need to be engaging with them, and you need humility to be open to changing direction, when needed. (SSS2)

Another supervisor also named humility as an important quality to have as a supervisor:

To be humble a bit and realise you do not know everything. You may think this is the best way, but someone else may have a better idea. It is important to be open as a professional to talk to other professionals about issues arising, so that you bring the best that you can to the candidate. (HS1)

The insights of these supervisors concerning humility as a necessary quality that enabled them to be open, is consistent with the argument made by Walker et al. (2008, p. 115) that “faculty members must be willing to ask for help, which requires some humility and vulnerability, but has the payoff of becoming a better mentor.” In the present investigation, most of the participating supervisors were able to respond with openness to the great degree of diversity they encountered in candidates. This insight is consistent with the work of Neumann (2003, p. xvi) who found that the supervisory relationship works best where there is open communication between
supervisory pairs. It is also consistent with literature from psychology, where authors argue that when people are open, they are able to be flexible and accepting of the other person in the helping relationship (see, for example, Siegel, 2010, p. 102). Rogers (1961, p. 115) argues that openness is the opposite of rigidity, fixedness, remoteness of feelings and being impersonal in the facilitating relationship. The insight that emerged in the present investigation that sheds light on the issue of diversity and variability in supervision is that participating supervisors embodied qualities in the relationship, such as, openness, engagement, patience, humility and respect. Supervisors who displayed such qualities were able to respond to variability in candidature in a flexible fashion: to new ideas, to change and to being appropriately vulnerable with their candidates.

Matching and fit

An emerging theme concerns the desirability of matching candidates and supervisors in order to get a good fit of personalities within supervisory pairs. This theme relates to the diversity in candidates that supervisors encountered. Approximately one-third of the participants held the view that the appropriate matching of candidates with supervisors would have a positive impact on the experience of candidature for both supervisor and candidate. One supervisor felt strongly that for supervisory pairs to have a successful relationship, the supervisor and candidate needed to be well matched:

I think we need to think about whom we match with whom. I think that is really important, [but] difficult to do in a smaller institution. (HS3)

A candidate suggested that her relationship worked well with her supervisor because their personalities were well matched. She explained that his style of supervision suited her personality:

In the [successful] relationships, there are good personality matches. Some people want more direction, or they respond to a stern authority. If I had a more paternalistic, stern authority figure, I probably would have resented it. (SSC1)

This candidate suggested that because of the importance of the relationship to the success of the candidature, supervisors and candidates should first interview each other to check that there is a good fit:
My relationship was a fluke. It is such an important relationship that I think that people need to interview each other first to see if they fit with each other, because often you just get given a supervisor. (SSC1)

Along similar lines, one supervisor implied that a match in personality was required to ensure the success of the supervisory relationship:

I think that if a student identifies the appropriate supervisor at the beginning that will make a difference to their experience and it will save a lot of bother. I tell the students to go and find out, not if they are a good supervisor, but what they are like. Hear from other students and other supervisors what I am like. I will not be offended. If you want to come and study with me, make sure that I am the person you want to be with. (NSS1)

A few participating candidates had the view that because of the importance of the relationship, the university system ought to provide more support in the process of matching expectations in supervisory pairs. One candidate believed that appropriate matching was necessary:

The university needs to help candidates find supervisors that are appropriate for them. You need some sort of support in this process. (HC2)

Personality mismatches (Wisker, 2005, p. 61) and personality clashes (Moses, 1985, p. 4) do occur in supervisory relationships. As shown, in the present investigation, a few participants reported on the desirability of matching individual candidates with appropriate supervisors in order to get a good fit of personalities within supervisory pairs. However, all the participating supervisors were able to work effectively with the great degree of variability they encountered in candidature, and respond appropriately to their candidates’ different personalities, backgrounds and contexts. Importantly, in spite of participants’ views on the importance of matching and fit, supervisors were, in practice, able to respond to differences in candidates with openness and flexibility. Arguing from a humanistic viewpoint, it is possible that supervisors were able to work successfully with a great deal of diversity in their candidates because they held internal attitudes towards each individual candidate that amounted to “unconditional positive regard” (Rogers, 1961, p 283). Theoretically, then, it might be expected that any supervisor who can hold certain positive attitudes towards candidates might be expected to work successfully with a wide range of candidates, as was shown to be the case in the majority of relationships in the present
investigation. According to this explanation, matching candidates with a supervisor in order to achieve a good fit between their personalities becomes a far less urgent issue because, as will be recalled from Chapter 3, creating a facilitating learning environment does not occur at the level of personality, but occurs through holding positive attitudes towards the candidate.

**Attitudes to power tensions**

All participants reported that they were aware of the potential for problems to arise in the supervisory relationship due to the power differential between a supervisor and candidate. However, the majority of participating candidates reported experiencing no obvious adverse impact of the power differential in their supervisory relationships, or they reported that they had experienced it minimally. A candidate explained that he did not experience the power differential in his supervisory relationship:

> There isn’t one [power differential]. I see them [supervisors] as having a set of skills that I really appreciate, and they appreciate skills I have, but I do not see any power differentiation. (HC2)

Similarly, another candidate explained that he did not experience to any great degree the effect of a power differential between him and his supervisor:

> I do not feel like he has much power over me. I feel like a bit of a free spirit in many regards, and he has let me be that way, which has been productive. (NSC1)

Yet another candidate recognised the existence of a power differential and explained how his supervisor managed this potential tension in the relationship:

> … the power differential is not marked. He does not push the power. He is an authority in his field, so it is more that I respect him as an academic. (APC1)

These descriptions show that candidates did not experience, to any great degree, power tensions in their supervisory relationships. The tone in these relationships was characterised by: supervisors acknowledging and respecting complementary skills of the candidate in the supervisory pairs, supervisors allowing candidate’s freedom to direct themselves in their candidature, and by candidates’ respect for their supervisors’ academic authority. One candidate did, however, experience a power differential in his supervisory relationship in ways that had a negative impact on the
supervisory relationship. It became apparent to the candidate that when his supervisor presented herself as the expert, then the negative aspects of the power differential were felt by the candidate, shutting down a free flow of communication between the candidate and supervisor. He reported that he was unable to express any thoughts to his supervisor that may have appeared to oppose her thinking:

Yes, there is a power differential. She is the expert. She is the supervisor. A couple of times she has made comments and I have thought, “you are wrong”, and I haven’t said that. That is part of the power thing. (HC1)

A supervisor explained that acknowledging and discussing the power differential was an important way to promote good communications in the relationship:

Whilst it is an open relationship and there is plenty of room to discuss, at certain points there are differences in power. I get to sign a progress report and it is not negotiable to the point where we can vote on whether it happens or not. Power needs to be acknowledged and … discussed in order to have good communication. (APS1)

Another supervisor reported that while she was able to challenge her candidates to achieve their intellectual potential, in order for her candidates to reach high standards, she had to engage with candidates in a manner that was empowering for them:

I am exacting with my students and they will tell you that. So much that they will say “I don’t want to do it one more time.” and I say, “One more time, we need to do this again.” But there is a way to be all that and not wield your power in any way that leaves a student feeling diminished, … or feeling disempowered. (SSS2)

The candidate of the above supervisor acknowledged the power differential in the relationship, but felt that her supervisor respected her ownership of her thesis:

There was a power differential, but now near the end … I could challenge my supervisor and say, “No, this is really important that I keep this in my thesis” and be respected for that. You have a sense of ownership about the research and the messages that are really important. (SSC2)

A few participating supervisors raised the notion of respect for the candidate as a key quality for managing the power differential in the supervisory relationship. A supervisor explained the difference between wielding power and having authority:

There is a power difference, and the possibility for supervisors to exploit the power differential is very real. Not exploit consciously, but by being too much of the expert.
Students expect you to be an expert, but they expect you to be respectful. I think it is very possible for two adults working together to share that power, but [you] retain that authority in the way that the student would expect and hope that you would. (SSS2)

One supervisor described his attitude to equality in the relationship as an attribute of good leadership, rather than merely wielding his power in the relationship. He linked his ability for inner leadership to having respect for candidates’ ability to learn:

If I dictate, then that is not respectful of their learning … You have to give them boundaries and a frame, or structure … But, it is leadership from within, not leadership from outside. (NSS1)

This description of respect for the candidate’s ability to learn is consistent with Rogers’ (1961, p. 283) contention that “unconditional positive regard”, where the facilitator has an optimistic view of human potential and, therefore, believes in the learner’s potential to develop and succeed, is critical for learning. The notion of respect for the candidate aligns closely with Walker et al.’s (2008, p. 61) view that respect for the candidate develops responsibility and leadership that are critical attributes of scholarly identity.

Equality

An important emerging theme concerns supervisors’ attitudes of equality in the supervisory relationship. Almost all participating supervisors reported placing a high value on equality in their supervisory relationships. These supervisors had different ways of expressing their belief in equality, which was demonstrated by the way they handled potential tensions to emerge from the power differential in the supervisory relationship. A supervisor explained:

I feel very much on an equal footing with my students. I think generally within the university my inability to take a position of power has worked against me, but not in supervision. (HS2)

Another supervisor strongly practised an attitude of equality in the relationship:

I do not see my candidate as the apprentice, but as an equal. In fact, in some ways as my superior in terms of his arts practice and his expertise, and his life experience. (HS3)
One candidate reflected that his relationship with his supervisor lacked equality, which evoked uncomfortable feelings for him in his supervisory relationship:

There isn’t equality in the relationship. While she demonstrates respect for me, I believe she is conscious that she is the teacher/leader/experienced one in the relationship. I am not always comfortable, or at ease. (HC1)

A supervisor explained that she did not operate in a paradigm of power but, instead, worked with her candidates from an attitude of equality expressed as an exchange of ideas:

I never feel more powerful than my students, or that I have power over them at all. I never work within that paradigm. It is always an equal exchange of ideas. (HS2)

A candidate reported that there was equality at the personal level of the relationship. Further, while she respected her supervisor’s academic authority, she did not feel that he exerted this aspect of his power in the relationship. She explained:

On a personal level, … it is equal. But, because of his experience, I am very much a junior, a novice. But, he does not come across in a patronising way. (NSC2)

A few candidates reported that their experience of the power differential changed as their scholarly prowess increased during candidature. One candidate described how over time, as she gained authority in her field, she felt that she had gained authority in the relationship and her supervisor had allowed this to happen:

There is definitely [a] power [differential], but he doesn’t abuse his power. The balance of power changed in our relationship as I started getting my own authority in my field, which is what you do in a PhD. (SSC1)

These descriptions show that the supervisory relationship became collegial over time. Many supervisors believed that because they had the advantage of power in the relationship, it was their responsibility to set the tone for an interdependent collegial relationship to develop. A supervisor reported that over time, tensions in the power differential diminished, and the relationship became collegial:

There clearly is a power differential between supervisor and candidate, but ultimately it becomes a relationship of colleagues. They … become another person, or a very important person, in your network. (APS2)
A few supervisors described the relationship as a partnership, with equality as a key feature:

I do not play the hierarchical supervisor with them [candidates] under me. I see it as a partnership. I’m trying to make them equal, so they feel that it’s their project, not that they’re a subset of my ego, or work. If [they] don’t know more about this than I do at the end of it, then we’ve failed. So, the power differential is a changeable thing. (NSS2)

Another supervisor also described the relationship as collegial, as between equals, which she perceived required her to have humility in the relationship:

I come into it as an equal and collegial relationship, rather than a top down one [where] I am the expert because I have years of being this, that and the other. The student expects that expertise, but I do not think that needs to be lived out in the relationship. And I think for academics that takes a certain, humility might not be quite the right word but it is certainly an acknowledgement, tacitly or explicitly that we don’t know everything. (SSS2)

Equality in the supervisory relationship also had an important effect on enabling the developing scholarly independence of the candidate. A supervisor explained:

If you try to exert authority and control things, there is a dependence that flows on from that. Some supervisors see a return on their investment by clonal iterations of their own research. I am not interested in that. (NSS2)

The high value that participating supervisors placed on equality in the relationship, thus potentially minimising negative effects of the power differential advances Grant’s (2003, p. 175) argument that the transformation of the candidate into an independent scholar is realised through productive power relations with the supervisor. In the present investigation, supervisory values, beliefs and attitudes concerning equality shed light on how participating supervisors managed power tensions in the supervisory relationship.

Direction and the dependence-independence continuum

The following section reports on the participants’ views on the role of the supervisory relationship in facilitating the transition from dependence to independence in candidates during candidature. It shows how the power differential played out between supervisory pairs in the amount of supervisor direction given to candidates during candidature, and their resulting position on the dependence-independence
continuum. One candidate described how his perception of the power differential in the relationship diminished as his independence grew during candidature:

At the very beginning I felt [my supervisor’s] power, I felt that I needed his help a lot. But, this changed over time. Now I never feel [his] power. (APC2)

Most of the candidates reported that they were aware of the role that their supervisor played in allowing and supporting their developing independence. A candidate commented on her experience of becoming increasingly independent:

In the beginning, he was the leader. Then I started pulling my weight more. His contribution got less, as mine got bigger. I started to get stronger and our relationship got on more of an even keel. (SSC1)

Another candidate explained the link between decreasing supervisor direction, and her achieving greater scholarly independence:

He was very directive at the beginning. I suppose he has left me to it a bit more now. I feel quite independent in what I’ve done. (NSC2)

These descriptions of the changing amount of supervisory direction during candidature align closely with reports by a number of researchers who argue that as candidates gain experience and confidence in their scholarly competence they appropriately move towards autonomy during candidature (see, for example, Anderson, Day & McLaughlin, 2006, p. 159). They also align with Benmore’s (2014, p. 13) account that successful supervisors adjust the “degree of direction or intervention necessary to facilitate independent learning and growth towards doctoral standard.” In the present investigation, a participating candidate explained that his supervisor’s confidence in him had helped him to develop his independence as a scholar:

My supervisor is always very confident in me. He says, “Yes, you can do it.” I feel a little bit more independent, and I believe I can do some publications with the results. (APC2)

One candidate developed her academic writing ability, and experienced becoming more independent as a scholar. She reported that she felt empowered by the way her supervisor showed her how to comply with academic writing conventions, while at
the same time he did not allow her to become dependent on him to write her thesis for her:

He would perhaps write a paragraph for me, but he would not write a chapter for me. He would show me how to do it, and then I would have to return it to him. So, he did not let me get too dependent. That is good because that would have disempowered me completely. (SSC1)

This description is consistent with the work of Burkard, Knox, DeWalt, Fuller, Hill and Schlosser (2014, p. 19) who found in a small study on positive and negative experiences of writing the thesis that candidates who had positive experiences typically had more supportive relationships with their supervisors than their counterparts who had negative experiences. Furthermore, they reported that these supportive relationships enhanced candidates’ research confidence and professional development.

A few participating candidates reported that their supervisors challenged them: to progress in their intellectual thinking and to develop their scholarly ability. A candidate described how this occurred:

My supervisor challenges my thinking, and [shows me] how to articulate my ideas and thoughts in a more concise way. (HC2)

A few participating candidates reported that during the course of their candidature, their supervisors delivered challenges in a less directive way. A candidate explained:

Initially my supervisor was more directive. However, as the time went on … it was more about supporting or challenging my thinking. (SSC2)

It was apparent that these participating supervisors responded to the developing intellectual prowess of their candidates by relying on qualities, such as encouraging the candidate to think independently, which candidates reported allowed them to become more independent over time.

One supervisor noted an important difference between candidate independence and candidate isolation. He explained this view:
… there is a balance between independence and dependence on the relationship. When a student goes on their own, it can lead to a lot of trouble. So, independence that is isolating is not beneficial. (NSS1)

The majority of supervisors managed well the tension between enabling candidate independence and maintaining a close relationship upon which the candidate could rely. Finding the balance in this tension concerns both fostering the candidate’s independent thinking, and that candidates learn from their supervisors how to “conform to disciplinary conventions” (Parry, 2007, p. 130). In the present investigation, a participating supervisor described his views on the balance between candidate dependence and independence:

I am not interested in a dependent student who wants to be led and told what we are doing. However, there is dependence in that I bring a degree of expertise and knowledge that I do not expect the student to yet have. It is about getting the balance right between independence and dependence. (APS1)

A few participating candidates reported that they mostly experienced their supervisor’s direction as reliable guidance, rather than as promoting dependence on the supervisor, which would have disempowered them. A candidate explained how important to him was his developing independence as a researcher:

… independence for me is somewhat crucial. I believe and I do not feel like I am terribly dependent on [my supervisor’s] input. He’s more of a guiding hand that keeps you on track and lets you know when what you’re looking at is probably a bit of a digression, or whatever. So I do rely on him, I would not call it dependence, maybe reliance, yes. (NSC1)

Another candidate also felt her supervisor initially guided her towards developing her abilities as a researcher, and at some critical point she was able to move towards scholarly independence:

I respected and felt confident in his ability to guide me through this terrain. There is a point where it changes. A maturity happens. I began to grasp what I was doing. (SSC1)

One candidate reported experiencing her supervisor’s encouraging support as guidance, rather than as direction:

She is very good at not giving you the answers but gently encouraging me to think about it further, as opposed to stepping in and providing solutions. (SSC2)
These descriptions demonstrate how participating supervisors and candidates shared the responsibility to find the right balance between the candidate being too dependent on the supervisor and receiving necessary guidance and support from their supervisor. This insight adds a nuance to Delamont et al.’s (1998, p. 157) reference to the “delicate balance” that supervisors need to achieve between the extremes of control and non-intervention, showing the role that candidates play in their journey to autonomy and independence.

A supervisor raised the importance of interdependence between the supervisor and candidate in the supervisory relationship. She explained that candidates needed to be independent in order for the relationship to become interdependent:

There is a continuum, at times the student is quite dependent on me as the supervisor to be able to find the structure, to show them the goalposts, and to start with the end in mind. My goal is to move them into independence. But the real satisfaction, the point at which it all comes together, is the potential for the interdependence that can emerge from that. You see it so well when you publish an article together. (SSS2)

A candidate reported that she had the freedom to choose whether or not to take her supervisor’s direction:

I am receiving direction and I could choose not to take it if I want to, but it has not come to that. (NSC2)

A candidate’s perception of having a choice in how she engaged with her supervisor’s direction raises existential notions of freedom, choice and responsibility that comes with choice, and which empowered the candidate in the relationship, in a professional sense. This insight is consistent with Whitmore’s (2002, p. 33) observation that taking “responsibility invariably involves choice”, meaning that people must be allowed to take personal control in their work, which, in turn, requires good self-esteem and confidence in themselves.

One supervisor acknowledged the power differential in the relationship, but had the attitude that it was a reciprocal relationship in which candidates were expected, and, were empowered to take responsibility for their own learning. He reported:

Obviously there is a power differential [since] there is a knowledge base that I have otherwise they would not be doing the PhD [with me]. But, I do expect that they take
This supervisor’s response demonstrates how candidates may be assisted to take responsibility for their learning and development during candidature. Such a response aligns with Yalom’s (1980, p. 268) argument that giving an individual responsibility is crucial to them achieving their full potential. It also resonates with Biggs and Tang’s (2007, p. 92) argument that students may be motivated to learn when they are free, trusted and given autonomy and responsibility for their learning.

**Respect and trust**

Respect, together with trust, was an important emerging theme. Earlier, it was shown that the majority of participating supervisors reported attitudes to equality in the relationship that included having respect for the thoughts, ideas and feelings of their candidates. Without exception, participants reported that mutual respect and trust were essential qualities in a supportive supervisory relationship. A candidate explained:

> I do think that there has to be trust and respect, if there isn’t that between you and the supervisor then you should be looking for another supervisor. It is too hard to get through without having a positive and supportive supervisory relationship. (SSC2)

Another candidate noted that respect in the relationship had to be mutually given and received between supervisory pairs:

> The relationship is respectful, mutually respectful I believe. (APC1)

A supervisor commented that respect and trust concerned having mutual respect for each other’s opinions:

> I hope that the candidate trusts and respects my opinions, and I respect theirs. (APS2)

A candidate reported that her supervisor respected his candidates for their intellectual achievements as novice scholars:

> He does respect what his students have already achieved in scholarship. (NSC2)

Another candidate commented that mutual respect was based on shared values and goals:
For me respect was critical. I think it is around common values and goals, around what we are trying to achieve in our lives. (SSC2)

Yet another candidate described the importance of the supervisory qualities of empathy and non-judgement in building her trust in her supervisor:

I suppose that empathetic quality brought about a little bit more trust. Knowing that he had an understanding of my life situation and empathy towards that, takes the pressure off. I am not afraid of him. Nothing escapes his attention, but there is no judgment. I would not feel that making a mistake or, not having completed something that I said I would have done by this particular date in any way diminished me. He would say, “Okay, what do we need to do from here?” (NSC2)

A supervisor explained that kindness was an important supervisory quality in respectful supervisory relationships:

I think that sharing a sense of mutual respect is actually done through kindness. (APS1)

Another supervisor communicated his respect for his candidate by giving him prompt feedback on his work. He explained:

I have a busy job, so when I send an e-mail back to my students within an hour or two, or a day, that represents respect for what they do and they respond positively to that. (NSS1)

These descriptions show that respect was initiated and modelled by supervisors. Candidates perceived respect tacitly through supervisory qualities, such as empathy, non-judgment, kindness and prompt communication.

All participants reported trust to be an essential component in the supervisory relationship. A supervisor explained that building trust was important to the relationship and described the nature of the trust that the candidate placed in the supervisor:

To a large extent, the relationship is about trust. Some of the challenge is about building the relationship to the point that the student trusts your assessment about things, your judgment, your capacity to listen, to negotiate, and look at what might be best [for them]. (SSS2)

A candidate reported that it had taken a long time for her to trust her supervisor with her intellectual vulnerability:
An important thing for me was that I began to trust him, and it took me ages to. I mean I always trusted him to be a professor and know what he was doing, but to trust him with this piece of work that was so big to me. I felt initially that my work had to be perfect and I did not send him stuff because I did not think it was good enough. Then I suddenly realised that you just had to trust him that what I was going to send him, he was going to deal with and send back to me. Trust takes time. (SSC1)

A number of aspects concerning trust in the supervisory relationship emerged from the data. The majority of participating candidates trusted their supervisors with their intellectual vulnerability and felt comfortable to share their feelings of uncertainty that they experienced during candidature. This insight is consistent with Parry’s (2007, p. 125) finding that for candidates, “their need for intellectual rapport is underscored by their need for validation, for which trust is an essential ingredient.” However, in the present investigation, the high degree of trust that candidates placed in their supervisors took time to build.

A supervisory quality reported by a few participants to be important to building trust in the supervisory relationship was described as the consistency of the supervisor. A candidate described his experience of consistency in his supervisor:

My supervisor is level headed and not prone to mood swings. He consistently seems to be in a good mood. I have never seen him in a particularly bad mood or anything like that. (NSC1)

Another candidate explained that her supervisor had been consistently authentic in the relationship, over many years:

Trust has been developed, in no small part, due to the longevity of the relationship. Over the years he has consistently been authentic and genuine, and that’s really important. (APC1)

Yet another candidate experienced his supervisory meetings as sometimes positive and at other times negative. He explained that this inconsistency had made him careful, defensive and guarded in the relationship:

Sometimes, they are [supervisory meetings] quite upbeat and positive and I come away feeling very good about them. Other times I think the supervisor has the big stick out and I am being very careful, defensive and very guarded about what I am going to say and what I present. There is a degree of polarity. (HC1)
Another important quality in building trust was the supervisors’ constancy. A supervisor explained that he was constantly supportive:

I have been the rock in their system when things have dissolved around them. Being constant with your support, even though the interaction and the way in which you engage with the process changes over time during the candidature. (NSS2)

Another candidate named his supervisor’s dependability as a trust-building quality:

I think it is her [pause] dependability is the word I am after, which builds trust between the two of us. (HC1)

These candidates reported trusting that their supervisor’s core qualities would be consistently, constantly, and dependably present and available to them through the emotional ups and downs they experienced during candidature. Furthermore, when supervisors were dependable in bringing respectful qualities to the relationship, they came to be perceived as trustworthy to their candidates. Walker et al. (2008, p. 102) contend that a supervisory relationship is more likely to flourish when it is based on mutual respect and trust, arguing “these qualities are important not because they make the relationship more pleasant; they are necessary conditions for learning.” Along similar lines, in cognitive psychology, it is widely acknowledged that trust in the helping relationship between a client and facilitator is the key to change in the client, irrespective of the personality, modality or style used by the facilitator (see, for example, Rogers, 1969). In other words, in helping relationships, “trust is not a luxury” (Siegel, 2010, p. 75). There is strong evidence in the present investigation that the reported trust between participating candidates and supervisors is equally as important in the doctoral supervisory relationship.

The emerging themes discussed in this chapter add further insights to the literature on effective supervisory relationships by illuminating the dispositional qualities of supervisors that develop respect in the relationship, and by showing how trust is built in the relationship. The views expressed by the participating candidates suggest that there was not one particular supervisory quality that participants named as being respectful. Rather, when positive qualities were present in the supervisory relationship, then collectively they established respect in the relationship. Supervisory dispositional qualities perceived by candidates and supervisors and reported as being supportive are shown in Figure 7.1. The insight gained is that candidates, it appeared,
were not looking for perfection in their supervisor; however, they did require that a
number of core qualities that build respect were consistently present in the
relationship. The consistent presence of these embodied core qualities allowed trust to
be established in the relationship. The implications of respect and trust in the
supervisory relationship for developing a conceptual model of supportive supervisory
relationships and supervision are discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

accessible, appreciative, attentive, authentic, affirming, caring, challenging,
clear, collaborative, collegial, committed, compassionate, consistent, constant,
easeful, encouraging, engaging, empathetic, empowering, (values) equality,
extends themselves, (welcomes) feelings, flexible, focused, generous, gentle,
guiding, (has) humility, (fosters) independence, informative, inspiring,
interested, intuitive, kind, listens, loyal, mentors, non-judgmental, observant,
open, patient, perceptive, (has) presence, (asks) questions, (fosters) rapport,
respectful, responsive, reciprocal, responsible, supportive, trusting, trustworthy,
(has) warmth, (has) wisdom.

Figure 7.1 Supervisory dispositional qualities perceived by candidates and
supervisors as being supportive.

Reportedly well-regarded and supportive supervisors consistently embodied in their
supervisory relationships many of the qualities listed in Figure 7.1. These qualities
were authentically embodied by all but one of the supervisors in the present
investigation. The list of qualities should, therefore, not be considered definitive or
prescriptive for supervisors. However, naming them should give an indication of the
types of dispositional qualities that were perceived by participating candidates and
supervisors as promoting supportive supervisory relationships.

Concluding remarks

Most of the participating supervisors across the disciplines that were investigated
shared similar core values, beliefs and attitudes in the way they regarded and met
challenging issues in doctoral education. One such issue was the impact of increasing
diversity of candidature on supervisors’ experiences of their supervisory work.
Another issue concerns the need to manage power tensions in supervisory
relationships. The view of the majority of participants was that supervisors strongly
displayed qualities of openness and flexibility that, in turn, provided a sound basis for
working supportively with their doctoral candidates. These qualities also allowed
them to meet the variable needs of individual candidates during their candidature. The
majority of supervisors behaved in ways that prevented unhealthy power dynamics from disrupting their supervisory relationships. Supervisors managed tensions in the power differentials in their relationships extremely well, to the extent that candidates reported experiencing power tensions minimally, or not at all. The high value that supervisors placed in equality in the supervisory relationship emerged as an important theme in showing how supervisors’ mitigated the effects of power tensions in the relationship. The theme of equality in the supervisory relationship is consistent with Kline’s (1999) definition of equality between people in organisations where there is a clear hierarchy. Kline (1999, p. 58) argues that equality means that “even in a hierarchy, everyone is considered equally valuable and equals as thinkers.” Since the supervisory relationship is hierarchical, with the supervisor traditionally seen as the ‘master’ and the candidate as the ‘apprentice’, the notion that the majority of participating supervisors in the present investigation regarded their candidates as equals in the relationship has important implications for the ways in which supervisors might establish supportive supervisory relationships. Clearly, these participating supervisors’ beliefs about equality played an important role in promoting productive power relations and fostering a positive rapport in the relationship. Valuing equality played out in supervisors’ decreased direction of candidates over time, which boosted candidate's intellectual confidence and promoted the development of their scholarly independence.

There were no obvious disciplinary differences observed in the participating supervisors’ ways of being in relationship with their candidates. Overall, the relationship between each particular supervisor and candidate might have been closer and more personal, and more or less directive, however, high levels of respect and trust were always present in each supportive relationship. The data strongly suggest that supervisors took responsibility, for their part, to initiate, develop and maintain a relationship where there was mutual respect and trust. Supervisors were aware of setting a positive tone and developing the conditions for trusting relationships to be developed and maintained. A major insight concerning supportive supervisory relationships is that there was not one dispositional quality that supervisors embodied in their supervisory relationships that was essential in developing respect and trust. Rather, there were a number of core qualities that working together as a system, allowed a mutually respectful learning environment to develop in which the
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relationship could flourish. Furthermore, when candidates perceived a suite of supervisory qualities, which they regarded as being respectful, to be consistently present then trust in the steadiness and reliability of the relationship developed over time.

The following chapter will continue to highlight the values, beliefs and attitudes that inform supervisor dispositional qualities that they embody in their supervisory relationships. The high value that supervisors placed in academic community and fostering reciprocity in supervisory relationships is explored.
Chapter 8

Reciprocity: Valuing Academic Community

This chapter reports on another theme evident in the findings, that is, the feeling experienced by the participating candidates of there being a strong sense of reciprocity in their relationships with their supervisors. In the chapter, candidates’ accounts of the ways in which supervisors made them feel accepted as belonging to an academic community are documented. The manner in which these experiences were felt to contribute to the developing sense of a scholarly identity by the participating candidates is also reported. The high value that supervisors placed on belonging to an academic community sheds light on the culture of supportive supervision.

Reciprocity

The majority of participants reported the importance of reciprocity in their supervisory relationships: a mutual exchange of giving and receiving between supervisors and candidates. One participating supervisor, commenting directly on the mutual benefits of reciprocity, explained:

Reciprocity is very important. I am assuming that there is some sort of mutual benefit. It is not just a one-way flow. I am giving them something and they are giving me something. (NSS1)

Candidates expected to receive intellectual knowledge, expertise, guidance, and support from their supervisors. However, a few participating supervisors reported that reciprocity in the supervisory relationship also concerned ways in which they learned from their candidates. One supervisor explained that he benefitted from the new knowledge that candidates brought to their candidature:

He has given me a lot in terms of opening my eyes to something I really hadn’t much knowledge about in terms of his subject matter, and that has been a gift to me. (HS3)

Another supervisor reported that in a reciprocal relationship, the supervisor’s respect for the candidate’s knowledge was key:
It is a reciprocal relationship. The candidate comes to you with ideas and you have experience. I learn just as much from my candidates as they learn from me. The important thing is to respect what people have as their knowledge. (APS2)

These descriptions of participating supervisors show that by being open to new knowledge and understanding, they allowed themselves to be changed by their relationships with their candidates. In addition to having respect for their candidates’ knowledge, a few supervisors also described the reciprocal relationship as a personal relationship that often resulted in a long-term mutually rewarding professional partnership. A supervisor explained that including his candidates in his academic network was personally important to him:

It’s not impersonal. They become part of your academic network and you become part of their network. It is a two-way process. The candidates that you work with keep contact with you. (APS2)

This description of supervisors’ reported ability to be open towards their candidates and to develop a direct personal relationship with their candidates is highly consistent with Rogers’ (1969, p. 228) condition of congruency, or “realness” in the relationship, which he argues is essential in facilitators of learning, as was discussed in Chapter 3.

Joint publication was a common expression of reciprocity for about half the participating supervisors and their candidates. A supervisor explained:

I use publication with students. That is the tangible end of reciprocity. (NSS1)

Another supervisor explained that he invited his candidates to participate in joint publications in order to benefit their scholarly progress during their candidature:

I co-publish with the students and even if I’m publishing something else that I think will benefit them in their thesis, then often I invite them to participate. (APS1)

A candidate described the ways in which her supervisory relationship was beneficial to the development of her scholarly knowledge:

My supervisors would ask for my feedback on articles or presentations they were working on. That was fantastic because then you feel like you are reciprocating in some way, and giving back in terms of your time in something that was important to them. Also, it broadened my scholarly knowledge. (SSC2)
Reciprocity through joint publishing also implied that to an extent there was the development of interdependency between these supervisors and their candidates. One supervisor reported that her candidates had complementary areas of strength, which fostered interdependence in the supervisory relationship:

There is the potential for interdependence that is a healthy negotiated synergy. You see it so well when you publish an article together and what I would call the complementarity in the relationship. I often say to a student you know this area, but I might be able to help you craft it this way. (SSS2)

The majority of the participating supervisors were open to learning from their candidates, and they had respect for the diverse knowledge and skills that candidates brought to their candidature and supervisory relationships. These qualities appeared to foster interdependence and create the conditions for a reciprocal relationship to develop.

**Collaboration and collegiality**

Collaboration and collegiality emerged as two important elements in reciprocal supervisory relationships as reported by the majority of participants. Collaboration concerns the supervisor and candidate working together, while collegiality implies that they share power in the relationship. The majority of participating supervisors and candidates reported that they had an attitude of equality and respect for each other’s abilities. Supervisors and candidates reported working together in a joint intellectual effort towards the candidates making progress during their candidature. A candidate explained how she and her supervisor had worked together on writing the thesis:

He’d model writing for me and say, “I can see what you’re doing here, now I’m going to write a paragraph or two, so you can see what pitch is about, because pitch is very important in the thesis.” (SSC1)

Collaboration was often as simple as being interested in the candidate’s project. A supervisor explained that his interest in his candidate’s project underpinned their collaborative relationship:

I see my relationships with my students as collaborative. My candidates are working on projects that I’m interested in, nearly all the projects I’m passionate about. (APS2)
Another candidate believed that collaboration with her supervisor was possible because of their shared personal and professional values of respect for collaborative relationships. She explained:

His philosophy and values fit well with my own, and with those of the profession, of not losing sight of that respect for collaborative relationships. (APC1)

A few participating supervisors intentionally collaborated with the candidate’s co-supervisors. They reported that they greatly respected and valued as essential what other academics brought to the supervisory process. Further, they saw that by recognising the complementary skills of these significant others, the candidates’ needs could be more fully met. One of these supervisors explained that his desire to meet his candidates’ needs motivated him and gave meaning to his collaboration with his colleagues in supervision:

We have complementary expertise either through the co-supervision, or associate supervision, or the other mentors or critical friends that we engage in as part of the process. We are clear about the strengths we each bring to the relationship and we look at how we can collaborate productively to meet the needs of students. (SSS2)

Similarly, another supervisor explained that he intentionally collaborated with his colleagues in order to meet his candidate’s needs:

Now that we are required to have at least two supervisors, I try to build these supervisory packages to create the whole supervisory role. I do this quite deliberately to get a good outcome for the student. It is a shared, a communal thing, it has to be. (NSS1)

It was apparent that the high value that supervisors placed on being in an academic community motivated their collaboration with candidates. The important role that intentionality plays in giving meaning and purpose to supervisors’ professional work was addressed in Chapter 6. This evidence demonstrates that when supervisors are purposeful in bringing particular qualities to their supervisory relationships, or achieving certain outcomes, then they are more successful in their intentions of developing supportive supervisory relationships.

Collegiality was underpinned by an attitude of equality in the supervisory relationship. A few participating supervisors reported that they sincerely viewed their candidates as colleagues, and collaborated with them in the pursuit of a shared goal.
This sincerity closely aligns with Rogers’ (1961, p. 282) argument that being congruent, that is, “within the relationship a person is exactly what he is - not a façade, or a role, or a pretence”, is not a technique, but has to be authentically embodied by the facilitator. In the present investigation, a participating supervisor reported that she viewed her candidate as a colleague:

I hope my approach is much more from a collegial perspective than from an expert-novice perspective. (SSS2)

Another supervisor reported that she viewed her candidates as colleagues and that this attitude towards working together enriched the experience of supervision, both for her and her candidates:

I think the idea of having collaboration in scholarship is really important. I like the fact that you can have people thinking and working together. I think that is crucial. I do not think you can get much done in isolation. Collaborating with my candidates as colleagues enriches the experience of supervision. (HS3)

Reciprocal supervisory relationships were seen to be collegial, as well as collaborative. Underpinning these attributes in the relationship were attitudes of mutual respect for one another’s abilities to work together towards the shared goal. Evidence of a range of qualities and attitudes that motivated participating supervisors to collaborate with candidates and which supported collaboration between supervisors has been presented. Many supervisors had shared interests and shared personal and professional values with candidates, and they intentionally co-operated with co-supervisors. Equality, and viewing candidates as scholarly colleagues, was strongly evident, as was supervisors’ valuing being in a scholarly community.

**Co-creation of the thesis**

Almost all of the participating supervisors reported that they played an important role in co-creating the thesis with their candidate, which provides another nuance to collaboration in the supervisory relationship. A supervisor explained that the simple act of sharing his ideas with his candidates was an act of co-creation:

Co-creation concerns giving them other ideas than the ones they have come with. (APS2)
Another supervisor described the relationship as a constructive intellectual space that was essential for co-creating new knowledge that progressed the candidate’s work:

A PhD is about building new knowledge and it has to be co-constructed, or co-created. The relationship between the supervisor and a student is a constructive space where literature is brought to bear on an issue in a way that has not been [done] before. It does not matter what method or methodology [is used], there is still that creativity around interpretation. So, the whole process, I think, is creative, and it is not just a student creating, it is definitely a co-creation of a new reality. (APS1)

Yet another supervisor said that a combined effort was required by the candidate and the supervisor in order to produce new knowledge and a distinctive thesis:

The relationship is quite synergistic. When you experience that, I think, as a student and supervisor, there is a real sense that your PhD can create something distinctive. It was only able to happen through the contributions of both. I did not give it to her and she did not come up with it, but it was co-creative. (SSS2)

Another supervisor believed that co-creation of the thesis, with supervisors and candidates jointly producing the thesis, occurred routinely, and was, in fact an intrinsic part of supervision:

There is misunderstanding about creative capital, where the students are celebrated as having produced this fantastic work, on their own. They did not do it on their own; the creative capital was actually shared. So, endeavours such as the PhD cannot help but have the supervisors folded into it. I think you cannot do it on your own. (HS3)

Co-creation of the thesis appeared to be an intrinsic part of many supportive supervisory relationships, whether explicitly verbalised and known to each member of the supervisory pair, or tacitly understood by them. A supervisor explained that co-creation was unstated:

The PhD is definitely co-creative; there is no doubt about it. Some students do not recognise that, they think that it is theirs alone. (NSS1)

A candidate also reported that co-creation of ideas occurred in a tacit process between him and his supervisor:

Co-creation is certainly there. However, it is not obvious, it is subtle. There is a subtle process where she will say something and that will trigger a response in me. So, it is certainly not overt, more tacit. (HC2)
A few other participating candidates reported that they were conscious of and aware that their supervisors co-created the thesis with them. A candidate described this co-creation in terms of a partnership with her supervisors:

Although it is my project and they are my papers, we have co-operated and co-created, so they are also my partners in that and their reputations are tied to it as well. (APC1)

An important insight that emerged was that supervisors who were involved in co-creating the thesis with candidates were able to bring to the relationship a quality of co-operation with candidates. These descriptions show that supervisors who valued co-operation over competition were very supportive of their candidates. A participating candidate described her awareness that her supervisor’s input had improved her thesis:

The thesis … is not my own entire work. I could not have done it without him. Well, maybe I could have, but it would not be the quality that it is. (SSC1)

Another candidate commented on how her supervisors’ work and effort was integral to her thesis:

My supervisors are in the whole thesis. They are reflected in there to the extent that I think you should put [their names] in brackets after yours, because they do a huge amount of editing and feedback and input of ideas to it. (SSC2)

The collaborative nature of co-creation of the thesis is consistent with the ideal supervisory encounter that Walker et al., (2008, pp. 102-103) assert may be seen as a co-creative and reciprocal experience. The key to co-creation was the demonstrated equality between the supervisory pairs, which is consistent with Arnold’s (2009, p. 67) argument that both the supervisor’s and the candidate’s ideas should be seen as equally valuable. The insights in the present investigation build on Arnold’s argument, showing the importance of the subtle role that co-creation of the thesis plays in reciprocal supervisory relationships.

The culture of supportive supervision

An emerging theme concerns the ways in which participating candidates’ self-confidence about developing as a scholar sheds light on how they experienced the culture of supportive supervision. Many participating supervisors reported that they
actively encouraged their candidates to have confidence in their developing scholarly ability. A candidate explained that his supervisor encouraged him to believe in his intellectual ability and that his resulting positive self-image played a role in his perception of himself as a developing scholar:

[My supervisor] always tells me “you will be a very good professor in the future”, or, “you are a good author.” I know he is just encouraging me, but it is a good thing to listen to. He makes me feel good enough to be a researcher and [a] scholar. (APC2)

Another candidate associated her developing scholarly identity with the development of her academic writing, and with publishing. She valued this aspect of her scholarly development:

My relationship with my supervisor has helped me develop my scholarly identity without a doubt; it has been part of the doctoral development. He was editing a text last year and he invited me to contribute a chapter, [which] was an opportunity [for me]. You hear stories of people being, almost used. … But, I would say my supervisors are being very generous. (APC1)

All of the participating supervisors reported that they valued building an intellectual community. A quality, shared by about one-third of the supervisors who supported community building, was that of modesty about their academic achievements. This quality closely aligns with humility, which emerged as a supervisory quality important in developing supportive relationships, as was discussed in Chapter 7. A supervisor explained that he had a modest perspective about his contribution to academia:

I was at this conference and this student was going on about how important his work is. And I said [to him]: “You’re part of an academic community, you’re not that important”, and he got so offended. He had obviously been integrated into this culture of importance. I hit his important identity nerve. I resist the temptation to be arrogant about myself. I like to hope that my students will pick that up and have modesty about their scholarly skills. (NSS1)

For this supervisor, his preferred attitude was not one of individual academics doing important scholarly work, but of recognising that academics are part of an academic community, building on the scholarly work of others.
A few supervisors believed that in their work of doctoral supervision they were training the next generation of scholars. For some of these supervisors the commitment to supervising their candidates sometimes was at the expense of their individual contribution to their field through publishing. A supervisor explained how this altruistic stance played out in his academic career:

I go through periods when I am not getting my own publications [done] and I see others publishing over the top of me. So that gets a little bit hard. But, … I really enjoy the fact that my PhDs have in general gone on to bigger, better and brighter things. I see what I do as a nursery and training ground and the platform for them to launch from. (NSS2)

The finding that supervisors support candidates in this way is consistent with the work of Kiley (2011b, p. 6) who found that altruism is a distinctive characteristic of highly productive supervisors. She argues that productive supervisors want to enhance the next generation of researchers, and they do so through helping not only their individual candidates to succeed as researchers, but also post-doctoral staff and younger academics, while also maintaining extensive professional networks.

A supervisor expressed how much he valued being a partner to his candidates. He described the depth of his commitment to his candidates:

There is a deep level of commitment. This is a partnership, and we are embarking on a journey together. (NSS2)

Another supervisor directly described her motivation for supporting her candidates:

I have a very genuine desire to see students succeed. (SSS2)

Yet another supervisor described how much she disliked the competitiveness of academia. What motivated her and gave her work meaning was the mutual exchange of ideas with her candidates. She reported:

There is a strange competitiveness, and ‘I’m better than you’ culture in academia. I hate competitiveness. What I love is the exchange of ideas and that for me is the greatest pleasure in supervising PhDs, and being excited about their projects. (HS2)

Without exception, the participating supervisors in supportive relationships did not see themselves as being in competition with their candidates, but rather they had a genuine interest in, and gave their support to their candidates. Furthermore, they
highly valued collaboration with members of their academic community. The values of collaboration and commitment to academic community that was shown to underpin supportive supervision are in direct contrast to the academic values of competition and individualism argued to be dominant by Henkel and Vabø (2006, p. 133) and Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 118), as was discussed in Chapter 2.

Many of the participating supervisors reported that the supervisory relationship and academic community were important to the success of their candidates in becoming independent researchers. A supervisor explained that he encouraged his candidates to interact with other members of the intellectual community:

I think the supervisory relationship is very important. They are not yet an independent researcher. There is a reason why they need to be here with [their] peers and their seniors who have been though and know more. (NSS1)

A few participating supervisors explained that they had developed close relationships with their candidates, which often lasted many years. A supervisor identified connecting to his candidates as core to his role in supervision. He described how he intentionally included his candidates into his academic network:

The relationship is not just about the thesis. There are layers of connections, more than just a student-supervisor relationship. You become connected with your candidates. That is who I am. I see that as the core role of the supervisor. I see the candidate as an individual, and I add value by connecting with them, and them with the network. (APS2)

These descriptions show that supervisors viewed their networks as part of the successful academic’s “cultural capital” (Parry, 2007, p. 30) and that sharing this with their candidates was an important part of their supervisory role. Further, the notion of supervisors developing close connections with their candidates is consistent with Delamont et al.’s (2004, p. 32) argument that some supervisors foster a personal commitment to their candidates. In the present investigation, in supportive relationships, participating candidates’ scholarly identities appeared to have developed as part of their overall development during candidature.

Given the conflicting drivers of competition and individualism on the one hand, and, collaboration and community on the other, well-regarded supervisors appeared to have a distinctive self-image that transcended a culture of rivalry and competition.
between scholars. Furthermore, the high value supervisors placed on collaboration, interdependence and building an academic community may explain a culture of supportive supervision.

Not all of the participating candidates identified with the culture of their academic communities. A candidate reported that she did not fit in well with the research culture in her department:

I do not fit very well in terms of the research culture. I always felt aside from it, apart from it, and do not think that I actually fit in with what is going on here at the university. So, it is just him [her supervisor] and me, really. He tried occasionally to get me together with other scholars, but it never really worked. (SSC1)

This description of the candidate feeling that she did not belong in her department resonates with Austin’s (2002, p. 96) finding in a longitudinal study of doctoral candidates’ socialisation to academic careers that in the task of becoming part of a department, candidates had to struggle with the question of whether or not they felt they belonged in the department. Austin (2002, p. 114) found that this struggle concerned a conflict between personal values and the values that candidates perceived they were being socialised to accept. In the present investigation, the candidate did not actively seek out a wider intellectual community at whatever stage she was in her candidature. Her explanation was that her relationship with her supervisor provided her with enough support and a sense of academic community. In a later conversation with the researcher, however, this candidate described her sense of isolation:

So, I was isolated, and there was not really anyone I could talk to about it. It is a solitary process without a great deal of support. You do it on your own and your main contact is your supervisor. (SSC1)

Another candidate described the importance of feeling supported, and of not being left alone in his candidature:

Just the fact that they [the supervisors] are there supporting me to do this is incredibly important for me, because I don’t know whether I’d be able to do it on my own. (HC2)

The nature of the support provided by the majority of supervisory relationships contributed to meeting the candidates’ needs and in reducing the sense of intellectual isolation that some participating candidates reported experiencing during candidature.
Such descriptions of isolation align closely with Stubb et al.’s (2011, p. 34) findings that many PhD candidates feel isolated from the academic community, while for others, the primary context for learning is the scholarly community. Further, they attest that the “PhD journey can be seen as an on-going meaning making process, where students need to grow a feeling of themselves as competent researchers and essential, valued members of the academic community” (Stubb et al., 2011, p. 34).

About half the participating supervisors viewed training candidates to be part of the academic community as an important aspect of their supervisory role. A supervisor felt that she had developed her candidate’s research capacity and that she had mentored him into a research role in the academic community. She reported:

I feel that he has been mentored into academia and into a research role. (HS1)

The candidate’s report concurred with this view. He considered that his supervisor was training him in academia, and that she had acted as a gateway in introducing him to the academic community. He reported:

I am being trained as a junior academic and introduced to the academic community within the university and wider, which is priceless. I really value that. (HC1)

Networking was a useful strategy used by these supervisors to integrate their candidates with the academic community. A supervisor explained that the way he exposed his candidates to his network was more intuitive than intentional:

I think networking is important. I probably do it intuitively. I get them looking at certain people’s work. Then we need to be thinking about what sort of conferences they may attend so that they get exposed to the network of their supervising team. This way they meet the people that they have read, and start to build their career. (NSS2)

Without exception, participating supervisors took the time and had the interest to make personal connections with their candidates. A supervisor described how these connections often resulted in a lifelong professional relationship with his candidates:

We are dealing with adult people, so there are always family crises and drama that occur in any given five-year period. So then, you get to know their background, their family, you get to know the candidate personally over time. I am very proud of the fact that I keep in contact with nearly all of my doctoral candidates. Most of the doctorates want a job, so you start writing references for them, usually near the end of the thesis,
as they are applying for a lectureship or whatever. Then two years later they apply for a senior lectureship, if they are productive and they publish papers, and then they want you to join on publications. Or, you may want them to join you on papers you are doing. Some of my students now are professors at universities and they have examined for me, so it is not as if they get their degree and never speak to you again. They are colleagues who are part of your network. (APS2)

Another supervisor reported that he supported the idea of a lifelong relationship with his candidates, within the context of their academic community:

I talk about my supervision style and the fact that I tend to make lifelong support decisions about my students. I keep in contact after [candidature] and sometimes we work together after completion of their degrees. (NSS2)

A candidate described the development of her scholarly identity in terms of an ongoing journey that took place within the supportive relationship with her supervisors:

Even though you will come out the other end with a PhD, … there is still a long way to go, a lot to learn and understand, and think about. It is an ongoing learning process … that my supervisors have supported me in developing. (SSC2)

This description echoes the work of McAlpine (2012, p. 38) who found that doctoral candidates experience the doctorate as an on-going journey in developing their scholarly identity. In the present investigation, another candidate reported that not much support was experienced from the wider community at the university:

I have to have a PhD to have a voice within the world of [his research area]. I don’t feel supported by the university whatsoever. I feel supported by my supervisors, but by the research college? No. (HC2)

Lifelong professional commitments were embarked upon between some participating supervisory pairs. Being part of an academic community was reported as being highly valued by these individuals. Being part of an academic community is not merely professional, but there is also a personal aspect to the relationship. A supervisor reflected that his approach to his relationship with his candidates was based on the high value that he placed in the notion of academic community. He reported that he created a sense of community with his candidates by being inclusive:
Chapter 8: Reciprocity: Valuing Academic Community

My approach to research is community based, so there is a sense of community and inclusiveness that I try to bring to the supervisory relationship. (NSS1)

Similarly, another supervisor valued academic community and described how initially, he and his colleagues performed the role of the academic community in the scholarly development of their candidates:

Even though I am building a community with the other supervisors within the university, I also want to include the students in a community of practice, because we are all interested in the same domain. They can begin to develop relational skills that will allow them to do further networking. However, in the short term, pragmatically we are their [academic] community, in terms of a support network and what it is like to be working with us. We also share things that will be useful to them; literatures and ideas, for when they start creating away from that core supervision. I think community is really important. I think it is the ideal. (APS1)

How well a particular candidate felt part of an academic community of scholars varied. However, for the majority of participating candidates, it became apparent that the initial integration with their academic community occurred mainly in, and through, the relationship formed with the supervisor. A desired outcome of candidature is that candidates become independent scholars. However, independence does not mean that candidates are intellectually isolated. The majority of supervisor-candidate pairs felt they were intellectually and emotionally connected, and candidates perceived this feeling of connection as supportive. Many of the participating supervisors reported how much they valued connecting with their candidates, and how they valued connecting candidates to members of their academic community. The concept of candidates being both independent scholars and connected with the academic community is paradoxical. It concerns both candidates’ independent scholarly thinking, and their collaboration with their supervisors, within an academic community.

Concluding remarks

The emerging themes in this chapter have concerned the practices of collaboration, collegiality and co-creation of the thesis by which participating supervisors developed reciprocal supervisory relationships. These supervisory practices explain how reciprocity has the advantage of managing potential tensions in the power differential in supervisory relationships. According to Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 118)
conflicting values of collaboration and competition are normal in academia. In the present investigation, however, participating supervisors gave a particular meaning to their supervision that was expressed in the high value they placed in collaboration with their candidates and colleagues. These attributes were valued over academic competition and independence, and they were expressed through encouraging their candidates to be part of their academic community. Across all disciplines concerned, supervisors who developed supportive supervisory relationships had a distinctive self-image that valued co-operation, collaboration and collegiality to a very great extent, rather than the values of academic rivalry, competitiveness and individualism.

This chapter has provided insights into the ways in which supervisors gave priority to the academic value of co-operation in their supervisory relationships and academic community in ways that supported their candidates. The majority of participating candidates’ scholarly identities developed through the qualities of interdependence and connectedness between supervisors and candidates. In this manner, candidates reported that they made intellectual progress during candidature, which they viewed as instrumental in developing their perception of themselves as developing scholars. It is evident that candidates’ inclusion into an academic community occurred initially through connecting with their supervisor in the supportive supervisory relationship.

While reciprocity, characterised by collaboration, collegiality and co-creation of the thesis, was an essential attribute of supportive supervisory relationships, the insights and emerging themes in this chapter also confirm that reciprocity is the foundation for what Walker et al. (2008, p. 102) call “healthy” academic communities. Supervisors who developed supportive relationships with their candidates clearly valued a reciprocal ‘way of being’ in the world, and which in existential terms, gave meaning and purpose to their professional work with their candidates and colleagues.

In the following chapter, the principle themes emerging from the present investigation will be discussed with reference to the existential humanistic theoretical framework underpinning the investigation. It will also present a new conceptual model for supportive supervisory relationships and supervision, and present implications of the model for doctoral supervisory practices.
Chapter 9
Conclusion

This final chapter draws together the essential threads of the investigation. It begins with insights about how an existential humanistic lens on doctoral supervision can inform the field of doctoral study. Important findings that address the research questions and the issues and concerns raised in Chapter 1 are then discussed in the form of themes to emerge from the data, and in terms of the theoretical constructs underpinning the investigation. A new conceptual model for supportive supervisory relationships and supervision, which takes into consideration the emerging themes in the investigation, is presented. Implications of the model for supervisory practices at the level of the doctorate are then presented. Finally, some suggestions for further research are advanced in light of the insights provided by the investigation.

An existential humanistic framework

An existential humanistic framework offers an enlightening way to view doctoral supervisory relationships. It provides a basis for illuminating the nature of dispositional qualities that well-regarded doctoral supervisors embody in their supervisory relationships, and which candidates and supervisors perceive to be important to the intellectual progress of candidates. A ‘ways of being’ perspective on supervisory relationships presents an alternative view on doctoral supervision when compared with the body of literature on effective doctoral supervision. This literature, as was discussed in Chapter 2, is dominated by lists of behaviours that supervisors should perform, rather than by the elaboration of the dispositional qualities underpinning the behaviours. A ‘ways of being’ perspective on doctoral supervisory relationships provides a deeper understanding of the non-verbal elements of the interpersonal communication in supervisory relationships. It also shows explicitly the ways in which rapport is established in these relationships.

Key concepts from the threshold concept framework and liminality also provide a promising lens through which to examine in depth highly valued doctoral supervisory relationships. It is evident that the dispositional qualities of well-regarded supervisors are characterised by the same qualities espoused by existential humanists as being appropriate to the negotiation of a ‘liminal’ experience in the form of doctoral
candidature. Key tenets of existentialism, namely freedom, choice, isolation and meaningfulness, are relevant in providing a deeper understanding of the intellectual and emotional difficulties that candidates experienced during candidature. They illuminate the manner in which participating candidates experience and make meaning of their intellectual and emotional isolation, and how they take responsibility for becoming progressively independent as developing scholars making intellectual progress during their candidature. Existentialism also provides insights about the meaning that participating supervisors attached to their supervisory practices through their supportive supervisory relationships. Humanism is considered to be relevant to providing a deeper understanding of the role played by the participating supervisors’ values, beliefs and attitudes of respect, trust and equality in developing and maintaining supportive supervisory relationships. From a humanistic perspective, these relationships provide ‘safe’ learning environments in which candidates are able to make intellectual progress during candidature.

**Principal themes**

A number of important themes emerge from the present investigation. These point to particular dispositional qualities of well-regarded supervisors in establishing supportive supervisory relationships. These qualities are consistent with a humanistic way of being in relationship, and they align with Rogers’ (1969) perspective on a facilitative approach to teaching and learning, characterised mainly by unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathetic understanding.

**Personal support**

A characteristic of supportive supervisory relationships that consistently emerged from the data concerns the importance of personal support: it was in every candidate’s experience an element found to be at the centre of developing and maintaining rapport in a supervisory relationship. Supervisors in the investigation provided personal support as distinct from, though in addition to, providing professional guidance. Personal support was characterised by special dispositional qualities, such as empathy and understanding, which supervisors embodied in their relationships with their candidates. Candidates explained that these qualities made the supervisory relationship strongly supportive at a personal level. The presence of these supervisory qualities in the relationships reported by the participants is directly consistent with
Rogers’ (1969, p. 111) condition of “empathetic understanding”, which he argues is an essential attitude in facilitators in order to establish an environment for significant learning. In the present investigation, supervisory empathy and understanding were key factors in establishing a learning environment that made candidates feel personally supported during their candidature.

Supervisors who gave personal support to their candidates also demonstrated ‘emotional intelligence’, which candidates found beneficial to developing and maintaining rapport. A few researchers (see, for example, A.M. Lee, 2008, p. 275) refer to the ‘emotional intelligence’ of supervisors as being necessary to their working with candidates to achieve successful completion. Further, Doloriert et al. (2012, p. 743) found that emotional intelligence mattered to both supervisors and candidates. In the present investigation, emotional intelligence was a striking and uniformly important element of the personal support that well-regarded supervisors provided to their candidates. Candidates and supervisors described a highly consistent suite of supervisory qualities, which they termed ‘emotional intelligence’, and which included: empathy, patience, kindness, accessibility, knowing and understanding the candidate and their life circumstances, and having the wisdom to know how to respond appropriately to particular needs and requests for guidance or assistance. These supervisory qualities, encompassed for the candidates in the term ‘emotional intelligence’, were shown to be very important to supporting candidates in the affective domain of the supervisory relationship. Emotional intelligence among supervisors evidently aligns closely with Rogers’ (1969, p. 106) perspective, in which the core conditions of empathetic understanding, congruence and unconditional positive regard are essential in helping relationships that facilitate significant learning.

The personal support that supervisors provided to candidates was instrumental in developing a strong intellectual and emotional rapport. While rapport, characterised here as a good understanding between a candidate and a supervisor, is widely acknowledged in the relevant literature to be a critical component in successful supervisory relationships, there has to date been little attention given to the ways in which it is developed and maintained in supervisory relationships. The importance of personal support that supervisors provide to candidates in establishing rapport reflects that candidature is a highly personal endeavour involving emotional challenges, as
well as intellectual ones. Clearly, the affective and cognitive domains are inextricably linked when it comes to doctoral candidature.

**Easeful attitudes to time**

Easeful attitudes to the amount of time supervisors spent in engaging with their candidates in supervision also emerged as an important theme in developing and maintaining rapport in supervisory relationships. Kline (2009, p. 52) describes the notion of ease as a state of “freedom from internal rush and urgency.” Time constraints have been recognised to be an issue in doctoral supervision. For example, Hammond et al. (2010, p. v) reported a concern about the impact of high supervisory workloads on the quality in supervision; and Neumann (2003, p. 55) noted the difficulties for some candidates of gaining frequent, or even regular, access to their supervisors. In contrast, in the present investigation, the majority of the participating supervisors communicated to candidates by being consistently accessible, that they had time for them. Candidates perceived that their supervisors were generous with the time they gave in supervision and claimed this supervisory attitude fostered a positive tone in the supervisory relationship. When supervisors actively embodied ease as a quality in their supervisory relationships, it was clear that candidates felt personally valued and supported, and that their work was important to their supervisors. This dispositional quality aligns closely with Rogers’ (1969, p. 164) perspective that facilitators’ internal attitudes towards learners impact upon the mood or climate of the learner’s experience of learning.

As was reported in Chapter 6, supervisors had a particular view of candidature as being a journey: believing that the value of the PhD resided in the processes of candidature, and not simply in the outcome of a thesis. The majority of the supervisors in the present investigation claimed that scholarly engagement, academic excellence, and reflection on the deeper issues of the PhD take time to establish and mature, and were essential to the intellectual progress of candidates. Supervisors’ beliefs concerning taking time in candidature, and their particularly easeful attitudes to time spent in supervision motivated and provided meaning to the time-consuming work of supervising a PhD candidate to completion.
Meeting diversity with openness and flexibility

Another important emerging theme concerns supervisory qualities of openness and flexibility. These qualities appeared to allow supervisors to work effectively and with equanimity with the range of diversity they encountered in their candidates. This finding is in contrast with Hammond et al.’s (2010, p. 10) finding that research supervisors felt adversely challenged by the increase in the diversity in doctoral candidates. In the present investigation, the majority of participating supervisors had the ability to view their candidates as individuals, and were able to ‘read’ each candidate’s unique set of needs. They were also able to vary the tone of supervisory conversations, and make adjustments in their approach, in order to meet the varying needs of individual candidates. These supervisors were open to change and not fixed in their style and delivery of supervision. Participating candidates highly valued these qualities. The type of expertise given to candidates was variable, for example, in how much direction supervisors gave to their candidates, particularly at the beginning of candidature. Underpinning this flexibility was supervisors’ trust in their candidates’ potential to succeed in achieving doctoral outcomes. Candidates responded to their supervisors’ faith in their potential to succeed with feelings of empowerment and a greater sense of confidence about developing their scholarly identity.

Supervisory ability to be open and flexible when facing variability in supervision is highly consistent with Rogers’ (1961, p. 353) argument that if a person is open to experience, then it means that they have a “tolerance for ambiguity where ambiguity exists.” In a similar vein, Siegel (2010, p. 108) argues that openness is an essential trait in psychotherapists, allowing awareness of his or her internal reactivity to uncertainty. He argues that this trait allows therapists to be accepting of uncertainty in their work with clients. In the present investigation, participating supervisors were well able to tolerate the inherent ambiguity found in the wide diversity in their candidates, and change their style of supervision to meet individual candidates’ needs. This finding is important because it addresses the issue of matching candidates with supervisors in order to achieve a good fit of personalities, as was discussed in Chapter 7. Supervisors demonstrated that supportive supervision does not occur only at the level of personality matches between supervisory pairs. Achieving a good fit between candidates and supervisors is greatly assisted by the supervisory qualities of openness and flexibility towards diversity in supervision.
The tacit nature of respect and trust

All the participating candidates and supervisors spoke at length about the importance of respect and trust in their supervisory relationships. These qualities in the relationship are not easily described because they concern feelings and emotions tacitly experienced in supervisory relationships. Nevertheless, it is important to reflect upon some of the characteristics of the qualities concerned. It was abundantly clear that respect between supervisory pairs came about when supervisors, for their part, embodied a mix of dispositional qualities in their supervisory relationships, as documented in Figure 7.1. These included being: authentic, caring, easeful, encouraging, engaging, empathetic, flexible, humble, intentional, interested, inspiring, kind, listens, open, patient, perceptive, responsive, responsible, supportive, trusting, trustworthy, and warm. Given the nature of many of these qualities, their only means of conveyance to candidates was tacitly, by means of non-verbal communication.

Many of these dispositional qualities align with what Siegel (2010, p. 180) calls “mindfulness traits in psychotherapists”, including awareness of self and of others, emotional equilibrium, empathy, listening and paying attention, openness, and taking responsibility to develop empathetic relationships with clients. While there are differences between the doctoral supervisory relationship and the helping professional relationship, as was explained in Chapter 1, in both types of relationship, there are notable parallels in the manner of communicating respect, to candidates in one setting, and to clients in the other. The parallel in fostering respect is shown in these shared qualities or traits that are tacitly communicated to the doctoral candidate or client.

All of the candidates in this investigation and a majority of the supervisors referred also to the importance of trust in their supervisory relationships. When supervisors consistently and constantly embodied certain positive qualities in their relationships, trusting supervisory relationships developed, and were maintained. For candidates, consistency meant that supervisors embodied the same mix of dispositional qualities as documented in Figure 7.1. Importantly, it was the consistency with which supervisors communicated these qualities that mattered. Similarly, being constant meant that these positive supervisory qualities were reliably and dependably present in their interactions and communications with candidates. These findings resonate
with Rogers’ (1961, p. 61; 1969, p. 228) argument that a critical condition for facilitators is to be congruent in helping relationships, or, simply put, to be dependably and reliably “real” with their clients or students.

It was critically important to candidates in the present investigation that they should be able to trust their supervisors with their intellectual and emotional vulnerabilities. Candidates reported that they could trust their supervisors to maintain a positive attitude towards them, and support them, even when they faced personal difficulties or became emotional during candidature. That candidates felt it was acceptable for them to have frailties and vulnerabilities resonates strongly with Siegel’s (2010, p. 75) observation that trust in the helping relationship is not a luxury, but is a basic neurological need of human beings: the trusting relationship creates the conditions for change in the client. While the doctoral supervisory relationship and the helping professional relationship are conducted in entirely different settings, it is clear that well-regarded supervisors embody qualities that foster respect and trust between the candidate and the supervisor, strikingly similar to mindfulness traits Siegel (2010, p. 180) described as vital among helping professionals. These insights have important implications for doctoral supervision because they show how important to establishing conditions conducive to the candidate making intellectual progress is the trust between the candidate and supervisor in supervisory relationships.

Supervisors’ attitudes of trust in the candidates’ potential to succeed in achieving doctoral outcomes also affected where candidates were on the dependence-independence continuum, namely, the degree of candidate independence and the amount of direction given to candidates. According to Baker and Pifer (2011, p. 5) there is very little research that has focused specifically on the doctoral candidate’s experience of the critical transition from intellectual and emotional dependence on the supervisor to scholarly independence. Crises in candidates’ confidence in their intellectual ability to achieve doctoral outcomes are widely recognised as being experienced by doctoral candidates at various times during their candidature, as was discussed in Chapter 2. However, evidence in the present investigation shows that the majority of participating candidates perceived that their supervisors had faith in their potential to succeed in attaining doctoral outcomes, as Chapter 6 attests. Overall, candidates responded positively to the degree of trust that their supervisors placed in
them, as they felt encouraged to continue to master critical threshold concepts, both intellectual and emotional, during candidature. Supervisors’ trust built candidates’ confidence in their intellectual ability and as developing scholars. Trust in the supervisory relationship was, therefore, important for establishing conditions conducive to candidates making necessary intellectual gains. Supervisory trust in their candidates’ potential closely mirrors Rogers’ (1969, p. 109) view that an essential condition for significant learning concerns “unconditional positive regard”, which he described as a “prizing, acceptance and trust of the learner as an imperfect human being with many feelings, many potentialities.”

Equality

The notion of equality between the candidate and the supervisor emerged as an important characteristic of supportive supervisory relationships. An attitude of equality placed supervisors and candidates as learners on a similar trajectory. Equality was demonstrated by the high value that supervisors placed in what candidates brought to their candidature, both professionally and personally, as was reported in Chapter 7. Only one of the eight candidates experienced concern about a power differential in his supervisory relationship, as was shown in Chapter 7. It is conceivable that equality in the supervisory relationship plays an important role in mitigating tensions arising from power imbalances: by non-verbally communicating how much supervisor’s valued equality in the relationship.

Equality in the relationship was also demonstrated through reciprocity, as reported by about half of the participating candidates and their supervisors, and as manifested by the co-authoring of articles for publication. The reciprocal supervisory relationship was instrumental in building these candidates’ confidence in their developing scholarly identities, as was shown in Chapter 8. The supervisory qualities of respect, trust, humility and equality in the supervisory relationship, as discussed in Chapter 6, appeared to form the foundations of collaborative and collegial relationships. Overall, the supervisory relationships became increasingly more collegial as candidates gained confidence in their intellectual abilities, which, in turn, contributed to the development of their identities as scholars. In existential terms, embodying these qualities in the supervisory relationship gave meaning to supervisors’ professional work in doctoral supervision.
**Intentionality**

The majority of participating supervisors intentionally embodied qualities, such as kindness and knowing and caring about the candidate’s personal life circumstances that from experience they knew would systematically develop supportive relationships. Furthermore, these qualities were an expression of supervisors’ academic values, beliefs and attitudes, as was demonstrated in Chapter 7. All of the participating supervisors were aware of the importance of taking responsibility for their role in establishing rapport in supervisory relationships. They were also aware that, by embodying certain qualities, they were building rapport in their relationships. This insight is consistent with Rogers’ (1961, p. 284) condition for learning that facilitators ought to ensure that their inner attitudes of congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic understanding have been successfully communicated to and are perceived by the client. The majority of supervisors in the present investigation sought to develop supportive relationships because it provided meaning and purpose in their professional work. Their professional motivation was to build supportive relationships with their candidates.

The majority of supervisors in the investigation intentionally had faith in their candidate’s potential to succeed in achieving doctoral outcomes, and they held onto this attitude through difficult periods in candidature. The element of intentionally trusting in the candidates’ potential to develop and make progress has some obvious parallels with the helping relationships. Two of these similarities are particularly noteworthy. The first aspect concerns the presence of the supervisor and the manner in which supervisors forged a connection with their candidates through being engaging, committed and caring towards their candidates. The second aspect concerns supervisors’ awareness of the importance to candidates making intellectual progress of their intellectually and emotionally supportive roles as supervisors.

**Reconceptualising doctoral supervision**

Drawing on the key themes emerging from the investigation, a reconceptualization of doctoral supervision is possible. It is one that takes into account the mindfulness qualities requisite in the helping professions, while acknowledging that there are limits to the expression of those qualities. The core attributes of mutual respect, trust and equality may be seen to provide the basis for developing a new conceptual model
for establishing and maintaining supportive supervisory relationships. Such a conceptual model accommodates these non-verbal elements in the interpersonal communication between supervisors and candidates, and allows them, at least to some degree, to be characterised.

Insights from the present investigation suggest that there may be a number of factors impeding the development of a culture of supportive supervisory relationships. First, supervisors may not recognise or be able to explicitly identify the dispositional qualities that they bring to their supervisory relationships. They may also not be able to give expression to the values and beliefs that motivate them and which inform their attitudes and behaviours in the relationships with their candidates. Furthermore, they may not explicitly know or be able to name the values they hold which give rise to the embodiment of certain positive qualities that, in turn, allow the attributes of respect, trust, and equality to flourish in the supervisory relationship. It follows, then, that not all supervisors may be able to embody these attributes in their supervisory relationships with intention. Evidently, intentionality appears to be a key antidote to the issue of variability of quality in doctoral supervision. Second, supervisors, particularly those with demanding workloads, may be unaware of the benefits of reflecting on their practices, in order to develop attitudes, behaviours and mindfulness traits that are considered in the helping professions to result in continual psychological maturation. Indeed, it comes as no surprise that Hammond et al. (2010, p. 69) found that in academic institutions insufficient opportunities were provided to supervisors for formally reflecting on their supervisory practice: the development of this practice is not generally part of academic culture. Third, supervisors’ practices are, unfortunately, embedded in an academic culture that traditionally does not support or reward teaching and mentoring, as Walker et al. (2008, p. 100) observed. There exists a tension between the academic values of collaboration and collegiality, that were found in the present investigation to be conducive to building trusting supervisory relationships, and the values of independence and individualism identified by Henkel and Vabø (2006, p. 134) and the typical competition between scholars identified by Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 118). Given this tension, it is not surprising that collaborative and collegial ways of developing supportive supervisory relationships are generally not recognised or rewarded by universities, including at the site of the present investigation.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

Developing a conceptual model for supportive supervision

The development of the theoretical perspectives of the proposed conceptual model, as they relate to each of the data chapters, now follows: (Chapter 5) the liminal space of candidature; (Chapter 6) supervisory ‘ways of being’ in relationship; (Chapter 7) core values, beliefs and attitudes; and (Chapter 8) reciprocity: valuing academic community.

Making meaning of liminal spaces

The importance of supervisors making explicit to candidates the troublesome nature of candidature, and of explaining the typical difficulties that candidates may generally expect to encounter, both intellectually and emotionally, cannot be underestimated. The affective domain of candidature, which concerns the intellectual confidence and manageable anxiety levels in the candidate, becomes the concern of the supervisor as well as their role in the candidate’s intellectual progress in candidature. At the same time as developing and maintaining a supportive learning environment, supervisors reported urging candidates to appreciate intellectual and emotional difficulties and the resulting discomfort and anxiety, as an inevitable and normal part of the liminal learning journey of doctoral candidature. Knowing and understanding that candidates typically move through liminal spaces by crossing conceptual and emotional thresholds while attempting to make new knowledge, helps candidates to make sense of, and attach meaning to, the difficult experiences of candidature. When supervisors help candidates to make meaning explicitly in this way, candidates obtain purpose, clarity, and confidence about making appropriate higher order knowledge gains.

Supervisory ‘ways of being’ in relationship

Reportedly well-regarded and successful supervisors had particular ways of being supportive towards their candidates in their supervisory relationships. Supervisors were aware of their ‘ways of being’ in supervision, and they consistently brought their dispositional qualities to bear in the supervisory relationship. A function of the supervisory relationship is to provide a supportive learning environment and for the relationship to be a positive experience for the candidate. A mix of dispositional qualities consistently present in the supervisor developed a mutually respectful and trusting learning environment in which the supervisory relationship could flourish.
Core values, beliefs and attitudes

Supervisory ways of being in relationships with candidates point to the embodiment of certain core supervisory values, beliefs and attitudes in those relationships. Supervisors engaged with the range of diversity they encountered in candidates with openness and flexibility, which allowed them to adjust their style of supervision to meet the variable needs of their candidates. Supervisors who placed a high value on equality in the supervisory relationship promoted productive power relations and a positive tone in the supervisory relationship, thus mitigating the potential adverse impact of the power differential in supervisory relationships. An attitude of equality placed supervisors and candidates on a similar learning trajectory.

Reciprocity and valuing academic community

Supervisors highly valued collaboration and collegiality over individual achievement, rivalry and competition, as was demonstrated, for example, by the extent of reciprocity in supervisory relationships. Supervisors aimed to assist the candidate to achieve and maintain confidence in their intellectual ability to develop as a scholar. Through embodying certain core dispositional qualities supervisors were able to establish an intellectual and emotional environment that was conducive to their candidates making intellectual progress during candidature, and which supported the candidates’ acceptance into an academic community. The process of becoming a scholar was initiated through the reciprocal supervisory relationship. This relationship supported candidates as they made meaning of the difficulty, ambiguity, anxiety and transitions in identity that accompany candidature.

A conceptual model

The conceptual model for supportive supervision, presented in Figure 9.1, is designed to give expression to what is the nature of supportive supervisory relationships and successful doctoral supervision. The model seeks to frame the challenges in the process of candidature and desired experiences in candidature, and the ways of being in supervisory relationships that result in and provide indicators for healthy academic communities.
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Figure 9.1 A conceptual model for supportive supervisory relationships and supervision.

The model provides a basis for advancing propositions that are central to the establishment of supportive doctoral supervisory relationships and doctoral supervision. The first proposition concerns challenges experienced in the process of PhD candidature. In the liminal space of candidature, candidates experience difficulty, anxiety and isolation in knowledge making during candidature, and while their scholarly identity is developing. At such times, candidates tend to feel that there is often a challenge to their confidence in their intellectual ability to make the required intellectual gains and to make progress towards succeeding in achieving doctoral outcomes. From an existential humanistic perspective, the antidote to these difficulties is for candidates to make meaning of their uncomfortable feelings of anxiety as they encounter intellectual challenges of knowledge making during candidature. The second proposition concerns the desired experiences in PhD candidature. Candidates found purpose and clarity about their candidature through
developing a scholarly identity within a supportive research culture and in a number of instances, through being part of a collaborative research community. A scholarly identity developed mainly through making intellectual progress and through a collaborative and collegial relationship with the supervisor. The supervisory relationship is characterised by reciprocity: a mutual giving and receiving from each other. The third proposition concerns supervisors as facilitators and their supportive *ways of being* in relationship with candidates. Supervisory core values were expressed in supervisory attitudes to equality, and through supervisors’ ability to embrace a range of diversity in their candidates with qualities of openness and flexibility. From a humanistic perspective, supervisors’ dispositional qualities worked together as a system of interpersonal engagement that tacitly developed a respectful climate in the relationship with their candidates, and which provided a psychological environment conducive to learning. Supervisors built trust in the relationship through consistently and constantly embodying such qualities.

Central to the model is the concept that successful supervision provides a supportive supervisory relationship within and through which the candidate can negotiate the liminal space of candidature. The model is holistic in that it acknowledges and accommodates the inextricably linked nature of the cognitive and affective domains for candidates during their doctoral studies. Therefore, in order to develop their expertise in meeting the needs of candidates in both these domains, supervisors might embody certain dispositional qualities in the supervisory relationship, such as, empathy, understanding and personal support, that assist candidates to make meaning of their experience of candidature. With making meaning in an explicit way, candidates gain clarity about the way forward in their candidature. When candidates make intellectual progress, particularly by publishing or presenting at conferences, they find purpose by beginning to get a sense of their developing scholarly identity within the research culture of the specialism, and by being accepted, even if tentatively, into a research community. Initially, this may be a community of two: the candidate and a preferred supervisor. While progressing through candidature is essentially an intellectually lonely endeavour, paradoxically, candidates make progress in the journey not merely in isolation, but through the supportive relationship with their supervisor.
It is not easy to describe how dispositional qualities and attitudes that are largely conveyed by tacit means can be embodied in relationships. Tacit qualities and attitudes can, however, be modelled in a coaching environment, according to Kline (2009, p. 19); and while they may not be easy to master, they can be learned. In a similar vein, supervisors might then bring dispositional qualities, such as ease and empathetic understanding, to their supervisory relationships. The model posited here must undergo robust critique in order to determine whether it might be integrated into existing empirical research on doctoral supervision.

**Implications for doctoral supervision**

An implication for doctoral supervision of the proposed model for supportive supervisory relationships and supervision is that more dialogue about supervisory practices needs to be encouraged in universities and research institutes. Hammond et al. (2010, p. 8), for example, recommend that universities facilitate rich and sustained conversations across academic communities about ways of theorising what it means to be a supervisor. The proposed model would enable doctoral supervisors to do this in both formal and informal ways. To facilitate a change in individual supervisors and departments, as Hammond et al. (2010, p. 7) have argued, departments and universities need to find ways of engaging supervisors to go beyond issues of compliance, to having constructive conversations that address the quality of supervision and effective supervisory practices. Currently the dialogue on doctoral supervision mainly concerns what supervisors ought to know and should do. Such dialogue does not address how supervisory dispositional qualities may impact on the non-verbal aspects of the interpersonal communication between a supervisor and candidate, and how they might build rapport. The model explicitly demonstrates how supervisors might establish a ‘safe’ psychological environment within supervisory relationships, namely, relationships in which there are elements of respect, trust and equality. Elements such as these, which are tacitly conveyed in the relationship, are seldom discussed, possibly, because it is difficult to give verbal expression to them. Potentially, the model offers to doctoral supervision an important insight: that a supervisor’s non-verbal ways of being supportive in the supervisory relationship can, to some degree, be distinguished into explicit qualities. It also provides supervisors with a conceptual structure from which to reflect on their practice in order to become aware of supportive qualities they can embody in the supervisory relationship.
Conversations between supervisors about supervisory practices could then occur; particularly, about how these tacit qualities may be better understood, and may be modelled effectively by experienced supervisors for the benefit of those who are learning to supervise doctoral candidates.

Another implication of the proposed model concerns the ways in which a positive culture of supervision, characterised by academic values of collegiality, collaboration and reciprocity, might be established and nurtured within academic departments and faculties. Vygotsky’s (1997, p. 32) concept of “the zone of proximal development”, which concerns the importance of learning with the assistance of a more knowledgeable mentor, indicates how critical may be the role that supportive supervisors play in facilitating the candidate making intellectual progress. Further, the principles of situated learning advanced in Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation suggest that doctoral candidates’ participation in their academic communities supports learning and facilitates socialisation into the community of practice. Supervisory relationships that embrace values of collegiality, collaboration and reciprocity may provide a platform for developing the candidate’s scholarly identity in a healthy academic community. The model accounts for such provision conceptually, but operationalizing it at the department and faculty levels requires knowledge, commitment and incentives, all of which seem to be in short supply in contemporary universities and research centres.

A further implication of the proposed model is that it makes explicit the nature of culture change required in supervision that once observed may provide departments and universities with an incentive to acknowledge and reward supportive supervisory practices. Indicators of supportive supervisory relationships include how supervisors: meet diversity in their candidates by varying their responses in supervision to meet the needs of individual candidates; how they demonstrate non-verbal ways of communication that develop supportive supervisory relationships; and how they are reflexive practitioners who intentionally challenge and change their own supervisory practices.
Potential for further research

An existential humanistic model of supervision, developed from the insights emerging from the present investigation and contextualised in this chapter, provides a lens for better understanding the nature of supportive doctoral supervisory relationships. However, the present investigation does not attempt to address all aspects of the complex role that academic values, beliefs and attitudes, and the dispositional qualities of supervisors, play in supervisory relationships. A number of areas for further research, therefore, emerge from the investigation.

First, there is a need for research that deeply explores how supervisors might conduct supervisory conversations in ways that provide an intellectual and emotional space which will allow candidates to reflect on their doctoral work, and in which their transformational thinking about their thesis can occur. This research might also explore the links between supervisory dispositional qualities and their candidates’ cognitive conceptual development. According to Manathunga (2012, p. 34), supervisors may dominate the conversation in supervisory meetings, rather than adopting a more collaborative style that may allow the candidate’s cognitive processes to move forward. In the present investigation, included in the interview schedule for candidates was a question asking candidates about their experience of ‘aha’ moments of transformational change in higher order thinking, or, creative shifts in their thinking about their thesis during supervisory meetings and conversations. The majority of the participating candidates reported that they did not regularly experience, if at all, these transformational moments during supervisory meetings and conversations. For these candidates, the supervisory meetings provided opportunities for receiving feedback, asking questions and observing their supervisors. Yet, it might be expected that supervisory meetings and conversations would provide opportunities for supervisors to foster the candidate’s independent and creative thinking, both of which attributes, according to Wisker et al. (2003, p. 392) are critical to developing the thesis. Evidently, in the present investigation, supervisory meetings and conversations did not often give the majority of participating candidates opportunities to reflect on their work in candidature. There is a need for further research on this reported experience because there appears to be none to date.
The second area for further research concerns the need to better understand the dynamic interaction between the supervisor and the candidate, particularly, in cross-cultural relationships. Furthermore, how both parties take responsibility for developing and maintaining a positive tone and rapport in the relationship, particularly with regard to the tone of supervisors’ written feedback to candidates. The majority of participating supervisors in the present investigation embodied a mix of dispositional qualities that set a positive tone in the supervisory relationship. A thread for further investigation concerns the effect of the candidates’ qualities on the tone in the relationship, and the responsibilities and the role candidates might play in how rapport develops with the supervisor.

Yet another area for further investigation concerns the manner in which candidates and supervisors manage the intellectual and emotional challenges that arise for candidates during their candidature. While participants in the present investigation acknowledged that all candidates experienced some anxiety during candidature, both candidates and supervisors did not foreground anxiety as a major concern. Candidates reported that they were supported by their supervisory relationships in overcoming their intellectual and emotional difficulties. Further, in-depth research on the role and nature of support in the supervisory relationship on mitigating candidates’ experience of anxiety is necessary to take further the insights concerning supportive relationships reached in the present investigation.

A fourth area for further investigation concerns the dynamics in the supervisory relationship regarding managing tensions arising from the power differential inherent in the relationship, particularly, concerning the optimal place for candidates to be on the dependence-independence continuum. Walker et al. (2008, p. 8) have argued that the “development of professional identity as a scholar is ultimately a process that students themselves must shape and direct.” However, power tensions concerning control and autonomy may exist in the supervisory relationship that may hinder candidates in the process of becoming independent scholars during candidature. How supervisory pairs manage power tensions and the nature of the developing scholarly identity of candidates, and the role that their levels of confidence play in their making intellectual progress, would be an interesting area of further research.
A final area for further research concerns the need to evaluate the efficacy of the existential humanistic model proposed here for developing supportive supervisory relationships and supervision. According to Halse (2011, p. 557), the work of doctoral supervision impacts on supervisors’ learning: it is how they become a supervisor. It follows, then, that an appropriate line of inquiry would be to investigate whether desirable supervisory qualities, and the academic values, beliefs, attitudes that have been found to be inherent in supportive supervisory relationships can be cultivated in novice and experienced supervisors, and what impact these may have on enhancing supervisory practice.

**Final remarks**

Now, at the end of this investigation, it is important to reflect upon the far-reaching impact of doctoral supervisory relationships and doctoral supervision on doctoral education and in universities. The need for universities to provide uniformly high quality supervision necessitates that academics engage with the culture of supervision they have constructed. Establishing a culture of supportive doctoral supervisory relationships then becomes the concern of individual supervisors, departments and universities. In the present investigation, the expression and communication of supervisors’ dispositional qualities perceived by candidates, such as empathy, flexibility, openness and humility clearly set and maintained personal support, respect and trust in supervisory relationships. To the extent that such dispositional qualities, and the values, beliefs and attitudes concerning equality and diversity underpinning them, might be made explicit, supervisors may have greater control over the positive course of a supervisory relationship.

The nature of the interpersonal communication between a supervisor and candidate, and how rapport is developed in supervisory relationships has been an area of limited research to date. Most previous research has focused on personal attributes and professional behaviours of effective supervisors and the role of the relationship in successful supervision. The present investigation has shown the nature of the dispositional qualities of well-regarded supervisors and the role these play in the interpersonal communication between supervisors and candidates. It has highlighted the overwhelming need to establish and foster a positive rapport to sustain the candidate intellectually and also emotionally during candidature. The insights and
themes of personal support, easeful attitudes to time spent in supervision, meeting diversity with openness and flexibility, the tacit nature of respect and trust, equality, and intentionality in the present investigation demonstrate that supportive doctoral supervision is both a professional and to a great extent, an interpersonal undertaking that is complex and multifaceted, both at the practical level and at the theoretical level.

As the present investigation has shown, doctoral candidature, in terms of being a liminal space, is experienced as a particularly intellectually and emotionally challenging experience for candidates. Key dispositional supervisory qualities, such as being empathetic, understanding, committed, attentive, and caring towards their candidates are perceived by candidates as supportive. A key lesson from the investigation is how important is the competence in interpersonal communication and relationship-building skills of doctoral supervisors to building rapport in supportive relationships. As with professionals in the helping relationships, such as counsellors, coaches and therapists, doctoral supervisors also play mentoring and nurturing roles that require a high proficiency in these skills. Helping professionals, require training in these skills. Becher (1993, pp. 145-146) linked variation in quality of supervision to a lack of formal training for supervisors in improving their interpersonal skills. It is to be expected that raising awareness of the dispositional qualities, and values, beliefs and attitudes that give rise to supportive supervision such as those reported in the present investigation might address Becher’s concern. To date, though, these qualities, values, beliefs and attitudes have been neglected because they are so difficult to describe. By shedding light on the dispositional qualities of supervisors and how they tacitly develop supportive relationships that enrich the candidate’s study experience and that enable them in making intellectual progress during candidature, the present investigation has begun to address this gap in the knowledge base of doctoral supervision.
References


References

*Education: An International Perspective, 20*(1), 31-41. doi: org/10.1108/09684881211198220


References


References


References


Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Attestation

Letter of Attestation

School of Education, Southern Cross University


This is to verify that I have acted as an independent auditor for Ms. Nicolette Burger on her doctoral research investigation on doctoral supervisory relationships. I am a Lecturer in the School of Education.

Ms. Burger asked me to verify the authenticity of her data collection and analysis processes, which I agreed to do. I have familiarized myself with the background information sent to participants in the investigation and with the ethics committee approval and requirements for the research. I have checked a selection of the recorded interviews with participants and verify they are accurately recorded. I have checked a selection of transcripts of interviews with participants from the research and I verify their accuracy. I have checked the findings arising from the interview data and documentary data and I believe they are credible and appropriate and I verify their representativeness. I believe that the views of the participants are represented fairly and accurately. I verify that the field data was collected, transcribed and analysed according to the procedures outlined and that the findings are fair, accurate and representative of the views of the participants in the research. Much of the data was arranged according to emergent themes and I have checked the appropriateness of these categories and found them to be accurate. Lists of representative quotes have been drawn up in relation to the major themes and I have checked these for authenticity and representativeness and find them appropriate.

Signed: 

Marianne Logan

Witnessed: 

Pamela A. Bradella

Date: 14/7/2015
Appendix B: HREC Notification of Approval

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE (HRESC)

NOTIFICATION

To: Associate Professor Sharon Parry/Nicolette Burger
    School of Education
    Sharon.parry@scu.edu.au, nici.burger@scu.edu.au

From: Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
      Division of Research, R. Block

Date: 18 September 2012

Project: Liminal spaces: The tacit dimension of the doctoral supervisory relationship.

Old Approval Number ECN-11-173
Approval Number ECN-12-235

The Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee has established, in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research – Section 5/Processes of Research Governance and Ethical Review, a procedure for expedited review and ratification by a delegated authority of the HREC.

Your renewal application has been considered by the HREC and has been approved to continue under the new approval number.

All ethics approvals are subject to standard conditions of approval. These should be noted by researchers as there is compliance and monitoring advice included in these conditions.

Ms Sue Kelly
HREC Administration
Ph: (02) 6626 9139
E. ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

Professor Bill Boyd
Chair, HREC
Ph: 02 6620 3569
E. william.boyd@scu.edu.au
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE (HRESC)

STANDARD CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL FOR ALL ETHICALLY APPROVED RESEARCH PROJECTS

The following standard conditions of approval are mandatory for all research projects which have been approved by the HREC or a HRESC and have received an ethics approval number.

All reporting is to be submitted through the Human Research Ethics Office, either at Lismore, Coffs Harbour or GC/Tweed. The email addresses are:
ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au
ethics.coffs@scu.edu.au
ethics.tweed@scu.edu.au

Forms for annual reports, renewals, completions and changes of protocol are available at the website:

Standard Conditions in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement) (NS).

1. Monitoring

NS 5.5.1 – 5.5.10

Responsibility for ensuring that research is reliably monitored lies with the institution under which the research is conducted. Mechanisms for monitoring can include:
(a) reports from researchers;
(b) reports from independent agencies (such as a data and safety monitoring board);
(c) review of adverse event reports;
(d) random inspections of research sites, data, or consent documentation; and
(e) interviews with research participants or other forms of feedback from them.

2. Approvals

(a) All ethics approvals are valid for 12 months unless specified otherwise. If research is continuing after 12 months, then the ethics approval MUST be renewed. Complete the Annual Report/Renewal form and send to the ethics
office.

(b) *NS 5.5.5*
The researcher/s will **provide a report every 12 months** on the progress to date or outcome in the case of completed research including detail about:
- Maintenance and security of the records.
- Compliance with the approved proposal.
- Compliance with any conditions of approval.
- Changes of protocol to the research.

3. **Reporting to the HREC**

(c) The researchers will immediately notify the ethics office, on the appropriate form, **any change in protocol. NS 5.5.3**

(d) A **completion report**, on the appropriate form, must be forwarded to the ethics office.

(e) The researchers will immediately notify the ethics office about any **circumstance** that might affect ethical acceptance of the research protocol. *NS 5.5.3*

(f) The researchers will immediately notify the ethics office about **any adverse events/incidences** which have occurred to participants in their research. *NS 5.5.3*

2. **Research conducted overseas**
*NS 4.8.1 – 4.8.21*
Researchers conducting a study in a country other than Australia, need to be aware of any protocols for that country and ensure that they are followed ethically and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

3. **Participant Complaints**
*NS 5.6.1 – 5.6.7*
**General information**
Institutions may receive complaints about researchers or the conduct of research, or about the conduct of a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) or other review body.

Complaints may be made by participants, researchers, staff of institutions, or others. All complaints should be handled promptly and sensitively. All participants in research conducted by Southern Cross University should be advised of the above procedure and be given a copy of the contact details for the Complaints Officer. They should also be aware of the ethics approval number issued by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

The following paragraph is to be included in any plain language statements for participants in research.

*Complaints about the ethical conduct of this research should be addressed in writing to the following:*
Appendices

Ethics Complaints Officer
HREC
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore, NSW, 2480
Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendices

Appendix C: Invitational Letter to Doctoral Supervisors

Dear
My name is Nici Burger and I am conducting research for my PhD in the School of Education at Southern Cross University.

My research is titled: LIMINAL SPACES: The tacit dimension of doctoral supervisory relationships.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research investigation, which aims to identify the tacit qualities and behaviours of well-regarded supervisors within highly valued supervisory relationships that promote doctoral outcomes.

Participation in this investigation is voluntary and participants will be completely unidentifiable. All information will be kept confidential to me and reported anonymously so that no data can be attributable to you, the supervisor, or to your candidate.

If you agree to participate, I will ask you to recommend one of your doctoral candidates whom I can approach to participate in my research. I will want to interview you both individually. I would also ask you to write a short reflective piece describing the qualities and behaviours that you bring to your supervisory practice. I would also like to view online discussion between you and your candidate and view written feedback from you to your candidates on draft chapters of their thesis and on the progress they are making in their candidature. Participation will require about seven hours of your time over the period of a year (2012).

I would like to email you an overview of the investigation and then a few days later I will contact you to answer any questions you may have and to find out if you are willing to participate in my research.

Thank you.

Best wishes

Nici Burger
Appendices

Appendix D: Invitational Letter to PhD Candidates

Dear

My name is Nici Burger and I am conducting research for my PhD in the School of Education at Southern Cross University.

My research is titled: LIMINAL SPACES: THE TACIT DIMENSION OF DOCTORAL SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIPS

Your supervisor, ______________________ was approached to participate in this investigation because she/he is known to be an experienced and well-regarded supervisor. This investigation is concerned with the nature of highly valued supervisory relationships. Your supervisor has given your name and contact details to me because you have agreed to be part of a supervisory pair of participants in this investigation. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research investigation, which aims to identify the tacit qualities and behaviours of well-regarded doctoral supervisors within highly valued doctoral supervisory relationships.

Participation in this investigation is voluntary and participants will be completely unidentifiable. All information will be kept confidential to me and reported anonymously so that no data can be attributable to you, the doctoral candidate, or to your supervisor. Participation in this investigation will require about seven hours of your time over the period of a year (2012).

To start with, I will want to have an introductory interview with you and there may need to be a follow-up interview afterwards. I will ask you to write a short reflective piece describing the qualities and behaviours that your supervisor brings to your supervisory relationship and their supervisory practice. Throughout the year of your participation, I would also like to view online discussions between you and your supervisor and view written feedback that you have received from your supervisor regarding your written work.

Please find attached: ‘Overview of the Investigation’, the ‘Information Sheet’ and ‘Informed Consent Form’. In a few days I will contact you to answer any questions you may have and set up our first meeting and interview.

Kind regards

Nici Burger
Appendices

Appendix E: Coding Schedule of Participants

Letters have been given according to disciplinary grouping. Numbered according to supervisory pairs.

APS1 - Applied Professions supervisor
APC1 - Applied Professions candidate

APS2 - Applied Professions supervisor
APC2 - Applied Professions candidate

NSS1 - Natural Sciences supervisor
NSC1 - Natural Sciences candidate

NSS2 - Natural Sciences supervisor
NSC2 - Natural Sciences candidate

SSS1 - Social Sciences supervisor
SSC1 - Social Sciences candidate

SSS2 - Social Sciences supervisor
SSC2 - Social Sciences candidate

HS1 - Humanities supervisor
HC1 - Humanities candidate

HS2 - Humanities supervisor
HS3 - Humanities co-supervisor
HC2 - Humanities candidate
Appendices

Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Supervisors

1. How would you describe the tenor of your conversations during supervisory meetings with your candidate?

2. What are the main challenges and rewards that you experience in supervision of doctoral candidates?

3. What qualities do you think you have as a supervisor, that you believe are necessary for effective and productive supervisory relationships?

Prompt: 1. Which qualities are personal and which are professional?

Prompt 2. Which of these qualities develop a good rapport?

Prompt 3. Do you intentionally/consciously employ these qualities in your supervisory relationship?

4. Tell me about your relationship with your candidate in terms of its importance to their experience of the PhD journey and the intellectual progress they make.

5. What, if any, supervisory qualities can be singled out to be of pivotal importance in building the supervisory relationship?

6. Difficulty during candidature and the anxiety of PhD candidates during candidature is well documented. Tell me about how your candidates experience this aspect of the PhD journey. Prompt: How do you help them to deal with difficulty and anxiety?

7. In terms of the supervisory relationship, please comment on these words and phrases:

   POWER DIFFERENTIAL
   DEPENDENCE/INDEPENDENCE
   RECIPROCITY
   CO-CREATION
   SCHOLARLY IDENTITY, RESEARCH CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

8. Do you have any further suggestions for supportive supervisory relationships?
Appendix G: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Candidates

1. How would you describe the tenor of your conversations during supervisory meetings? Prompt: how do they make you think, feel and behave?

2. What works well and what is challenging for you in your supervisory conversations?

3. Describe your relationship with your supervisor.

4. What qualities do you think your supervisor brings to your supervisory relationship?

5. Which of these qualities develop a good rapport?

6. How important is this relationship to your experience of the PhD journey and the progress you make intellectually?

7. Are there any supervisory qualities that are pivotal in building the supervisory relationship?

8. Difficulty during candidature and the anxiety of PhD candidates during candidature is well documented. Do you experience difficulty of any kind? Prompt: Please tell me more about that. And anxiety? Prompt: and if so, what kinds of anxiety have you experienced? How do you deal with anxiety? Does your supervisor help you deal with these emotions?

9. Can you recall where you have experienced a shift, insight or moment of change in higher order thinking during a supervisory conversation and/or meeting? Is there anything about what the supervisor does or the way they are towards and with you, which facilitates these knowledge leaps?

10. With regard to the supervisory relationship, please comment on these words and phrases:
POWER DIFFERENTIAL
DEPENDENCE/INDEPENDENCE
CO CREATION
RECIPROCITY
SCHOLARLY IDENTITY, RESEARCH CULTURE and COMMUNITY

11. Do you have any further suggestions for supportive supervisory relationships?
Appendix H: Documentary Data Collection Sheet

NICI BURGER – PhD RESEARCH – SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .................................................. DATE: ..................................................

1. Please write a reflective paragraph that captures to date your experience of your supervisor’s qualities and behaviours in the supervisory relationship.

THANK YOU.

Regards

Nici Burger
Appendices

Appendix I: An Example of the Analysis and Coding of Data

Unit: Example “she will still make time for me”

Code/category: Time

Supervisor Dispositional Qualities: accessible, interested, committed

Theme: Easeful Attitudes to Time

Links to Theory: Humanism “safe” relationship

Quotes showing references to Time

“I like to spend a lot of time with my candidates, they'll be working on specific narrow projects, but one of the key things in any research project is to be able to show how that project has broader implications. I spend a lot of time with my candidates to think through what does that mean.” [supervisor]

“I have to do a lot of work with my 2nd supervisor. He is also extremely busy and I might meet with him may be a few times a year in his office or at a conference sometimes. But no regular communication. I write emails to him every day and he e-mails me every day and if necessary we meet in his office.” [candidate]

“I would let them go and then bring them in. I try doing that and when it works it is enormously rewarding. Sometimes that takes a long time.” [supervisor]

“I really enjoy supervision, but it's stressful because of all the other time-pressures, I cope, but I don't manage it.” [supervisor]

“The hardest thing that I find is the time pressure - if there was anything that I would change it would be that, my supervisor’s workload. It's not that he's not interested, it's not that he wouldn't like to spend more time, but it's very obvious that the time pressure is the reason why we might not talk over things as much as we could.” [candidate]

“She’s a very, very busy woman but she will still make time for me and make you feel like you're valued and it’s important what you're doing and what I’m doing is important to her and she is important to me as well.” [candidate]

“But she's got a conference to organise, one of the other women had taken leave so she took on her work, so, you know where's the time for me? There are times when I feel somewhat abandoned by her. Her position and workload within the University requires a level of input that to a certain extent excludes me or should I say places me further down the food chain, her priorities lie elsewhere. Although I accept that that is what is required I do at times resent it. And I resent the
university for the pressures that they place on their staff, to do more and more.”
[candidate]