Choosing a PHD supervisor

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TO PHD OR NOT TO PHD...

THAT IS THE QUESTION.

WHETHER 'TIS SANER IN THE MIND TO SUFFER THE SLIGHTS AND PUTDOWNS OF OUTRAGEOUS FACULTY...

OR TO TAKE DATA DESPITE ADVISOR GRUMBLES, AND BY GRADUATING, END THEM?

TIS A COMMENCEMENT DEVOUTLY TO BE WISH'D.

TO GRADUATE, TO SLEEP...

TO NAP: PERCHANCE TO DREAM...

TO SLEEP; ONCE MORE; AND, BY A PHD TO SAY WE END THE BACKACHE AND THOUSAND FINANCIAL DEBTS THAT GRADS ARE HEIR TO.
What is your worth?

• Institutions want you because you are precious.
• Universities gain funding.....
• Credibility.....
• Profile through your PHD
• You are contributing new knowledge to your field of study/knowledge economy.
When you choose a supervisor.....

• Finding and choosing the right supervisor is an essential task for students about to embark on a PHD programme.

• Remember you’ll spend the next 3 or 4 years together.

• More likely to be influential in how you think, research or in your career trajectory.

• Institutions- students either choose supervisors or simply allocated their supervisors.

• Advised that PHD students sit down and reflect over qualities which they would like from their supervisor.
How do you know which supervisor to choose?

• You don’t know much about them.....
• Advisable that you first choose an area /problem that interests you.
• Then find a supervisor who is well experienced in your area of interest.
• Advisable to find out about the research history of your supervisors (publications, scientific database, books, editorials, public engagement, project history, academic textbooks, academic projects).
• Advised that one of the supervisors should be an experienced one.
• Spy from current and past students
Supervisor’s responsibilities...

• Institutional policy on supervision.
• Ability to guide a postgraduate to completion.
• Facilitate your academic development.
• You don’t need some who is away most of the year ‘stars are attractive-but may be distant’.
• Should be familiar with doctoral administration-process involved.
Supervisor’s expectations

• Supervisors are human beings.
• Do their own research, teach etc.
• Expect you to be independent and interested in the research.
• Expect you to produce quality work.
• Expect you to attend meetings.
• So what type of student are you?
• Constant feedback?/ Detached from supervisor?
Challenges in choosing a supervisor.....

- Sometimes you choose a supervisor who is a leader of a well funded project...
- The lab is equipped.....
- What do you do when a supervisor chooses the design, the publication strategy etc.?
- Some students are recruited to work on specific projects supervisors have already formulated....
- How do you take ownership of the project?
• Sometimes students and supervisors have differences of opinion on how the research can be conducted...How would manage the conflict?

• Students choose supervisors whom they believe have knowledge in the field only to discover the opposite...What would you do in this case?

• Students sometimes find out later that all previous students got little supervision from his/her supervisor. If you expect constant feedback how would you manage the situation?
So...what type of a supervisor are you looking for?

• Do you need someone who will encourage you when your experiment falls flat?
• Do you need someone who will challenge you?
• Do you need someone who will steer you towards completing your PHD?
• Do you need someone who is constructively critical?
Is that a good thing or a bad thing?
EXAMPLE ... LIFE OF FISH

A **POSITIVIST** fisherman stands on the river bank without getting his/her feet wet – identifies & counts visible behaviour of fish according to their characteristics/common properties by observing. Makes **statistical conclusions** of the general tendency of fish group behaviour as they swim around.

A **POST-POSITIVIST** fisherman supplements his/her quantitative observations of the social properties of a species of fish by wearing a wet suit and conducting structured interviews of a random sample of fish to ascertain their reasons for swimming in accordance with the inferred social pattern.

The **INTERPRETIVE-CONSTRUCTIVIST** fisherman enters the water, establishes rapport with the fish, and swims with them, striving to understand their experience of being in the water.

The **CRITICAL** fisherman enables the fish to perceive the pollution in the water in which they live, to find its source, and to identify its harmful effect on their being in the water. The fish become empowered to organise themselves as a lobby group and protest to the Fisheries’ Department.

ADAPTED FROM TAYLOR & MEDINA (2013)
References


• [http://www.newscientist.com](http://www.newscientist.com) [Accessed 8 September 2016].