

Metrics Matter?

Harnessing Data on PGR Expectations and Hofstede's Cultural Model to Transform Research Supervision

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The Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)

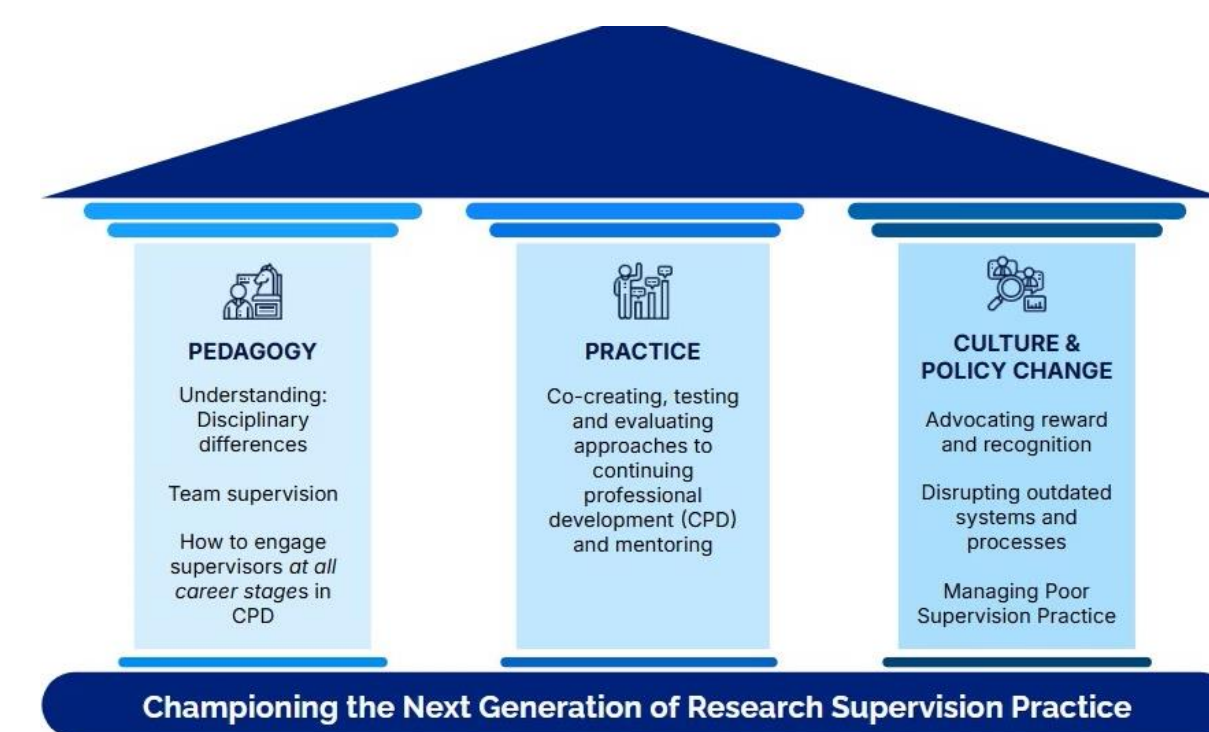
About RSVP

The Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP) is a Research England funded project designed to transform the culture and practice of research supervision.

Project objectives

RSVP is exploring four key areas:

1. The role of team supervision
2. Supervision practice in different disciplines and contexts
3. Supervising different types of research degree
4. Understanding and combating poor supervision practice



Impact

The impact will be a positive culture change in the way in which doctoral supervision practice is conducted, recognised and rewarded.

What do postgraduate researchers expect from their supervisors?



Our literature review of PGRs' expectations of supervisors unsurprisingly highlighted the importance of a positive research culture (supportive, collaborative, inclusive) and the value doctoral candidates place on having a respectful, collegial and empathetic relationship with their supervisors. This applied across all the countries studied in large and small-scale surveys.

The 'good/virtuous' supervisor monitors students' welfare, shows genuine support and empathy and respects the students' right to a private life.

The 'bad/vicious' supervisor is not genuinely interested in the project, showing neither focus nor active engagement.

The literature review was undertaken to triangulate findings with supervisor focus groups (RSVP, in preparation). We wondered what insights could be gained by examining the literature through a cultural lens.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Power Distance Index

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (1993) is a framework for understanding how **cultural values influence behaviour** in a society. The theory identifies six cultural dimensions:

Power Distance	Masculinity vs. Femininity
Uncertainty Avoidance	Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Indulgence vs. Restraint

The Power Distance Index (PDI) measures the acceptance of a power hierarchy by individuals in a nation, culture or organization.

People from low power distance cultures expect to be treated in the same manner as those who have more power than them.

People from high power distance cultures accept status inequalities as a part of society, are expected to show respect for superiors and have a high dependence on their superiors.

Placing a Power Distance Index lens on PGRs' expectations

What Sustains Doctoral Students' Interest?

Comparison of Finnish, UK and Spanish Doctoral Students' Interest - Pyhältö et al., 2020

Finland - Doctoral students are less stressed (possibly due to lack of tuition fees and of time limit) and show the lowest level of research interest.

Spain - More doctoral students demonstrate a high level of research interest but are more burn-out (possibly due to supervisors' demands and funding).

UK - Doctoral students had the most cynical attitude and highest intention to drop out compared to PGRs in Finland and Spain.

Power Distance Index: Finland [32]; UK [35]; Spain [58].

The lower PDI in Finland vs higher PDI in Spain could explain PGRs' better welfare in the former and burnt-out PGRs in the latter. Supervisors in Spain might overload their PGRs and/or PGRs might feel unable to complain.

The lower PDI in Finland and UK might help explain PGRs' lower interest and motivation vs. higher PDI (Spain), where PGRs might have to keep up with their supervisors' expectations (i.e. PGRs in Spain might work harder as expected by more authoritarian supervisors).

International Students' Perception of Research Supervision in the Social Sciences:

the Case of Three Comprehensive Universities in China - Bahtilla & Oben, 2021

China - "Some supervisors do not know what the supervisee expects from them," "supervisors need to consider the different needs of supervisees when giving feedback," supervisors need research supervision training.

The high PDI in China (80) might be affecting communication and supervision practice:

- PGRs are unable to convey their concerns and to voice expectations
- Supervisors' authority overshadows that they are themselves in need of urgent training.

What Pakistani Doctoral Students Want? A Qualitative Exploration of their Research Experiences

- Hina Batool et al., 2022

Pakistan - Doctoral students, mostly women, suggested that their experience would be improved by family support, particularly during data collection and mind-matched supervisors. "The findings make it clear that the role of research supervisor should not be underestimated, and researchers should be careful while choosing a supervisor, as this choice could make PhD journey a pleasant activity or a really tough experience."

The PDI in Pakistan [55], is intertwined with other cultural dimensions i.e. individualism [13] and masculinity-femininity [50].

Attitudes in Pakistan may be shifting as indicated by the authors: "doctoral students become choosy in the selection of their supervisor then, no doubt, [supervisors] with less skills and disappointing attitude can be identified easily by the administration. This, as a result, might bring a change in the skill and attitude of [supervisors] being neglected by doctoral students for their choice as their supervisor."

What are the implications for the development of doctoral supervision?

Viewing the literature on PGR expectations of their supervisors through the lens of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory raises many interesting questions:

1. How can supervisors, at the intersection of multiple cultural contexts, empower candidates to negotiate and challenge their authority?
2. To what extent can we suggest that a low Power Distance Index reflects effective and satisfactory supervision?
3. Can Hofstede's cultural dimensions and other cultural mapping tools support us to develop best quality supervision?

In line with our RSVP commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, the discussion of these and other questions will contribute to a better understanding of how to embed EDI in the enhancement of cultural change and practices in supervision.