The Role of Trust in Doctoral Student – Supervisor Relationships in Canadian Universities: *The Students' Lived Experiences and Perspectives*

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Doctoral students' success depends on the effectiveness of supervisory relationships with their supervisors. Research shows that trust is integral for successful workplace relationships as it can enhance well-being and performance. In this article, drawing the data from a larger phenomenological research study, we examined the nature of trust in the doctoral supervision context along with its impact on the doctoral students' well-being and performance. Data analysis of the doctoral students' responses revealed several key factors that position trust as an important and necessary component within the doctoral supervision context for maintaining students' well-being and enhancing their performance.

Keywords: higher education, doctoral supervision, trust, well-being, Canadian universities

INTRODUCTION

Doctoral students' success, in part, is dependent on effective supervisory relationships with their program supervisors (Morris, 2011). As in any effective relationship, *trust* seems to be the glue that holds relationships together and a lubricant that greases communication and effectiveness and efficiency of interactions (Marshall, 2000; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Trust is also a requirement to ensure the well-being and performance of everyone involved in that relationship (Helliwell & Wang, 2011; Solomon & Flores, 2001). Trust between the supervisor and student can go through a typical lifecycle stages of being established, maintained, sustained, broken, or repaired (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2015). If both parties, the trustor and trustee, are willing to view challenges from the other person's perspective, trust can strengthen their understanding and commitment (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Davis, 1996). On the other hand, if any of the parties do not consider the other person's opinion, this might threaten the trust and negatively impact the workplace relationship. This is because failing to listen to the other person is a hazard behavior, which is "self-focused, ego-driven, and . . . does not build trust" (Covey & Merrill, 2006, p. 209). As such, understanding the role of trust between the doctoral student and supervisor is significant (Sheldon, Davidson, & Pollard, 2004). However, there seems to be only a dearth of research in higher education context that focuses on trust between doctoral supervisors and students. The need to explore the phenomenon of trust in doctoral supervision context urged us to study it across all disciplines, including the social sciences and humanities, the natural sciences and engineering, and health science, potentially making an important contribution to higher education research and practice in Canada and other countries

with similar contexts. Drawing on a larger phenomenological research study (Al Makhamreh, 2019) that explored the nature of relational leadership and the leadership competencies in the doctoral supervisor–student relationship within the Canadian university context, this particular article focuses solely on the nature of trust in the doctoral supervision context along with its impact on the doctoral students' well-being and performance. Two research questions guide the discussions in this article: a) What is the nature of trust in the doctoral supervision context? and b) To what extent does trust influence the doctoral students' well-being and performance? Upon a brief overview of selected literature on trust and description of research methodology, we present data analysis of semi-structured interviews with 19 doctoral students in different programs in Canadian universities. We then discuss the key findings in relation to the extant literature and implications for practice, policy, and further research both within and beyond the doctoral supervision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of Trust in Relationships

The significance of trust in the workplace is well established in the literature as the primary element of positive relationships (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003; Cherry, 2016; Kutsyuruba, Walker, & Noonan, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2003, 2014). Trust can be defined as:

> the extent to which an individual engages in a reciprocal interaction and a relationship in such a way that there is willingness to be vulnerable to another and to assume risk with positive expectations and a degree of confidence that the other party will possess some semblance of benevolence, care, competence, honesty, openness, reliability, respect, hope and wisdom. (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2015, p. 109)

Trust is viewed as the backbone of social relationships. For instance, in high-trust relationships, individuals can say the wrong thing but still be understood, while in low-trust relationships, individuals can be very measured and accurate but still be misinterpreted (Covey & Merrill, 2006). Trust is an ongoing reciprocal partnership in which both parties have roles to play (Reina & Reina, 2006), and it includes risk and is associated with vulnerability as an element that should be embraced (Korsgaard, Brodt, & Whitener, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Trust is also acknowledged as imperative for the well-being of organizations (Donaldson, 2001; Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998), and the five behaviours that can encourage a trustworthy relationship in organizations are: consistency, integrity, consideration, communication and empowerment (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). It is also known that trust needs time to be developed — we cannot expect it to "be established overnight; the process of establishing trust is time consuming and is co-dependent on a multitude of interrelationships" (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2015, p. 110).

Building trust is developed through interaction, and since time is a real issue for parties involved in a trusting relationship, they may need to openly discuss factors that could help them create and maintain trust in their working relationship. Some methods of developing trust include communicating effectively, encouraging a culture of openness and honesty, and minimizing inconsistent and unpredictable behavior (Brower et al., 2000; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2009; Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2015; Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; Wheatley, 2006).

Trust in Doctoral Supervision Context

Scholars have argued that trust plays an important role in supervisory relationships. Robertson (2016) found that trust is a key component in successful team supervision of doctoral students and team collaborations, and the missing component in dysfunctional teams. Michaud (2010) argued that doctoral students put their faith and trust in supervisor' capability to lead them through a meaningful and rewarding graduate experience and to a positive outcome. Mutual confidence is a major element in the supervisory process and must be "informed" rather than provided on "blind faith," in that the supervisor must have confidence in the student, and the student must feel confident in the general adjudication of the supervisor

(Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 1997, p. 103). As Brabazon (2016) argued, doctoral students' trust in the professionalism of supervisors must be based on evidence and procedure.

Each party should take the perspective of the other. However, there are challenges that come with taking the other person's perspective. It can be cognitively demanding, especially with the heavy workload that supervisors usually bear (Williams, 2012). Supervisors are faced with increasing undergraduate teaching workloads, continuous pressure to do research (publish or perish), a higher number of PhD students to supervise, and heavyweight administrative obligations, such as grant applications. As a result, these enormous responsibilities may leave them with little time for their students' supervision (Deem & Brehony, 2000; Levecque et al., 2017). Accordingly, some research has raised valid questions about whether supervisors are able to meet these extensive demands (Pole, Sprokkereef, Burgess, & Lakin, 1997; Deem & Brehony, 2000). This suggests that while supervisors must apply a perspective taking strategy to enhance trust and build a positive supervisory relationship, students must do so as well. Doctorate students also function in a pressurized work environment and might live the experience as if they were running a marathon with different obstacles they need to overcome such as vague expectations or unsatisfactory feedback (Austin, 2002), and they are under increasing pressure to finish their candidature within a specified time frame (Ismail, Abiddin, & Hassan, 2011). The supervisor and student both have lives outside campus, and maintaining a work–life balance is a challenge that adds to this tough and hurried working pace (Austin, 2002; Fox, Fonseca, & Bao, 2011).

Effective communication, as an important aspect of trusting relationship, is crucial to students' success because it helps them enhance the quality of their research and improves their doctoral program experiences (Haksever & Manisali, 2000; Ives & Rowley, 2005; James & Baldwin, 1999; Phillips & Pugh, 2000; Spear, 2000; Wisker, 2007). Becoming a supervisor is a "two-way process . . . [in which] openness about . . . [the supervisor's] and the student's competence may prevent the student from withdrawing or failing" (Moses, 1989, p. 10). This suggests that effective communication—which is key to establishing trust—starts with the supervisor, who builds the foundation for it. Poor or no communication between supervisors and students is the main source of conflict between the two parties, and if it is not addressed, it can create frustration and isolation, lead to mismatched expectations (which is one of the significant reasons why supervision relationships fail), and cause attrition (Bloom, Propst Cuevas, Hall, & Evans., 2007; Egan, Stockley, Brouwer, Tripp, & Stechyson, 2009; James & Baldwin, 1999).

Agreement and disagreement are key features in people's communication and do not normally create conflict; however, the way people handle disagreement is often responsible for any conflict that arises (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006). Sometimes, the supervisory relationship can be difficult and can deteriorate. James and Baldwin (1999), for example, proposed that the supervisory relationship can be unpredictable, and it would be unrealistic to assume that challenges can always be avoided. They highlighted that supervisors sometimes could be the last to know whether their students are unhappy. This implies that the students should take the first step to draw attention to the issue.

Whether students can take the first step in addressing problems in their relationship with their supervisor is a valid question, particularly in a low-trust context. Furthermore, the authority aspect and the power dynamic in a leader–follower relationship might pose a real challenge (Hollander, 1995), causing a student to worry that the supervisor's influence and control could impact their results (Morris, 2011). This might hinder some students from being open and expressing their negative feelings (*e.g.*, frustration) to their supervisors. This indicates that supervisors should create a trustworthy environment that is safe for their students to express themselves. Moreover, they need to be sensitive to their students' needs so they can understand the signals when their students do not feel well or are frustrated (Manathunga, 2005a).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An interpretive phenomenology design was used to study the individual lived experiences by exploring, describing, and analyzing their meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The lived experiences of human beings include "the whole system of interactions with others . . . in an environment that is fused with meaning and language" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 171). For this paper, we analyzed data collected in

response to these interview questions: *Could you please describe what trust means for you, and how trust exists between you and your supervisor? Tell us a story of a situation that can illustrate your thinking.*

A purposive sampling strategy (Creswell, 2005; Neuman, 2006) was used to invite doctoral students to participate in the research. The criteria specified that participants could be any student, current or former, in a Canadian university doctoral program in any discipline, including social sciences and humanities, the natural sciences and engineering, and health science. We emailed the students directly through their profiles, which were publicly available on their university websites. We also applied a snowball strategy, asking current participants to recruit future participants from their connections. The interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2018. We recorded all the interviews and transcribed them verbatim, with all proper names and identifiers removed and changed to pseudonyms.

The participating doctoral students (N =19) were mostly full-time, with only one being part-time. Nearly all were domestic students, and only one was international. They were at different stages of their programs: graduated (n = 11), All But Dissertation (ABD) and fifth year (n = 3), third year (n = 2), and second year (n = 3) (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANTS' PROGRAM/DEMOGRAPHICS–DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Pseudonyms	Disciplines	Age at Completion of PhD	Age at time of Interview	Stage in the Program
Laura	Social sciences & humanities		28	Finishing 2nd year
Daisy	Social sciences & humanities		26	Finishing 2nd year
Natasha	Social sciences & humanities		28	Finishing 2nd year
Tiffany	Social sciences & humanities		26	In 3rd year
Sara	Social sciences & humanities		29	In 5th year (ABD)
Stephanie	Social sciences & humanities	30		Graduated in 2018
Heather	Social sciences & humanities	50		Graduated in 2018
Michael	Social sciences & humanities	38		Graduated in 2017
Nora	Social sciences & humanities	53		Graduated in 2013
Nicholas	Natural sciences & engineering		26	In 5th year
Ronald	Natural sciences & engineering		29	In 5th year
Chris	Natural sciences & engineering	33		Graduated in 2015
Reginald	Natural sciences & engineering	27		Graduated in 2010
Adam	Natural sciences & engineering	27		Graduated in 2008
Leslie	Health sciences		41	In 3rd year
Nancy	Health sciences	27		Graduated in 2013
Lamar	Health sciences	48		Graduated in 2005
Randy	Health sciences	26		Graduated in 2004
Nelly	Health sciences	28		Graduated in 1997

We applied a thematic analysis approach, which is a "method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis can potentially provide a rich and thorough yet complex account of data (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). This type of analysis also involves the identification of themes through "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). We aimed to be attentive and tentative— "attentive to the data, and tentative in [the] conceptualizations of them" (Dey, 2003, p. 108). To do so, we employed a close reading strategy focused on the contents before analyzing the common themes across participants' responses. We first incorporated a deductive analysis approach (Crabtree & Miller, 1999), followed by a data-driven inductive approach (Boyatzis, 1998). The deductive/inductive analysis involved a continual moving back and forth between the codes and the entire dataset.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Students considered trust to be a major component in the supervisory relationship. They either shared how they experienced a trustworthy supervision relationship, or how they perceived it, and they offered stories and moments that illustrated their perspectives. The results indicated that when supervisors are accessible to their students, approachable and psychologically present – which we decided to call AAPP-oriented supervisors – they create an opportunity for trust to develop. There were two main themes that highlighted the participants' lived experiences and perspectives: (1) pending trust, which starts as soon as the supervisory relationship begins; and (2) building trust, which includes how pending trust develops and gets approved or disapproved via interaction.

Pending Trust

For students, trust started early, with both individuals approaching the relationship under the perception that the other party "began with what they would perceive as being good intentions" (Reginald). They entered "into an agreement together: to work together to help each other, more so the supervisor over the student" (Nelly). Therefore, trust started with "shared mutual agreements" (Lamar) that were either informal (Nora; Chris; Nancy; Randy; Leslie; Ronald) or formal (Stephanie) under which each party was committed to their roles and responsibilities. Students were aware that they had to fulfill their obligations, and they expected the same from their supervisors. The following interview script highlights what students commonly expected from their supervisors:

> Your supervisor is going to set you on the right path and give you a project that will help
> you to get where you need to be as a student . . . in terms of your research and in terms of
> your future career goals (Randy).

It was apparent that some students placed a lot of trust when they were "picking the supervisor" (Lamar) and in "choosing [the supervisor] to start" (Chris). Most students mainly selected their supervisors because they had "research programs in parallel" with theirs and were "content experts" (Lamar), and because some supervisors were "very established scholars" and "internationally known" (Michael). As such, to some students, the selection was "not really so much trust that you think about. [It was] more like, just take me, please take me, work with me, work with me" (Michael).

Some students were comfortable with what to expect from their supervisors, especially because they had known them before; they had either worked with them on projects (Randy) or had them as master's program supervisors (Michael; Tiffany; Adam; Nancy; Leslie; Nelly). However, this previous familiarity did not guarantee that trust would be developed, maintained, or enforced in the doctoral supervision relationship. For example, Stephanie, Ronald, and Sara all worked with the same supervisors in their master's programs, but trust was an issue for them.

Some students did not know the role of their supervisors, such as Nicolas, and they "didn't really understand what was expected of a supervisor" (Natasha), nor did they have early conversations with their supervisors on how the relationship would work. These students started confused and ended up with ambiguity that impacted their performance. This suggests that the first impression students get when they start their programs is important in setting the foundation for trust, and supervisors need to pay more attention to how they start their supervision relationships with their students.

Some students were nervous in their first few meetings with their supervisors, such as Daisy, who recounted, "At first I was a bit nervous of my supervisor because I just didn't know what to expect from them." Some felt intimidated from their supervisors' prestigious status, as Laura conveyed: "I think, originally, it's a little bit daunting to meet someone who's so, you know, so highly acclaimed and, like, I've been reading her research for so long." All students reflected how interaction in the doctoral supervision context is the main element that takes trust from what we call *pending* status to a place where it is permitted or not permitted, as pinpointed in the building trust phase.

Building Trust

Students shared that trust can be built or lost through interaction and engagement (Chris; Heather; Nelly). Starting from "something as simple as defining the scope of the project" (Chris), the necessary level of trust that is achieved at the very beginning either increases or decreases through interaction. For example, Heather switched supervisors because she had poor communication with her first one. She argued that trust is developed when there is communication, and supervisors who do not interact with their students are less trustworthy.

It was apparent that some students viewed trust or the expectations at the very beginning of the supervision relationship, which we call *pending trust*, as a growing process (Daisy; Heather; Michael; Nelly) that starts out shallow and either deepens or declines as the relationship develops. Some lived it as "an evolving concept" that "continued to grow" (Michael). To others, growing trust was a slow process; for example, Daisy suggested that trust grows slowly, especially because she had a negative and noninclusive supervision experience in her master's degree, which impacted her well-being. She decided to "start off slow" and take time in her doctoral supervision relationship to figure out her supervisor's interests.

The time limit in which trust must be established varied based on each supervisory relationship. For Nora, building trust was "actually very—quite instant, in my experience. . . . It didn't take a long time to develop that trust; it was immediate." For others, it ranged from "probably a few months for both of us to trust each other" (Adam) to around six months, which was "enough time that the student can perform a number of experiments" (Nancy).

The process of building trust—whether it was instant, took time, or was never built as expected—can be explained by five subthemes: reciprocating trust, caring supervisors, consistency and empowerment, opportunities for trust, and threats to trust.

Reciprocating trust. From the doctoral students' perspectives, trust is considered to be reciprocal. Both parties need to be confident that the other has the capacity—and more importantly, the willingness—to make sincere efforts to contribute to the main shared goals throughout the entire program. Unidimensional trust is not possible because it leads the other party to turn inward and withhold trust in the supervision relationship. For example, because Adam's supervisor was still new, it took them both a few months to trust one another "in terms of whether or not he was a capable supervisor" and "whether or not I had the skills in the lab to be safe and do the things that he wanted me to do and execute." For Lamar, she was also the first student for her supervisor, but her experience lacked trust because her supervisor ignored her guidance, feedback, and needs, which did not meet Lamar's expectations.

Tiffany narrated that having an experienced supervisor made a difference in the level of trust she had in her. She felt like she was "lucky in the sense that because [my supervisor] has been supervising for so long, she's also gone through so many students." Tiffany shared that there might be less trust if it was "someone who's doing it for the first time" and added that this "might even [cause] confusion."

Caring supervisors. Students clearly expressed the connection between trust and caring supervisors who conveyed a sense of understanding, attention, and compassion, whether these students lived it or wished if they had. Students who enjoyed having supervisors that had their best interests at heart valued how their supervisors were there when needed and how they followed through (Chris; Tiffany; Randy; Nancy). They did not leave their students stranded (Nora; Adam) and did not give up on them or let them quit the program (Heather; Nora). As a result, they all trusted their supervisors' best judgment.

All students were aware when their supervisors were looking out for them and when they were looking out only for themselves instead. The students highlighted that having supervisors who are not self-centered was critical because it allowed them to be themselves—honest about their needs and able to be vulnerable. On the other hand, students who had self-centered supervisors lived inconvenient supervision experiences and could not rely or count on their supervisors; this lack of trust created a tense environment that made their time in their programs arduous (Nicolas; Lamar; Stephanie; Ronald).

Having the students' best interests at heart is a belief that students developed over time when their supervisors demonstrated it to them through actions rather than words. Supervisors could demonstrate care in several ways, and one of them was to know the tools and program requirements, so they could offer

informed advice and direction (Randy). At the same time, students were aware that their doctoral supervisors were not supposed to be like "Google. . . . She doesn't have all the algorithms at her fingertips" (Natasha). Therefore, students needed to be connected well with their research communities, so they could benefit from all the valuable resources they had in their departments or fields. This means that having the students' best interests at heart also includes encouraging them to network and build these valuable connections. In other words, it suggests that the concept of having the sole supervisor as the only source of support should be challenged.

Consistency and empowerment. Students reported that trust is fundamentally "encountered on a daily basis" through constructive feedback, informed guidance, and open dialogue (Randy), which makes consistency a treasured element in enforcing trust (Nancy; Reginald). These supervisors were "very empowering" and provided students with a "lot of independence" (Randy) that some needed, thereby enforcing trust and motivating and satisfying students (Heather; Michael; Nancy; Nora).

Randy addressed her trust in her supervisor's judgment accordingly: "I always thought he was very knowledgeable, very knowledgeable, [and] very capable, and I always trusted his judgment and his advice, and it has never led me astray. We still have a very good relationship today." Randy added how she benefited from her supervisor's "hands-on" approach, which she needed. When she submitted papers to him, she would get them back "covered with red ink." Randy reported that because she trusted her supervisor, she was fine with having her work marked up with red ink—which quite often makes other students nervous. This implies that when trust is established, students are more open to accept the feedback technique that their supervisor applies.

Students who had to deal with supervisors who were inconsistent (Sara), did not support them (Lamar; Stephanie), or did not empower them when they needed some kind of independence (Ronald) reported that they did not find their supervisors trustworthy, and the lack of trust in their relationships left them worried and trapped in a foggy path that depleted their motivation.

Opportunities for trust. Trust needs opportunities to grow, and it shines in a supportive and safe culture. Students spoke about how they either viewed or experienced trust and how it centered on feeling comfortable enough to talk to their responsive supervisors about their ideas, challenges, problems, negative feelings, difficult issues, and lab mistakes with the faith that their supervisors would respect and understand them, maintain confidentiality, and support them (Leslie; Chris; Daisy; Heather; Nancy; Natasha; Nora; Sara).

This supportive and safe culture aligned well with students' fulfilment needs. This culture fostered transparency and encouraged "being comfortable to communicate" different issues with supervisors (Nora) who were willing to show their "vulnerabilities," and acknowledging that they might not have all the answers to students' queries (Michael).

Some examples of this supportive and safe culture came from Sara and Heather, who both had accidents that impacted their progression. Sara broke her face, and this accident put her "one semester behind." Even though Sara's trust was challenged when her supervisor did not check in with her, she appreciated how her supervisor advised her to talk to the department chair, and asked her to "put a statement" into her "annual progress report . . . detailing that and making sure [it] was on my record so that it [wouldn't be] a question in the future."

Heather had "a very serious concussion" in addition to other personal challenges. She reported how trust is about having difficult conversations with supervisors: "Having those conversations [isn't] easy, [but] having that conversation with my [supervisor] was very easy, and I trusted her. . . . I trusted her to have my back and to advocate on behalf of me."

Other examples came from Nancy and Chris, who faced challenges in the labs and felt comfortable enough to approach their supervisors and inform them. Nancy shared a story about when she made a mistake in a lab experiment (an error in her calculations) and how trust helped her approach the problem properly. When facing a problem in the lab, Chris was comfortable enough to approach his supervisor, but he tried to fix it first, while being "prepared to take ownership." This willingness to accept responsibility reflects how students were mindful of their roles in building trust and how they actively worked to enhance it.

Threats to trust. Many students had trustworthy supervision experiences that boosted their energy and minimized personal issues or pressures placed on them that were inherent in graduate programs. These students had peace of mind that they could count on their supervisors, who supported them and created opportunities for them to uncover their potentials. It was evident that students would be better off with mutual trust in their doctoral supervision experiences because this allows them to focus on their progress rather than worry about their performance and well-being.

However, not all students were so fortunate. Some were in tough positions and observed what we call *pending trust* with which they started their program disappear. These students included Stephanie, who had a written agreement with her supervisor, and Ronald, who had a verbal agreement, which implies that these express agreements did not protect trust to vanish.

Nicholas, Reginald, Stephanie, Ronald, and Lamar disclosed different stories about trusting their supervisors, and some felt like their supervisors mistreated or even bullied them. The similarities in their lived experiences centered on the pain reflected in each story they shared.

Nicholas emphasized that he did not have a lot of interaction with his supervisor, which caused him to end up in the wrong direction for around five semesters, and accordingly prevented trust from developing. Meanwhile, Reginald endured "eighteen months . . . where the problem I was working [on] lost momentum." He did not receive proper feedback from his *main supervisor*. He had to make a decision to choose one supervisor instead of two, so he chose the other one.

As stated earlier, some students worked with the same supervisors in their master's and doctoral programs, and they benefited to some extent from this long-term relationship as they got to know their supervisors better and trust them. On the other hand, Sara, Ronald, and Stephanie all worked with the same supervisors in their master's and doctoral programs, but they unfortunately had negative experiences. Sara was demotivated, and her trust in her supervisor started to decrease after she stopped going to the lab and her supervisor never noticed her absence. Similarly, Ronald was stressed about being delayed in his program but was doing his best to complete the program and graduate.

Stephanie, Ronald, and Lamar were all challenged in their programs because their trust in their supervisors was breached. This occurred under different circumstances, but the similarity in their stories is that the broken trust had a negative impact on their well-being. Stephanie shared how "commitments and timelines" were significant to her, but her supervisor did not always respect them. She explained how she lost trust in her supervisor when he put her through difficult situations. For example, her supervisor allowed her to present her work in the candidacy exam in front of her committee, knowing it "was not fully ready," but convincing her it was, which broke trust. Her disappointment was doubled because her supervisor had done the same thing during her master's program as well. This established a negative pattern in which her supervisor acted as a bully, belittled her perspectives, abused his power over her, and hurt her feelings constantly, which left her frustrated and exhausted.

Ronald trusted the way his supervisor supported him when he arrived in the city where his university was located. Unfortunately, Ronald explained how this trust decreased when he realized that his supervisor was delaying his graduation. He explained that what breaks trust "is to perceive your supervisor is acting according to their interests" or "basically hurting your interests to satisfy his." He felt like his supervisor was exploiting him, wasting his time, and leaving him to suffer in a hopeless situation.

Lamar shared that supervisors must have their students' backs and help them succeed. She explained that trust diminishes if a supervisor "[doesn't] come through" if you send an email "saying, 'I really need you,' and she doesn't respond to you," or if she "gives you terrible feedback and doesn't help you identify where you need to go from there." These constant negative and abusive behaviors from Lamar's supervisors left her depleted and impacted her well-being.

To conclude, students believed that trust is mutual and that to have a trusting and functional supervisory relationship, both parties must contribute to building trust through their actions. For them, trust begins when the supervisor is consistent, empowering, caring, and able to build a supportive and safe culture. Different threats were identified that can impact trust negatively (e.g., toxicity and self-interest over students' interests) and eventually impact students' well-being.

DISCUSSION

Doctoral supervision is a type of leadership, and leadership—is inherently "persuasion, not domination" (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994, p. 3). This explains why trust was found to be the one core element that distinguished between functional and dysfunctional doctoral supervision. This finding was not surprising because a great body of research demonstrated trust as a dominant factor that highly differentiates effective from ineffective leadership (e.g., Bass,1990; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman,1995; Schein & Schein, 2018), and it was also found in the doctoral supervision literature to be the factor that influenced the students' doctoral experiences (e.g., Manathunga, 2005a; Robertson, 2016) in that supervisors need to "secure the student's trust" (Benmore, 2016, p. 1263).

Students enter the supervision setting with some level of expectation, or what we call "pending trust," that the other party has good intentions, has the competencies required to do the job, and is committed to their identified roles and responsibilities. Reina and Reina (2006) called this stage "contractual trust" (p. 15), which sets the tone for engagement and direction. Through interaction, "pending trust" can be approved or disapproved. This finding suggests two main phases of trust in this context: (1) the pending trust phase and (2) the building trust phase.

The pending trust phase urges the need to discuss expectations, roles, and responsibilities as early as possible. One student had these "roles and responsibilities" conversations formally by signing an agreement, but it was clear that these formal agreements did not guarantee trust to develop or a functional relationship to progress (Sharkie, 2009). Other students had them informally, and for some (not all), those early conversations helped or enforced trust and mindfulness regarding the direction of the supervisory relationship.

While Parker-Jenkins (2018) suggested agreements should be "both verbally and in written form . . . to safeguard the interests of all parties and to help facilitate successful completion rates" (p. 68), Molm, Schaefer, and Collett (2009) found in their study on fragile and resilient trust that reciprocal exchanges (without formal agreement) develop trust that is more resilient and affect based than negotiated exchanges are. We argue that neither verbally nor written agreement help if doctoral supervision is characterized by ignorance (Stephanie's supervisor) or self-interest (Ronald's supervisor). However, regardless of this finding, detailing roles and expectations to make sure both parties understand the dynamics of their work is required (Green 2005; Reidy & Green, 2005), and we recommend having these recommendations formally and informally. But clarifying roles and expectations is only half the trust journey—living up to those expectations is what develops a trustworthy supervisory relationship, which is done in the second phase.

The building trust phase starts as soon the supervisor sets the tone for engagement and direction. Some students suggested allowing a few months to a maximum of six months to establish trust, which requires supervisors to practice AAPP (i.e., being accessible, approachable, and psychologically present) to allow that trust to develop. The supervisors' AAPP is a condition that allowed them to foster trust, which means that trust starts with the supervisor, who practices AAPP and who is capable of forming positive and trusting supervisory relationships. This finding speaks to other research that suggests the leader is responsible for setting the foundation on which trust can be built (e.g., Gordon, 2017; Molinaro, 2017). AAPP suggests that both the supervisor and student learn the whole process together, which helps them to get to know each other (Edmondson, 2012), will best serve their efforts to reach their goals, and will eventually allow trust to develop.

Students valued their supervisors' guidance, consistency and feedback as a source of trust that influenced their well-being and performance. Feedback was found to be an essential element for students' performance in terms of reaching their full potential, motivation, and well-being. Feedback enforced trust in supervisors when they offered it or distrust when they provided negative feedback or did not offer it at all. The importance of feedback for performance and motivation has long been accepted in the literature (e.g., Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Some scholars argued that individuals use and implement feedback when they accept it and trust it to be truthful (Kinicki, Prussia, Wu, & McKee-Ryan, 2004), which means that having a trustworthy supervisory relationship enforces using feedback and offering students feedback

develops trust. As a result, this student–supervisor relationship directly impacts students' performance (Armstrong, Allinson, & Hayes, 2004).

Some students suggested that receiving guidance through empowerment—which means they were enabled to set directions, define goals, and make choices—enforced their trust in their supervisors. These empowered students highlighted how they were motivated and excited about their work, which is consistent with other leadership research that proposed how empowering leadership contributes to followers' motivation (Kirkman & Rosen, 1997, 1999; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). However, empowerment needs conditions in place so students can benefit from this leadership attribute. For example, leaving students alone without proper guidance or feedback (e.g., student Reginald) does not indicate empowerment—it reflects carless behaviors or nonbenevolence that undermines the students' abilities (disabling instead of enabling them) to move forward and jeopardized their trust in their supervisors.

Lee (2008, p. 277) highlighted the strain between the "dependence" and "independence" of students on their supervisors, and as Petre and Rugg (2010) explained, "Doing a PhD requires a balance between independence and guidance" (p. 222). The participants reflected on students' needs and observed that they sometimes had to be dependent and other times independent (hands on and hands off). It is was evident that it is the supervisor's responsibility to balance "dependence" and "independence" (Benmore, 2016, p. 1261) and be "adaptable" (Pearson & Brew, 2002, 143) to offer empowerment as needed, based on the students' readiness and after implementing the essential empowerment conditions. These empowerment conditions include showing trust in the students' capabilities (e.g., Nancy). Moreover, they include facilitating the process for students, such as by removing obstructions to performance, which did not happen in the case of student Nicolas. These empowerment condition findings confirm what other studies suggested (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005; Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000; Kirkman & Rosen, 1997, 1999).

Trust is not one-sided, but rather is mutual (e.g., Serva, Fuller, & Mayer, 2005; Reina & Reina, 2006), and students shared how they viewed or lived trust to be a reciprocal feeling that united them around their mutual goals. Reciprocating trust was a powerful and necessary element, especially when they were confronted with challenges. This result is consistent with Willetts, Mitchell, Abeysuriya, and Fam's (2012) perspectives, who proposed that "to a large extent, mutual trust . . . carries both student and supervisor through the many tensions and challenges" (p. 139). Furthermore, mutual trust was found to be one of the factors that distinguished the lived experiences of students who were satisfied and maintained their well-being from those who suffered. This conclusion confirms what Sinclair (2004) highlighted about the importance of reciprocity, which Rowarth and Cornforth (2005) further expanded by explaining how a "successful PhD program starts when the student and supervisor develop mutual trust and respect" (p. 161).

One of the focal elements of building trust was related to supervisors demonstrating they had their students' best interests at heart. When students believed that their supervisors had their students' best interests at heart, they were more likely to accept their feedback — even when their written work was marked in red pen, which does not seem that students prefer. This finding confirms what Halse and Malfroy (2010, p. 87) reported: students "are more open to receiving critical feedback about their work in a way that they know that it's coming from a person that has their best interests at heart."

The caring behavior that leaders display and how it promotes trust is well established in the literature (e.g., Dixon & Janks, 2010; Guerin, Kerr, & Green, 2015; Spears, 2010), and having their students' best interests at heart represents benevolence, which is a vital component of trust (e.g., Cook & Wall, 1980; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman,1995; Mishra, 1996). It was clear that this people-oriented approach was key in building a supportive, no-blame culture for trust to be nurtured and students to thrive. We argue this positive culture is like a shelter that protects trust and helps it grow, especially in this power scene context which "resides with the supervisor(s)" (Parker-Jenkins, 2018, p. 63). Supervisors who managed to build this positive culture minimized this power scene by adding more power to trust.

Students are vulnerable, and only those who trusted their supervisors were comfortable enough to show their vulnerability. The students' vulnerability meant they needed to fully trust their supervisors to be capable of living up to their leadership role, which confirms what Brabazon (2013) advised students: "You will need to lean on them. You must have the belief that they can help you" (n.p.), especially when facing challenges and being vulnerable.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Our study has shown that trustworthy characters and behaviors breed more trust and allow both parties to negotiate deliverables and outcomes in a way that soothes any tension and enriches their overall experiences. When a mutual trustworthy supervisory relationship is developed, a double win is accomplished: students can have more courage to go out of their comfort zone, which is key in becoming more innovative, and supervisors can benefit from discovering new ways of doing things, which contributes to their personal and professional growth.

The key implication of this study is the need for a deliberate attention to trust building approaches within doctorate programs. To this end, colleges, faculties, and departments that offer graduate studies can set guidelines for supervisors and students to discuss expectations, roles, and responsibilities as soon as the students enter the program. Additionally, AAPP-orientation can help supervising professors work with their students to evaluate their doctoral supervision practices on a continuous manner. The dialogue between the two parties is critical, and encouraging a culture that values openness is key.

It is also important to recognize limitations of this study. Lack of generalizability is a common limitation in all qualitative research, and this research is no different. Another limitation is that this paper solely focused on students' perceptions and did not include supervisors; therefore, a comparison of students' and supervisors' lived experiences and perspectives related to the notion of trust would offer a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Doctoral students and supervisors can benefit from these findings by reflecting upon their beliefs and practices to create trustworthy supervisory relationships.

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