

Paper

Working at it: Autoethnographic accounts of the psychological contract between a doctoral supervisor and supervisee

Delia Wainwright and Sally Sambrook

Delia Wainwright

Bangor Business School, Bangor University, Wales, UK

Email: delia9@fsmail.net

Phone: 01352 780507

Professor Sally Sambrook

Bangor Business School, Bangor University, Wales, UK

Email: sally.sambrook@bangor.ac.uk

Phone: ++ 44 (0) 1248 382046

Introduction

Hi Delia,

There's an ethnography conference in Venice – do you fancy going? It could be a nice first academic conference for you, and Venice would be lovely! I've contacted Matthew, one of the organisers, and he says it's a nice small and friendly conference. Like me, he's also had experiences of bad conferences! Going to conferences can be scary, but it's an important part of your academic development – meeting people, networking, all that kind of stuff. It's all very nice, but it's also hard work. What do you think?

Sally sits at the computer, looks at the paper and sighs heavily. It's Saturday afternoon, it's warm and sunny outside but she's sat in the kitchen catching up on the hundreds of emails received whilst she's been away at a conference in Newcastle. The conference was great – lots of new ideas, contacts with new faces, and plenty of socialising, probably too much! That was a good conference – they even won the prize for the best paper. That was a lovely part of her academic work, she thinks and smiles. But Delia has just emailed her – she's not happy with their autoethnography (AE) paper. It's not AE enough. Sally had hurriedly thrown together something to send to Delia before she went to Newcastle. She felt obliged to write something. Perhaps she shouldn't have. Perhaps she interfered too much – she should have let Delia take the lead. Was this something to do with asserting her power – after all, she'd been unhappy with another co-author who'd submitted their 'final' conference paper without her having seen it! Was this still fresh in her memory and she was trying to have a more active hand in crafting this one? But how would Delia feel now, trying to tell her supervisor she doesn't like what she'd written? What will that do their supervisory relationship? Did she exert too much power as a supervisor, or was she just trying to be helpful and make a start? Sally starts to type:

'As an academic, there is an expectancy that I present at conferences, to receive feedback, to meet other colleagues with similar research interests and develop networks. It is part of my academic role: it is part of my work. In my role as supervisor, I also think it's important for students to attend conferences and I have a

responsibility to select an appropriate conference. As an academic, my interest in doctoral supervision has steadily increased, primarily to improve this aspect of professional practice. With it, my interest in autoethnography has grown – initially to deal with a traumatic experience with another student during a conference (Sambrook et al 2008) – but also because it feels right to examine myself in my research, and particularly my relationship with research students. The two have neatly come together with Delia's PhD.'

Not exactly how I would have started it, I think to myself, writes Delia. Trying to present our understanding of our psychological contract in this paper has started to lead to me seeing cracks in our perceptions of each other's understanding of our supervisory relationship. The psychological contract is about perceptions and implicit understandings of expectations and obligations. Reading Sally's new introduction I sigh probably as much as she has. What makes her think that she took the lead by throwing stuff on paper, most of it is what we put in a previous paper and I had thought that had been a shared process I hadn't perceived that Sally was leading it. Maybe there are power issues that we haven't addressed. What makes Sally assume that in my supervisee role I might do anything to reflect badly on her? Just because someone else didn't meet her expectations regarding a conference submission doesn't mean the same applies to me, I am a well respected professional in my own right, just not in the academic world. Why does Sally feel the need to mention how she won a prize for the best paper? Is this her way of pointing out that she knows more about writing papers than I do? I respect her greatly as a supervisor but wonder if I have been naïve to think that power hasn't been an issue in our supervisor-supervisee relationship. Or is she asking me to trust her regarding the paper as she is clearly the expert and I am the novice?

Thought: {If I seriously think that I can send her this addition then I must feel that the element of Trust still exists in our PC as I am trusting her with quite a stark statement. Dunleavy (2003) suggests that students build up a sense of what can and can't be said and how it might be said. My sense is that our PC is able to withstand the scrutiny.}

Sally - I think you need to write a response to my response- if that's ok with you??

Gosh, Delia has read so much more into what I wrote, and things I didn't mean. That's always a problem when you write - when it's out there in print, you have no power over how the reader will interpret it (must find some refs for this). First, by saying I took the lead, I meant that I had interfered and added all the bits I'd found from past conference papers as well as our earlier paper. I think I was implicitly apologising for having hi-jacked the paper. And yes, the earlier paper was definitely a shared thing. I'm now cross with myself that a) I did this and b) that Delia and I haven't actually agreed how we write conference papers. My fault – we should have discussed this. I was sloppy, too many assumptions on my part. With Clair, she used to write the first draft, I'd comment, add bits etc and that was that. Having being annoyed by this recent experience of a co-author submitting the conference paper without me seeing the final version did NOT imply that I thought Delia would do the same thing – but it must have had some impact on me! I'm sorry Delia is now questioning why I mentioned the prize – it certainly wasn't to show off, or throw my academic weight around, to demonstrate how clever and powerful I am. The prize

meant a lot – it's very personal because it's dedicated to a dear man I worked with on my very first research project, but I'll actually explain all that to her when I see her. This has just reminded me that I must send Delia the link to our current project on doctoral supervision which asks questions on power and emotion. I think Delia and I are having our crisis moment, just like Clair and I did. And funnily enough (not that this feels that funny at the moment), this was to do with a conference presentation. But I'm sure we can work through this, just as Clair and I did. Is Delia being too sensitive, perhaps she is, reading in things that I didn't mean but I can see how she has interpreted them in this way. Perhaps I didn't think carefully enough about what I was writing, but it certainly demonstrates her ability to critically analyse discourse! But now I feel equally sensitive! Of course there's a power asymmetry in our relationship, I would be naïve to suggest there wasn't. But I do hope that I don't abuse my expert and legitimate power in any way. I think I always seek to increase student independence as they progress through their PhD journey, from novice to independent researcher. And just because Delia might be a novice researcher in my world does not mean that I don't respect her professional role in her professional world. As a supervisor, there's a tension between me making all the decisions (as happened with one weak student – and Delia don't read into this that I think you're weak!) or letting the student make all the decisions when they need some guidance. I'd hoped to have achieved an optimum balance but Delia is raising questions here and again perhaps I - or we - have made too many assumptions about how we work together. Perhaps, I've been too busy/happy giving the social support/guidance without some of the technical – how shall we write together, thinking more carefully about our PC etc? Anyway, Delia asked for a response, so here it is, all raw and reactive as I feel at the moment. No doubt I will have written something that will be (mis)interpreted so I'm beginning to wonder if all this honesty stuff is worth the hassle? Is it going to help Delia get her PhD? I certainly don't want to complicate things! A PhD is hard enough without worrying too much about all of this ...Of course, I'm sure it goes on in most supervisory relationships, but making it explicit and trying to make sense of it is feeling a little dangerous and delicate and I certainly don't want it to jeopardise anything.

This level of disclosure is something that we are 'working on' together and we are both moving out of our traditional comfort zones to present the paper. The psychological contract that exists between us is not static and as such it is an amorphous concept, difficult to clearly define and practically impossible to 'see'. Therein lie some of the tensions revealed in this paper. The dialogue presented shows static moments in time and are snapshots that taken alone say less than they do when understood in the context of an unfolding journey. Here we present our journey to the point demonstrated above:

We offer our collaborative autoethnography of the emerging and evolving psychological contract between a doctoral student and her supervisor. Despite the wealth of literature examining doctoral supervision, and the crucial importance of the relationship (Boucher and Smyth 2004, Hockey 1995, Phillips and Pugh 1994, Wisker 2001), the element of the psychological contract (PC) has been generally neglected. Wade-Benzoni and Rousseau (1998) firmly argue that psychological contracts do exist between supervisors and supervisees in the doctoral process and investigated the types and effects of these contracts, but didn't explain to what extent this could be considered a form of 'work'. We hope to make a small contribution to Barley and

Kunda's (2001) call to 'bring work back in(to)' organisational research, turning the ethnographic gaze upon the academe. Thus, we offer a personal and partial insight into a supervisor's and student's perspective on the doctoral supervisory PC.

There is further scope to employ autoethnography to explore this very intimate and emotional relationship. In the academic (ethno) culture, how do (auto) students and supervisors manage their relationship? How do students and supervisors conceptualise this 'work'? These questions can be considered in terms of a psychological contract (PC) between the student and her supervisor.

Argyris (1960 p22) defined the psychological contract as, 'the perception of both parties to the employment relationship, organisation and individual, of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship'. Although usually examined within the formal employment relationship, Taylor (2008) argues that PhDs can act as an exemplar for an occupation and doctoral supervision is certainly an aspect of academic work. We therefore explore the perceptions and promises of both parties to the doctoral supervisory relationship. What is the informal, implicit contract? How is this 'work' relationship formed, managed and developed?

Hi Delia

I've been thinking and wondered if there was a psychological contract in our doctoral supervisory relationship? This could run parallel with your study of the PC at work and would make a fabulous autoethnography (I can dig out some articles for you on this if you like). Anyway just a thought.....

Hi Sally

Interesting idea, I had actually thought about some of this when I was reviewing my reflexive notes I have been keeping about the whole research process. I have also been considering taking an autoethnographic approach a Please do dig out any articles that might be useful. I am reading the Ellis and Bochner book at the moment. Interesting stuff.

Is it work?

The idea to explore the psychological contract within the doctoral supervision relationship emerged from discussions about autoethnography as a methodology. Delia wished to incorporate her own experiences of the psychological contract (in the student-supervisor context) into her PhD thesis examining the psychological contracts between employees and the organisation within her (ethno) work place. Sally wished to further explore autoethnography as a methodology, and further understand the doctoral supervisory relationship as a sub-culture within an academic (ethno) work culture. We felt confident that we would be able to examine our psychological contract without it having a detrimental effect on our ongoing supervision relationship, and present our understanding in the form of a personal story.

Thought: {When we wrote the above statement there seems to be the implicit understanding that our PC can withstand the examination, we have through this statement made an obligation to each other that it will not damage our supervisory relationship. This could be viewed as something that implicitly developed}

There exists a large body of literature relating to the psychological contract in the work context. This is usually conceptualised as existing between an employer and employee (Argyris (1960), Levinson et al (1962) and Schein (1965) and the focus has been diffuse in nature. As an employee of the Trust, Delia has a PC with her own work organisation. Similarly, as an employee, Sally has a PC with her work organisation – the university. This provides a particularly interesting context to conduct an autoethnography. Like Humphrey & Learmonth (2006), Sally works in a ‘mixed’ business school, where the dominant research tradition privileges quantitative methods. Her interests in critical ethnography and critical management studies (CMS) create identity confusion, where writing about the self within a business school context is uncommon and where her approach to researching conflicts with that which is institutionally approved. However, Sally wants to share insight into the life of a female scholar outside the mainstream within a university business school, despite the accusations of self-indulgence, narcissism and “academic wank” (Sparkes, 2002: 212) that are often made against autoethnography. Her aim is to show how autoethnography can represent a powerful way to focus on issues that are typically ignored in (if not hidden by) more traditional scholarship – the human, social and emotional dimensions of doctoral supervision. As an academic, doctoral supervision is a formal element of her research activities, thus supervising Delia is clearly academic work. Although there are attempts to develop qualitative organisational and managerial research, most faculty are uncomfortable with any attempt to “dethrone the demons of modernism, positivism and managerialism” (Parker 2002: 118)

Given this context, we note that little work has been conducted on the PC within academia, and we wish to further explore this and build on the work of Wade-Benzoni, Rousseau and Li (2006). In particular, we draw on the work of Wade-Benzoni and Rousseau (1998), who firmly argue that psychological contracts do exist between supervisors and supervisees in the doctoral process.

As Argyris (1960) defined the psychological contract, it focused on the *employment* relationship. However, we explore this in the context of the doctoral relationship, which we argue is work – and thus forms part of an implicit employment contract - for both the supervisor and student. In simple terms, we define the psychological contract in this context as the informal or implicit relationship between the supervisor and the student.

Hi Delia

‘But isn’t the psychological contract usually conceived of in the work context?’

Hi Sally

Yes, but I have been doing some reading around this:

Occupations are, ‘chunks of activity within the ongoing stream of human behaviour which are named in the lexicon of the culture’ (Yerxa et al 1989 p5). Taylor (2008) argues that PhDs can act as an exemplar for an occupation as defined by Yerxa et al.

My PhD whilst not my only occupation relates closely to my work context and I hope that the results will inform my day to day working practices. Whereas your role as my supervisor forms part of your formal work role as defined by the University.’

It definitely feels like work to me, whichever definition we use!

Watson (2003) defines work as ‘The carrying out of tasks which enable people to *make a living* within the social and economic context in which they are located’ (p 255). This is clearly the case for Sally: she supervises Delia as part of her academic tasks, from which she makes her living as an academic. This specific definition does not quite fit students, although Delia, like many students, is conducting research within her own work organisation. Undertaking the PhD is supported by the Trust in which Delia works and she has some negotiated study time to undertake this work activity. Within her formal job description there is an expectation that Delia will be involved in research activity, as outlined below:

- Responsible for the development of nursing and practice knowledge through the development and implementation of research and audit
- To undertake formal research projects as agreed by the Service Manager and secure funding as appropriate.
- Analyse, appraise and act upon contemporary research evidence.

By completing a PhD Delia is fulfilling aspects of her job role and for the time she works on the PhD that is part of her formally contracted hours, we would argue that she is ‘employed’ to complete her PhD. Outside these times, Delia still ‘works’ on her PhD but is not formally employed to do so.

However, in its simplest form, work is ‘physical or mental effort directed towards making or achieving something.’ (Chambers dictionary 1999). A PhD requires the application of both physical and mental effort in achieving the ‘end product’ of a thesis. ‘A PhD is three years of solid work’ (Mullins and Kiley 2002 p386). In traditional textbooks about PhDs (such as Philips and Pugh 1994, Finn 2005) aimed at the PhD student, the process is described in terms of the PhD being the outcome of several years of work ‘activities’. There are practical suggestions for project management and the development of skills that are commonly seen in many workplaces. Textbooks describing the supervision relationship from the perspective of the supervisor (such as Delamont, Atkinson and Parry 2004, Wisker 2005), also firmly place the supervision of the PhD student in the culture of work.

Hi Delia

I agree with your comments about work.

I have added in information for the paper, here are the additions about the supervisory relationship, taken from stuff I’ve written before. It looks like there’s much literature exploring the nature of the doctoral supervisory relationship but little that attempts to understand the psychological contract.... So I think it’s important to determine who is contracting with whom, and how each seeks the other. Anyway, see what you think.

This extract from one of email conversations illustrates our emerging consideration of our relationship as work, and thus the possibility of exploring our psychological contract. We now turn to our methodological approach, autoethnography, and our desire to shape and share our story of the doctoral relationship and PC.

Working up/at a story

The use of stories in trying to understand the doctoral process is not new (see, for example, Boucher and Smyth 2004, Green 2005, McMorland et al 2003, McCormack 2005). McCormack (2005) uses the stories of four female students to reveal their experiences, including the 'absence' of, or poor, supervision. Stories are a legitimate way of making sense of and re-constructing experiences of the doctoral supervisory relationship, from both student and supervisor perspectives. In the autoethnographic genre, we attempt to share an evocative story (Ellis & Bochner 2006). McMorland et al (2003) suggest that individual and collective reflection on the practice of PhD supervision is underdeveloped among the academic community, and while there is growing interest in research about research supervision, few studies inquire into practice "from the inside." We hope to offer an insider (auto) perspective, offering first-person, reflexive accounts of excerpts from our experiences. McMorland et al (2003) offer insights into the multiple dimensions of supervisory relationships with students and amongst co-supervisors. They suggest that much greater attention has to be paid to the multiple and complex relationships that exist among students and staff if doctoral research is to be a fulfilling creative enterprise (work) for all, and argue that staff and students need to develop skills and courage in reflecting on their own capabilities, and to strengthen a culture of learning across multiple role relationships. However, no mention is made of the psychological contract. We present our story so far, offering our reflections on the complex psychological contract dimension. McMorland et al (2003) argue that sustained reflectivity of this nature is radical in the academic context. Green (2005) also uses stories to focus on the discursive relationship between supervision and subjectivity, addressing important 'unfinished business' to illuminate the psycho-social dynamics of struggle, submission and subjectification. This hints at the psychological aspects of the relationship, but does not explicitly mention the psychological contract. Boucher and Smyth (2004) also use reflections on their own experiences of doctoral supervision to present what they have learned about the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Key issues that have arisen for them include managing existing and developing friendships with students, and working with students' strong emotions such as anger, frustration and sadness. In the wider cultural context, Ylijoki (2005) also uses narrative to explore academic work.

Thought: {I've often talked about the emotions in supervisory relationships, but when these occur in unpleasant ways – as they did for Clair and I following 'that' conference presentation or now during my attempts to write this paper with Delia, it feels much more painful, and I feel very vulnerable as a supervisor – something you don't often read in academic writings.}

Having agreed that we could explore our psychological contract as a collaborative autoethnography, we decided to focus our thoughts in three areas,

- Why have we engaged in this PhD
- What were our expectations and how were they formed
- When did we think there was a psychological contract within our relationship

We each wrote our own narrative of our experience of the psychological contract. To enhance these narratives, we also illustrate our understandings with excerpts from our

emails to each other over the previous year. These are presented with our names beside them, differentiated from our email conversations which are indented.

There are, however, risks in exposing ourselves – privately through our email exchanges and publicly in this paper.

Hi Sally

Hope you are enjoying the bank holiday weekend. It's back to study as usual here. I have written my AE piece which I found fascinating and am looking forward to sharing it even if it is a bit scary being so 'exposed'. Do you want to do this at our next meeting or do we swap before then?

Hi Delia

Yes, not too bad - trying to combine some exercise and some reading (AE of course). I know exactly what you mean about the fear of being exposed. I think it might be a good idea to swap via email before our next meeting so we both have time to reflect on each other's thoughts.

And in a later email exchange, this anxiety emerges again.

Hi Sally

I have read the articles, interesting stuff. I will now have to be very careful with the composition of future emails in case we decide to analyse them.

Hi Delia

Yes it's a bit scary if you think what you write might be recorded and analysed, and so much of what I write is without regard for this possibility- I feel so comfortable in our supervisory relationship

Hi Sally

I don't think it will change my emails either, I am still willing to express blind panic when appropriate, which also indicates that I too am comfortable in our supervisory relationship.

Thought {The above email exchange took place during the first year and reads as a mutual congratulations of our supervisory relationship success. At this time, was there an implicit mutual obligation not to test the boundaries of the relationship? I think we both understood each other's boundaries, not through explicit discussion but through an evolving understanding over time. I am unsurprised that we were comfortable, neither of us did anything to test the boundary, there was no vulnerability in the relationship as neither of us did anything to breach the comfort zone.

In recent times, and also as part of the process of producing this paper, we have perhaps for the first time become vulnerable in the process and acknowledged that we may have left a lot to evolve without setting boundaries.

I know that Sally was working flat out at that point but I still expected her to respond to me at weekends, evenings etc, there was no formal contract saying she had to do that but I knew she would, just as I made the presumption that she knew I worked

hard too and that emails outside office hours were the only practicable way for me to work with her too. She expected me to contact her then and I expected her to respond. It is only now at the midway point of the process that I wonder if we had mutual expectations based on shared understandings. In a recent conversation Sally mentioned her crazy work schedule before going on sabbatical, 80 hour weeks etc. I have often also mentioned to her that my work schedule was also busy. However, when we had an explicit conversation about it, it was clear that we had different definitions of busy/crazy. A busy work schedule for me was nowhere near as busy as busy for Sally. Had part of the implicit terms of our contract been based on a misconception on Sally's part of how busy I was? Would the terms of access/contact have been different if she had known this? Had I inadvertently deceived her about how busy I was? Does it affect the degree of trust between us if we haven't really understood each other's context?}

Bruni (2002) emphasises that ethical autoethnographers engage in practices which not only do no harm to others but also do not have a negative impact on themselves. 'Honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts - and emotional pain.there's the vulnerability of revealing yourself, not being able to take back what you've written or having any control over how readers interpret it' (Ellis and Bochner 2003 p738). We also had to consider relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). We are mindful of the complexities of self-disclosure (both as student and supervisor) and the 'I's we might be revealing, associated with the concept of the 'ethics of I' (Doloriert & Sambrook 2009), exploring this within the asymmetric power relationship of doctoral supervision.

Thought: {As I read this again my naivety as a student probably presents itself. Why is there the assumption that the supervisor is in the more powerful position? If explored on the surface it does appear to be the case but is it in reality always so? The University has targets which they are expected to meet, this includes student completion rates etc. Is it also a reflection of our own PC that Sally doesn't make me feel that she is exerting power over me, she knows I am a mature student and that whilst I am committed to the PhD process I also have a commitment to my professional life.

It's funny that you ask if supervisors automatically and/or really have power over students, as that's something I'm exploring in a current research project – so I'll let you know when we've collected our data! I think there is a certain degree of expert and probably legitimate power in that the supervisor should know more about conducting research and should know enough about the research topic, and should have received some development for this role. There may also be elements of charismatic/referent power in that the student might see the supervisor as role model, particularly if she's seeking a research/academic career. Is there reward power? Yes, I think so in that I can give Delia positive feedback and help her achieve her PhD. Is there coercive power? Maybe in some relationships but I don't think so in ours – but perhaps Delia can respond to this? Of course, this analysis draws on French & Raven's notion of personal power bases, but we could also look to Foucault (1980) and explore how power exists in capillary form. I remember exploring this with another doctoral student (Bradbury-Jones et al 2007) and we noted that rather than being distributed top-down, it 'reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses,

learning processes and everyday lives' (Foucault 1980, p 39) ...and that 'it is "exercised rather than possessed" (Foucault, 1995, p.26). So, although the doctoral supervisory relationship is one of unequal power and status, both students and supervisors are capable of action (Grant & Graham, 1999). Another interesting concept, related to this, is disciplinary power in which observation takes a capillary form, meaning the 'gaze' is not only from the top down but also sideways and from the bottom up, and can be indiscreet or discreet. It is indiscreet because people are usually aware that they are under some kind of gaze, but it's discreet when people are unaware of the gaze because "it functions permanently and largely in silence" (Foucault, 1995, p. 177). I guess in some/most supervisory relationships the gaze is discreet, but you and I are trying to make sense of this and are therefore bringing it to our attention, and the attention of others, so it is no longer hidden or in silence.}

Is it working?

To explore whether our PC is working, first we share our thoughts on who the contract is with/between. Second, we identify the explicit and implicit elements and then illustrate the evolving nature of our PC.

Who the contract is with/between?

Delia I am clear in my own mind that my psychological contract is with Sally, not the Business school or even the university. I don't know anyone in the Business school although Sally has briefly introduced me to a couple of people (couldn't now say who they were or whether they were 'important') and I also indicated this to Sally in an email when I said, 'I definitely think my psychological contract is with you as the University haven't even got my name right yet'. I was surprised when Sally started her next email with 'sorry about your name'. I had not considered the 'who' of Sally in the psychological contract in the context that she appeared to be acting as an 'agent' of the University.

Sally From my perspective, obviously my contract is with Delia. I would guess that Delia perceives her psychological contract is with me.

Delia The theme of who the parties to the psychological contract are in the supervisory relationship suggested that for both of us it was narrow in focus, we both contracted with each other directly. This is perhaps unsurprising from Sally's perspective as I in my supervisee role could not be considered to represent anyone other than herself. What could have potentially added a layer of complexity to the relationship was that Sally occasionally suggested that she was an agent of the organisation as in response to my comment about the University getting my name wrong, Sally appeared to apologise on the University's behalf. I could have added complexity to the relationship if I perceived any of my PC as being dependent on the actions of the organisation be that the Business school or the umbrella identification of 'the university'. However for the majority of the interactions the PC was firmly rooted between the two of us as the supervisor and the supervisee directly. When considering my view of 'who' the relationship was with, my lack of integration into other aspects of University life may have been influential. Whilst a full time student I also maintained my career and spent very little time physically present at the University. Sally's position was also clear within the parameters of this autoethnography although through developing this paper it has led to her heightened

awareness of the other psychological contracts that exist with other students and with the University.

What is the contract – the explicit and implicit?

Sally I engage by offering to meet regularly, provide reading lists, encourage critique of existing literature, to be responsive and provide timely feedback, to encourage intellectual development through questions and discussions, to suggest possible research strategies and data collection methods, to offer support at conferences. This is how I see my obligations as a supervisor.

Delia I feel that Sally is obliged to meet with me regularly and give me constructive feedback.

Delia I would have guessed that Sally would have expected me to be committed, to be able to work to deadlines and to remain motivated and ask for support when needed. I have implied things about our psychological contract and made assumptions about it.

Sally I would guess (but don't actually know) that Delia just expects me to carry on doing what I did in the MSc, only at a higher academic level. I have made assumptions about the way that Delia works.

When considering the statements we both made when we originally set out to put our psychological contract under scrutiny we found it easier to initially generalise about the elements that to some degree would be reflected in a formal contract between any student and any supervisor. At this stage we had not engaged in a real exploration of what made up our personal psychological contract, and did not take any 'risks' in sharing any deeper understandings of our PC relationship. It was difficult to make explicit what was implicitly experienced by each of us, and was it really desirable?

There is an argument that the psychological contract is an *implicit* one. Levinson et al (1962) defined psychological contracts as, 'a series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be dimly aware but which nonetheless govern the relationship to each other,' (p21). When considering the implicit elements of the psychological contract we both agreed that we had not explicitly considered the psychological contract and that indeed our expectations had not necessarily been explicitly articulated. Our accounts demonstrate our hidden assumptions and guesswork identified as implicit elements.

Hi Sally

Oh dear! I have been re-reading Jones (1999) and apparently, 'it is necessary to give structure and shape to the relationship actively and explicitly. If form is allowed to develop implicitly then it is likely that assumptions will be made about what will take place in the supervision relationship' (p7/8). Mackinnon (2004) also highlights the role of explicitly discussing expectations and obligations.

Hi Delia

I am going to make the *assumption* that you don't agree with this as this has not been our experience.

The evolving nature of the psychological contract

Sally I felt comfortable in our earlier academic relationship and assumed that this would continue much the same, only with a higher level of intellectual engagement. Despite this earlier relationship, and Delia's PhD research question, I hadn't even thought about our evolving psychological contract.

Delia It has evolved over time and can be 'evidenced' in the way that our communication has evolved. Our emails can be used as 'evidence' of our evolving psychological contract. Once I stated my growing interest in autoethnography the whole psychological contract seemed to start rapidly evolving, I started to question our relationship more, was our psychological contract developing because we had more shared interest? Something could happen tomorrow that changes everything about our contract. What comes next could be better or worse or just different.

When considering the evolving nature of the psychological contract we both identified that the psychological contract was not static and that it had evolved over time. However, Sally notes that she hadn't considered the nature of it evolving and Delia highlights that it has evolved and that this is a continuous and ongoing process. The 'evidence' of this evolving nature is referred to by Delia in her account as being demonstrated in the emails between herself and Sally.

The above autobiographical excerpts provide a flavour of our thoughts about the different themes which emerged from our narratives during the first year of the supervisory relationship. The different identified themes were woven throughout our accounts and the order in which they were discussed is not a reflection of their importance to us.

During the second year our PC has further evolved and whilst the first year appeared to present a 'rosy' view and neither of us had to go out of our comfort zone to examine our PC, there were elements of breach during the second year. The following reflections demonstrate this.

Sally expects me to work hard and to keep going at the pace we have set. She has gone on sabbatical and, whilst not explicitly saying this, the implication is that everything will remain the same, email conversations and then tutorials when she gets back (Sally was away skiing in France for several months). Sally has been constantly available during the first year and I felt that I had as much attention as I needed. In the second year I would have valued seeing her monthly like before and although Sally invited me to France (not feasible due to diary commitments on both sides) I feel that I have lost momentum for not being able to have a face to face conversation with her. Has she breached my expectation? Sally explained she was going away well in advance and I would prefer to have a bit of Sally rather than more of someone else, although in reality I might not have got more of someone else. Literature suggests (Morrison and Robinson 1997) that it is not breach that is the most significant thing but how it is dealt with. I haven't suggested to Sal that breach has occurred and whilst I think it has I am fairly sure that it won't derail us as she will be coming back! I think the short term effect has been that I have taken my foot off the pedal somewhat, as there are no bouncing weekend emails to encourage me on. I think she won't know if I am not in and go and do something else (in reality she isn't my keeper and it is to

my benefit to keep working!) Does Sal think I have breached our PC? She probably expects me to be mature enough to carry on working without her being at the end of weekend emails to 'hold my hand'. Have I breached her expectations of me by not working as hard over the past few months? When did we agree how hard we were both obliged to work and how available we needed to be? Does she know the role she plays in keeping me motivated? I see this as a hugely significant part of our PC, 'you motivate me through being available and I will try to deliver' so how would she view it, is there the element of reciprocity?

Well, this is interesting! I did feel 'guilty' going on sabbatical, but I had earned it! Delia talked of me being busy/crazy at work and just before I left, I thought I might have cracked! But, although I was going to be physically away, I always intended to retain regular email contact – and I thought I did. My husband kept saying 'you're on sabbatical – you don't need to do this kind of work!' 'But I need to, I said I would and I feel I need to – it's only fair. She is my PhD student after all and that's legitimate work even when I'm on sabbatical.' But breach? That's a bit strong, but yes, I suppose Delia is not wrong to feel this. Yet, I've supervised several students 'virtually' so for me, I didn't think this was going to be an issue. I thought I made a special effort to keep in touch with Delia, but I do accept that not seeing each other in person did result in her losing momentum – although she disguised it well. It's only now that I'm thinking – why hasn't she made more progress on the interview schedule? Secretly, I'm now wondering what she has exactly done over the last few months! Of course, first it was Christmas, and then she got married and then what? And another funny thing, Delia is now referring to me as Sal. That's just a recent thing! I don't encourage many people to call me Sal – for me, it's a term of endearment and I'm laughing at how this came about. So, perhaps if there was a breach, it's healed or been resolved!

You did keep in email contact, I just didn't see you! Morrison and Robinson (1997) made a distinction between breach and violation. They suggested that breaches are the perceived differences between what has been promised and what has been received and violation is the emotional reaction that occurs when the discrepancies are perceived. Conway and Briner (2005) point to one of the difficulties that arise if a distinction is made between breach and violation, namely that, 'breach now refers to any sort of perceived discrepancy, from very small breaches of subtle implicit promises...to very major breaches of explicit promises' (p65). I think when I use the term breach I am referring to a small breach. When we embarked on the PhD journey I expected to meet with you regularly and for a while that didn't happen, it certainly isn't a deal breaker and I don't expect that I will stop calling you Sal or you calling me D.

No, I don't think so, either!

Working at it

We have presented our stories of the first two years of our doctoral supervisory relationship, arguing that a psychological contract exists and is evolving. Examining our narratives in the context of doctoral psychological contracts, we suggest that we have something between a balanced and relational contract than an unstable or transactional one (Wade-Benzoni and Rousseau 1998). Levinson et al (1962) noted

that psychological contracts are 'a series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be dimly aware but nonetheless govern the relationship to each other' (p21). Within this work there is an emphasis on needs that lead to the development of relationships where each party behaves in ways that fulfil the needs of the other. There are reciprocal elements to the relationship which will continue as long as the parties continue to meet each other's need and there is an assumption of reciprocity.

We would argue that by examining our psychological contract through personal narratives we have become more than 'dimly aware' of each other's expectations and needs and that by doing so it has given us the opportunity to strengthen our supervisor-supervisee relationship to work in partnership. Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2004) observe that the supervisor-supervisee relationship should be viewed as an academic partnership and should not come with emotional baggage (p83). However, we observe that by being aware of each other's needs and the emotions we bring to the working relationship our psychological contract is strengthened. In addition, research suggests that emotion intelligence - on the part of both student and supervisor - is an important element of the relationship (Sambrook et al 2009, Wisker 2001).

As we attempt to illuminate our relationship, there exists a tension between the desirability of an explicit or implicit arrangement. Kotter (1973) suggests that explicit discussion needs to take place to ensure the development of a healthy psychological contract. Baker (1996) suggests that such explicit discussion may not be either possible or desirable in the first instance. Whilst there are dangers of making implicit elements of the psychological contract explicit (Rousseau 1995), Wellin (2007) argues that elements of the psychological contract should be made explicit. We have found in practice that the relationship evolves as time goes on and there are both implicit and explicit elements. We agree that we both have to work at the supervisor-supervisee relationship to strengthen it. We do also recognise that our relationship, and PC, could be quite different from others, and from that described in text books on how to manage your supervisor.

Conclusions

We have shared our collaborative autoethnography of the first two years of our doctoral supervisory relationship. We have focused on the notion that this can be conceptualised as a form of work, thus it can be considered an employment relationship, in which we have developed a psychological contract. Little research has explored this and we make a small contribution to help better understand this complex and dynamic phenomenon. Conducting such potentially 'soft' research within a 'mixed' business school work context, where the dominant research tradition privileges quantitative methods (Humphrey & Learmonth 2006), poses some risk to Sally, but she is determined to pursue this and open up the possibility of more autoethnographic research. Delia faces similar risks working in the medico-scientific health service, but there is growing interest in more person-centred methodologies. We both feel this is important work, and are working to increase awareness within our respective employment contexts.

Thought: {Perhaps the greatest risk is opening up the possibility of examining our PC in this relationship?}

From our narratives, three key themes emerged: our thoughts on who the contract is with/between; the identification of what we considered to be the explicit and implicit elements; and the evolving nature of our PC. Of course, we recognise that this is just one short story from two voices.

Thought: {This reads like a very sanitised account of what has been an uncomfortable and delicate process. Things have been revealed, I think pride has been hurt, but I hope trust and resilience have prevailed.}

We are, however, mindful of the complexities of self-disclosure (both as student and supervisor) and the 'I's we might be revealing – employee, researcher, student, partner, child etc. And we have no control over how our revelations are interpreted. This is demonstrated in the exchanges which opened this paper.

In another paper, we struggle with the ethical implications and unintended consequences of participants revealing themselves to the researcher – Delia. As researchers, we are mindful of protecting our participants, gaining their consent and ensuring their anonymity, but we also need to consider ourselves. In such evocative and honest accounts, there is greater concern for the concept of the 'ethics of I' (Doloriert & Sambrook 2009). As supervisor, Sally also has a responsibility to ensure that Delia has an equal voice within the asymmetric power relationship of doctoral supervision. Although not her employer, and with no formal authority in an employment context, Sally still has power to influence (manipulate) Delia's PhD work

Sally, perhaps I still have the power to influence/ manipulate how you supervise me?

Delia, perhaps you do! Any examples?

Yes, perhaps as Grant (2003) suggests, in ways such as expecting you to read lots of drafts of conference papers! Or perhaps in more subtle ways through how we interact, although I do think 'manipulate' is a bit of an overstatement.

The greatest risk however has been to work on a collaborative ethnography where we have taken the chance (risk) to honestly examine our motivations and understandings of the PC between us, despite there being indications that we do not always implicitly understand each other and at the risk of crossing the safety barrier of our supervisory relationship.

As the PC literature highlights, the way that PCs develop can be a reflection on the individual past experiences of those who are involved in the relationship (Roehling and Boswell 2004). As people we bring our past with us and within this study our pre-existing relationship has been a positive factor in allowing us to look at the nature of our PC in the context in which we currently relate to each other. Wade-Benzoni and Rousseau (1998) argue that greater awareness of the contract-making mechanisms that operate in postgraduate education can help improve the quality of student experiences and the research collaborations between faculty and doctoral students. At

this point, we hope we have provided initial insights into this complex and dynamic psychological contract, illustrating how this has been (socially) constructed, working through our explicit and largely implicit expectations and obligations, and sharing experiences to help other students and supervisors better manage their psychological contracts.

References

Argyris, C. (1960) *Understanding Organizational Behavior* Homewood, Hill, Dorsey.

Baker, H.G. (1996) The psychological contract between employer and employee. *Psychology: A Journal of Human Behavior* 33 (3) p16-30.

Barley, S.R. and Kunda G (2001) 'Bringing Work Back In', *Organization Science* 12(1): 76–95

Boucher, C., & Smyth, A. (2004) 'Up close and personal: Reflections on our experience of supervising research candidates who are using personal reflective techniques,' *Reflective Practice*, 5, (3), 345-356

Bradbury-Jones C, Irvine F, Sambrook S (2007) Unity and detachment: a discourse analysis of doctoral supervision, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 6 (4), 81-96

Brannan M, Pearson G & Worthington F (2007) Ethnographies of work and the work of ethnography, *Ethnography*; 8; 395

Bruni, N (2002) The crisis of visibility: Ethical dilemmas of autoethnographic research. *Qualitative Research Journal* 2, (1), 24-33.

Chambers dictionary (1999)

Conway, N., and Briner, R.B. (2005). *Understanding Psychological Contracts at Work* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Delamont, S., Atkinson, P., and Parry, O. (2004) 2nd ed, *Supervising the Doctorate A guide to success* England, Open University Press.

Doloriert C & Sambrook S (2009) 'Ethical confessions of the 'I' of Autoethnography: a student's dilemma,' *Journal of Qualitative Research in Organization and Management: An international journal*,

Dunleavy, P. (2003) *Authoring a PhD* Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan

Ellis C (2007) Telling Secrets: Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others, *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 3-29

Ellis, C., Bochner, A.P (2000) Autoethnography, Personal narrative, Reflexivity, Researcher as Subject. In Y.S. Lincoln (ed) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed) Thousand Oaks: Sage, 733-767.

- Ellis, C., and Bochner, A.P. (2003) 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity' in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (2nd ed) Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage, 199-258.
- Ellis, C S and Bochner AP (2006) 'Analyzing analytic autoethnography: An autopsy' *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, (4), 429-449.
- Finn, J.A. (2005) *Getting a PhD An action plan to help manage your research, your supervisor and your project*. London, Routledge.
- Foucault, M (1980) *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings* New York: Pantheon
- Foucault, M. (1995) *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage
- Grant, B. (2003) Mapping the pleasures and risks of supervision *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 24, (2), 175-190
- Grant, B., & Graham A. (1999). Naming the game: Reconstructing graduate supervision. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 4(1), 77-89
- Green, B. (2005) 'Unfinished business: Subjectivity and supervision,' *Higher Education Research & Development*, 24, (2), 151-163
- Hearn, J. (2001) 'Academia, Management and Men' in Brooks, A. & Mackinnon, A. *Gender and the Restructured University*, Buckingham: OUP
- Hockey, J. (1995) 'Getting too close: A problem and possible solution in social science PhD supervision,' *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 23, (2), 199-210
- Humphreys M & Learmonth M (2006) *QI & AOM Compared: We're Managers, We Don't Do That Sort of Thing!* *Academic Tourism, Academic Identity*, 1st Annual Joint ULMS and Keele University Institute for Public Policy and Management Symposium on Current Developments in Ethnographic Research in the Social and Management Sciences
- Jones, A. (1999) Significant relationships: planning for effective research supervision *Nurse Researcher* 6, (4), 5-17.
- Knights, D. & Richards, W. (2003) 'Sex Discrimination in UK Academia' *GWO* 10(2) pp213-238
- Kotter, J.P. (1973). The Psychological Contract: Managing the Joining-Up Process. *California Management Review* Spring 1973, No 3, pp 91-99.
- Levinson, H., Price, C.R., Munden, K.J., Mandl, H.J., and Solley, C.M. (1962) *Men, management and mental health* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Mackinnon, J. (2004) Academic Supervision: seeking metaphors and models of quality *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 28, (4), 395-405.
- McCormack, C. (2005) 'Is non-completion a failure or a new beginning?' Research non-completion from a student's perspective' *Higher Education Research and Development* 24, (3), 233-247.
- McMorland, J., Carroll, B., Copas, S., & Pringle, J. (2003) 'Enhancing the Practice of PhD Supervisory Relationships through First- and Second-Person Action Research/Peer Partnership Inquiry,' *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 4, 2
- Morley, L. (2005) 'Opportunity or exploitation? Women and quality assurance in higher education' *Gender and Education* 17(4) pp 411-429
- Morrison, E.W., and Robinson, S.L. (1997) When employees feel betrayed: A model of how psychological contract violation develops. *Academy of Management Review* 22, 226-256.
- Mullins, G. and Kiley, M. (2002) 'It's a PhD, not a Nobel Prize': how experienced examiners assess research theses, *Studies in Higher Education* 27, (4), 369-386.
- Parker, M. (2002) *Against Management*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Phillips EM & Pugh DS (1994) *How to get a PhD: A handbook for students and their supervisors*, (2nd ed) Buckingham: Open University Press
- Roehling, M.V., and Boswell, W.R. (2004) 'Good Cause Beliefs' in an 'At-Will World'? A Focused Investigation of Psychological Versus Legal Contracts. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 16, (4), 211-231
- Rousseau, D (1995) *Psychological Contracts in Organisations: Understanding Written and Unwritten Agreements*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Rousseau, D. (2001) The Idiosyncratic deal: Flexibility versus fairness? *Organizational Dynamics* 29, 260-273.
- Rousseau, D., Ho, V.T., and Greenberg, J. (2006) I-Deals: Idiosyncratic Terms In Employment Relationships *Academy of Management Review* 31, (4), 977-994.
- Sambrook S, Stewart J & Roberts C (2008) 'Doctoral Supervision: a view from above, below and the middle' *Journal of Further & Higher Education*, 32 (1), 71-84
- Sambrook S, Roberts & Stewart J (2009) *The power and emotion of doctoral supervision*, 6th Critical Management Studies Conference, Warwick University, July
- Schein, E.H. (1965). *Organizational Psychology* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

- Sparkes, A. C. (2002) 'Autoethnography: Self-indulgence or something more?' in A.P. Bochner and C. Ellis (eds.), *Ethnographically Speaking: autoethnography, literature and aesthetic*. pp. 209-232. Walnut Creek CA, Altamira Press
- Taylor, J. (2008) An Autoethnographic Exploration of an Occupation: Doing a PhD *British Journal of Occupational Therapy* 71, (5), 176-184.
- Wade-Benzoni, K.A. and Rousseau, D.M. (1998) Building Relationships Around Tasks. Psychological contracting in Faculty-Doctoral student collaborations *Technical Paper, Heinz School of Public Policy* Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh PA. Available from www.heinz.cmu.edu/research/19abstract.pdf
- Wade-Benzoni, K.A., Rousseau, D.M., and Li, M. (2006) Managing relationships across generations of academics *International Journal of Conflict Management* 17 (1), 4-33.
- Watson TJ (2003) *Sociology, Work and Industry (4th ed)* London, Routledge
- Wellin, M. (2007) *Managing the Psychological Contract. Using the Personal deal to Increase Business Performance* Gower Publishing Limited, England.
- White, S. (2003) Autoethnography- an appropriate methodology? *Qualitative Research Journal* 3, (2), 22-32.
- Wisker, G. (2001) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*, Basingstoke: Palgrave
- Wisker, G. (2005) *The Good Supervisor Supervising Postgraduate and Undergraduate Research for Doctoral Theses and Dissertations* Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan
- Yerxa, E.J., Clark, F., Jackson, J., Parham, D., Pierce, D. (1989) An introduction to occupational science, a foundation for occupational therapy in the 21st century. *Occupational Therapy in Health Care*, 6, (1), 1-17.
- Ylijoki Oili-Helena (2005) Academic nostalgia: A narrative approach to academic work *Human Relations*, 58, (5), 555-576