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Desirable qualities of modern doctorate advisors in the USA: a view through the lenses of candidates, graduates, and academic advisors

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ABSTRACT

Desirable qualities for modern doctorate academic advisors in the USA that provide for successful completion were explored. In this mixed method study, both interview and survey data were collected. Interviews took place with 13 academic advisors and 18 doctoral candidates and graduates. Thirty-eight academic advisors and 151 candidates and graduates in the USA completed the survey. Participants were from 33 states and represented disciplines of physical therapy, nursing, health, education, and business. Findings across academic advisors, doctoral candidates, and graduates indicate that participants preferred structure in the advising process, helpful and timely feedback, regular communication, emotional support during the doctoral research journey, and a professional relationship that transitions from hierarchical to collegial as the candidate moves to completion of the modern doctorate process. Implications for preparation of academic advisors for modern doctorate candidates may be helpful in supporting their successful completion.

Introduction

Doctoral study experiences in the USA are often framed as an almost sacred relationship between a candidate and his or her academic advisor, who generally guides the candidate through dissertation research to completion and graduation. These relationships have been characterized as apprentice-ships, proceeding in the manner prescribed by the academic advisor. In Europe and outside of the USA, these academic advisors may be referred to as supervisors, but advisor, major advisor, or chair would be most common to participants in this USA study and therefore, academic advisor is the term being in this article. Although there were multiple purposes of the overall large study, data represented here reflect the purpose of determining the most desirable qualities of academic advisors from the perspective of doctoral candidates (those within one year of completion and dissertation research), recent graduates (no more than two years beyond completion), and academic advisors.

The majority of doctoral supervision research focuses on the perception of advisors and how they characterize their work. Due to the political nature of the relationship between candidates and recent graduates and advisors, the aforementioned are less frequently asked about their academic advisement experiences, making our findings an important addition to the published research, which can inform academic advisement processes and practices, particularly in the USA.

Conceptual framework

Our research focuses on the current differences in perceptions between the two groups of candidates and recent graduates, and academic advisors in the USA. The concepts addressed are desirable academic advisor qualities from the perceptions of candidates during the research phase, graduates within two years after graduation, and academic advisors.

Research describes the perceptions that each group holds, but there is limited research that exists that draws comparisons between the two. For example, the research of Lee (2008) takes a closer look at the perceptions of these doctoral academic advisors in terms of their supervision practices. One of the advisors relayed the perspective that they, 'act as a bridge between the knowledge and the student and eventually they don't need me' (Lee 2008, 275). Importantly, she concludes that the academic advisor is working with candidates towards a place where they are able to develop independence as researchers to make their own contributions to their selected field (Lee 2008, 275).

Examination of research that highlights perceptions of both advisors and candidates from Kirsi Pyhältö, Jenna Vekkaila, and Jenni Keskinen (2015) found that 24% of candidates and 20% of advisors reported that coaching was a highlight of the supervisory experience. Coaching was the second most frequently reported supervisory practice, behind only assistance in research. The authors explained that both groups 'saw giving emotional support and constructive feedback, guiding candidates towards finding their own paths, collaborative thinking and promoting the doctoral candidate's active agency as a member of the scholarly community as important elements of supervising' (Pyhältö, Vekkaila, and Keskinen 2015, 9). In these ways, we see similarities in perception between candidates and advisors.

These same practices found by Pyhältö, Vekkaila, and Keskinen (2015, 9) are similar to the learned outcomes of mentorship described by Lindén, Ohlin, and Brodin (2013). The authors included these learned outcomes as 'dealing with anger' (emotional support), 'recognizing that it is possible to make a career and be yourself' (guiding candidates toward their own paths), and industry feedback (constructive feedback) (Lindén, Ohlin, and Brodin 2013, 650–52). These studies allow us to begin drawing connections between the perceptions of candidates and their alignment, or misalignment, with the perceptions of advisors.

Murphy, Bain, and Conrad (2007) examined the perceptions of candidates and advisors as those perceptions tie directly to the supervisory relationship. Supervision is divided into categories: supervision that was either based on control or guidance, and then supervision that was either task-oriented or person-oriented (Murphy, Bain, and Conrad 2007, 219). Between control-based supervision and guidance-based supervision, interviewees, candidates and advisors both, overwhelmingly explained that they viewed supervision as guidance-based. Comparatively, when looking at the second groupings, most interviewees viewed supervision as task-oriented (Murphy, Bain, and Conrad 2007, 220). This finding is contradictory in some ways because guidance-based supervision is grounded in collaborative efforts which may be paired with a belief in person-oriented supervision, which develops the candidate on levels of professional and personal growth (Murphy, Bain, and Conrad 2007, 220). Such contradictions may be rooted in differences in perception between candidates and advisors. Murphy, Bain, and Conrad explain that,

> When the data for supervisors and candidates were separated, we found a small tendency for supervisors to endorse guiding (12) over controlling beliefs (5), and to be more person-focused (11) than task-focused (6). The opposite trend seemed to apply to the candidates: controlling beliefs (10) were expressed more than guiding beliefs (7), and task-focused beliefs (12) were more often expressed than person-focused beliefs (5). (2007, 225)

Other research suggests that the perceptions of academic advisors are not always similar to the perceptions that candidates hold of their experienced supervision. Lindén, Ohlin, and Brodin (2013) noted that an example commonly comes from the belief that supervisors hold that they have

impacted the candidate on a personal level. Instead, candidates sometimes relay that they feel that their academic advisors have done an effective job impacting their learning exclusively (Lindén, Ohlin, and Brodin 2013, 659). The researchers support this thought in saying, 'Since PhD education is intended to prepare doctoral students for professional work both within and outside academia, it is problematic that students' personal learning was not supported to a greater extent' (Lindén, Ohlin, and Brodin 2013, 659).

Methods

As a mixed method study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The qualitative data were collected from both groups: (a) advisors, (b) candidates and recent graduates through the use of semi-structured interviews and completion of open-ended survey items. Quantitative data were collected from a survey designed for candidates and graduates, and a second parallel survey designed for doctoral advisors. In this paper, we are sharing findings from similar items on both surveys that pertain to identification of desirable qualities for doctoral academic advisors.

Population and sample

The population of advisors and, doctoral candidates and graduates is extremely large, given that more than 400 professional doctorate, or practice doctorate programs in the USA were identified by the researchers through searching university and organizational websites. An e-mail invitation was sent to 432 coordinators of these identified professional doctoral programs, inviting them to participate as advisors and to share the opportunity with other professional doctoral program coordinators and academic advisors, as well as with candidates and recent graduates who met the criteria for participation.

Before solicitation of participants to the study, the researchers determined that criteria for the purposive sample of doctoral candidates would mean they would be in candidacy and defined as in the research phase of their program, most likely within a year of completion. Criteria for recent graduates was that no more than two years had passed since their program completion and graduation.

The interviews preceded the survey administration and therefore at the time of the academic advisor interviews there was no known list of professional doctorate programs nor advisors in the USA. Therefore the list of potential academic advisors and candidates and recent graduates to be interviewed was generated across professional doctorate programs known to the researchers from professional organizations, conference attendance, and universities, excluding those in the researchers' programs within their college. Those on the list were contacted and each was invited to participate in the interview and to recommend other academic advisors and/or candidates and recent graduates. After elimination of those who did not meet the criteria of advisor for professional doctorates, the resulting sample was 23 for the advisor interviews and 21 for candidates and recent graduates.

Participants for the entire study in the USA represented disciplines of physical therapy, nursing, health, education, and business. Geographically, the participants spanned the USA from the Atlantic to Pacific Oceans and from the most southern to the most northern border, representing 33% or 64% of the states in the USA.

Resulting participants in the interviews included 13 academic advisors and 18 doctoral candidates and graduates. Twenty-four academic advisors and 151 candidates and recent graduates in the USA completed the survey items represented in this article, Doctoral Supervision of Multi-Disciplinary Practice Based Doctorates: An Appreciative Inquiry into Best Practices in their Design, Development, and Delivery (USA).

Instrumentation

Qualitative

Academic advisor interview and survey open-ended item.
The academic advisor interview protocol was collaboratively developed with the international interview team of the Multi-Disciplinary Practice Based Doctorates: An Appreciative Inquiry into Best Practice in their Design, Development, and Delivery project. The original interview items were piloted by each member of the international interview team in their context. After preliminary analysis, the team agreed on revisions to the interview items.

For implementation in the USA, the interview protocol and interview items were edited for US-centric language and university contexts. USA Protocol Supervisors/Advisors/Chairs Interview Questions and Prompts included 10 items, 5 of which were used for analysis of desirable qualities of academic advisors. The same method was applied to the singular open-ended item on the survey supported by Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015, 399) 'Open-ended research instrument items allow for more individualized responses.'

Candidate and recent graduate interview and survey open-ended item.
Like the academic advisor interview protocol, the protocols for candidate and recent graduate interviews were also developed in collaboration that included the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc) and confirmed by the international faculty interview team noted in the advisor section. It was determined by the interview team that candidates and recent graduates would be more likely to provide authentic responses if their interviewer was in a similar position and there was no possibility of adverse impact to the participants supporting the strategy of Eurodoc and doctoral candidates in the USA serving in this role. The interview items were developed and confirmed through the same process as the advisor items and were piloted with doctoral candidates at the time of the study, which allowed the team to agree on revisions and language.

The protocols and interview items for candidate and recent graduate interviews were revised for US-centric language. The interviews included 10 items, 3 of which were used for results on their perceptions of doctoral supervision. Similarly, the process for the open-ended survey item was finalized.

Quantitative

The 46-item Doctoral Supervision of Multi-Disciplinary Practice Based Doctorates: An Appreciative Inquiry into Best Practice in their Design, Development and Delivery (USA) candidate and recent graduate survey was used to measure perceptions of doctoral supervision as they had experienced it and a mirror survey with 68 items was used to gather perceptions of academic advisors. The surveys were developed by the survey development team of the Multi-disciplinary Practice Based Doctorates: An Appreciative Inquiry into Best Practice. The original surveys were piloted by the researchers in several USA universities to ensure that survey items were properly aligned. After preliminary analysis, the team agreed on revisions to the survey items. Each survey has five sections: (a) expectations, (b) procedural details, (c) supervisory competency, (d) supervisory styles, and (e) demographics of respondents to include the USA university state, program, professional background, age, and field of academic study.

Once the survey items had been agreed upon by the larger, international team of researchers, they were edited for implementation in the USA for US-centric language and context. Of the 46 items on the candidate and recent graduate survey and the 68 items on the academic advisor survey, 3 similar items, two quantitative and one open-ended, were used to determine desirable qualities of an academic advisor included herein.

Procedures

Qualitative

As noted in the population and sample section, interviews were solicited and conducted similarly with academic advisors, candidates, and recent graduates. The procedures for the open-ended

survey item was that participants were asked, 'What would you like the researchers to know about your doctoral supervision experience that may help in guiding future supervision in professional doctorates?'

Academic advisor interview. The researcher sent the invitation to participate in the academic advisor interviews from July through November 2015 via email. Multiple emails were sent inviting participation to 23 potential interviewees. The invitation was accompanied by the participant Pre-interview Checklist that asked about professional experience in advising doctoral students, discipline, and program, and the institution's statement of approval of the research and alignment with ethical standards. Two invitees responded that the interview was not appropriate based on their experience and eight did not respond to the invitation. For those who responded positively to the invitation, a time convenient to the interviewee and researcher was set up for a virtual or in-person interview depending upon geographic locations.

At the time of the interview, each participant was asked for consent to be recorded and each gave consent. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a third party with no knowledge of the research nor of the researcher. The researcher also took notes during the interview for use during analysis and for clarification if needed.

Candidate and recent graduate interview. Based on expressed interest through attendance at conferences and the professional network of the researchers we were able to email doctoral candidates and recent graduates to invite them to participate in interviews. Interviews were held between December of 2015 and March of 2016. Informed consent was provided just prior to the recording, and then again at the start of the recording. A pre-interview questionnaire was completed to collect basic demographic data of each interviewee. Interviews were semi-structured and were built to include probes for further investigation where necessary based on the existing interview items. All 18 interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Interviews were completed via telephone and recorded for future transcription. The interviews were assigned an alpha-numeric code defined by discipline and location in an effort to foster genuine anonymity. After the interviews were recorded, they were transcribed verbatim by a third party who was not familiar with the participants nor with the researcher.

Quantitative

Survey data were collected from both groups (advisors, doctoral candidates, and recent graduates) simultaneously during the spring and summer of 2016. The letter of invitation, emailed to a list of 432 professional doctorate program coordinators informing them of the purpose of the study, included directions, a link to the online surveys for advisors, for candidates and recent graduates, and the informed consent.

The administration of the survey followed Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) design regarding points of contact. These included the initial email, a follow-up invitation, and final invitation. The surveys were closed on 23 June 2016 ending any further data collection.

Analysis

Qualitative

Qualitative analysis was conducted according to Sophie Tessier, 'For researchers doing qualitative research, interviews are a commonly used method. Data collected through interviews can be recorded through field notes, transcripts, or tape recordings' (Tessier 2012, 446). The use of interviews allowed for the development of transcripts verbatim to be coded and analyzed through multiple readings, coding, and revisions. The analysis was according to the grounded theory approach of Corbin and Strauss (1990).

Analysis of the transcripts led to the emergence of desirable qualities as concepts. Then similar concepts were grouped and identified as categories. To be included as a category, items were mentioned at least seven times by interviewees. After separate analysis of advisor and candidate and recent graduate transcriptions leading to the development of categories, the researchers collaborated on common labeling of the similar categories and identification of differences in perspectives on desirable qualities of advisors.

Quantitative

For the three items used to determine desirable academic advisor qualities the data were analyzed and are reported in aggregate by candidates' and graduates' collective responses to ensure continued anonymity. Once the survey closed, the close-ended item responses from the survey were tabulated and analyzed. Each item within the Likert-type scales was analyzed in detail by concept. Likert-type scale responses were evaluated using descriptive and the inferential statistical tests, Chi-square, and Kruskal–Wallis.

Limitations and delimitation

Limitations of USA national boundaries and lack of data bases of doctoral candidates, graduates, and advisors are important to this study. The academic advisor sample was small of 13 for interviews and 24 for the survey completion which limits generalizability of the findings related to advisor perceptions. Further, the participants were delimited to exclude advisors, candidates, and graduates of the researchers' own programs to prevent any potential influence on responses. Had individuals from the researchers' college been included in the study, the sample size for advisors would have increased, but may have unduly influenced the findings with contextual bias.

Findings

Qualitative interviews and survey open-ended item

Analysis of the transcriptions of candidate and recent graduate interviews led to the emergence of the desirable qualities of advisors: frequency of communication, quality of communication, mode of communication, accessibility, feedback, the use of articles and research, timelines for candidates, academic advisor's expertise, offering workshops, the advisor's network, building a personal connection, showing enthusiasm, candor, trust, encouragement, autonomy, guidance, providing advice academically, and developing a collegial relationship (Tapoler 2017). Following grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990) concepts were then organized into four categories representing perceptions of candidates, recent graduates, and advisors: communication and feedback, relationships, structure and resource utilization, and mentoring (Tapoler 2017).

Advisor interviews resulted in two additional categories of desirable advisor qualities: advisor commitment and high expectations. Interviewees clarified that understanding of the time required to be an advisor and maintaining scholarly expectations for candidates was essential to assure their successful completion and success in their career afterward. These additional categories bring the total to six.

The analysis produced consistency for desirable qualities of academic advisors related to communication and feedback. Providing feedback that is timely and constructive was a consistent comment. From the communication category, mode of communication, accessibility, and feedback each reflect a candidate's preference for open dialogue and collaborative progress with their doctoral advisors. Candidates and recent graduates stated that more frequent and timely communication than received was desirable as delay in getting feedback hinders progress. Advisors added that feedback should be kind and provided in a positive manner. Emphasis was made by all on effective communication, including frequency of communication as a desirable quality.

Relationships that reflect strong support were identified by candidates and recent graduates. Advisors indicated that they should also care about the candidate and program success. The development of a personal connection and the presence of an encouraging atmosphere indicates a candidates' desire for a supervisory relationship that extends beyond formalities and research (Tapoler 2017). Empathy related to candidates' and recent graduates' circumstances that may extend beyond the academic environment was mentioned by advisors as important, particularly since they are family members as well as employees in business, education, healthcare, and other industries. The acknowledgement that professional doctorate candidates have multiple roles, unlike more traditional doctoral candidates whose major role may be that of a researcher student was emphasized.

Guidance and advisement as mentorship, underline the idea that candidates are seeking growth both in their academic journeys and also in their professional careers and personal lives (Tapoler 2017). After program completion advisors consider the relationship to continue for career support, publication support, and professional reflection. One advisor summed up the importance, 'Be a good mentor.'

In the category of structure and resource utilization consistencies were related to the advisor's areas of expertise. Candidates and recent graduates noted that common research interests, passion, and expertise in their research topic were important, although perceived to be lacking (Tapoler 2017). Candidate and graduate interviewees explained that their doctoral research may not have aligned directly with their advisor's expertise or interests and they perceived that the lack of connection between the two hindered their success by reducing the readily available resources and knowledge. Advisors extended the desirable qualities of disciplinary expertise and passion for the research to include expertise in research methods and quality instruction in the research process.

The structure is included in resource allocation as it relates to organization of students into cohorts or group advising sessions to facilitate their progress and at the same time provide support from the advisor and from colleague candidates. Advisors noted the importance of structure and timelines in supporting successful program completion. One advisor said, 'My students always leave with marching orders.' In contrast, timelines were reported to be absent from experiences of the candidates and recent graduates, and yet were noted to be desirable. Deadlines and structure were thought to be important by both groups of participants.

Another structural concept identified by all interviewees was the application of doctoral education to professional practice. Participants perceived the instrumental nature of the modern doctorate experience as a major contributor to professional success and in program completion. The theory or research to practice connection served as a motivator for more than completing the research to earn a degree.

Although not mentioned by candidates and recent graduates, advisors consistently emphasized the need to maintain high expectations for the candidates. They voiced that written expectations were important so that there would be no misunderstanding. Their words were clear, 'We should be proud of who we're sending out there' and 'The best gift I can give them is having high standards. I don't want them to be disappointed with what they've produced 10 years from now.' High expectations included writing, researching, methodology and statistical expertise, and commitment to a quality research product.

The second category unique to the analysis of advisor interviews was commitment. Commitment to the candidate during the research process meant, ' … willingness to be with them through the process of improving.' Further examples of commitment referred to understanding and being willing to dedicate the time, patience, and energy needed to supervise doctoral students, such as 'time and dedication to the student's project.' They noted that doctoral advisement may not be attractive to some faculty because of the commitment required for some candidates' successful completion.

In the open-ended survey item that asked candidates and recent graduates to share information about their supervisory experience to inform future supervisory practices, candidates and recent

graduates responded with elements of positive support and timely feedback and with concerns about having to 'fend on my own' through the research or dissertation process. Like the academic advisors, communication was a primary focus of candidates and recent graduates. Additionally, structure and timelines to support successful completion were important to the candidates and recent graduates who completed the open-ended survey item echoing the interview findings.

These findings and sample comments can be reviewed in Table 1. Categories and sample comments reflect consistencies across interviews and open-ended survey items.

Quantitative survey data

Although 151 candidates and recent graduates and 38 academic advisors completed the survey, less – 148 and 24 respectively – responded to the items reported in this section. Analysis of responses indicates that the most helpful qualities of doctoral academic advisors from the candidates' and recent graduates' perspectives are communication skills, understands the doctoral process in the particular context, and develops the candidate as a researcher by providing feedback on progress and direction of their research. Candidates and recent graduates believe that being highly published, being a leader in the field, or understanding the candidate's non-student context are less important qualities.

Most important advisor competencies

Doctoral candidates and recent graduates and academic advisors were both asked to rank order a list of academic advisor competencies from least important to most important. While both lists were not identical, there were 8 out of 11 ranked competencies on both surveys. The eight competencies on both surveys were: good communication skills, understands the doctoral process, subject expertise, successful experience in practice, good methodologist, leader in the field, proven academic record, and highly published. Three competencies were not on the academic advisor survey that were on the candidate and recent graduate survey: develops candidate as a researcher; understand candidate's research goals; and understands candidate's non-student context. Two competencies were not on the candidate and recent graduate survey and were on the academic advisor survey: encourages dissemination of candidate's research and links candidates and graduates to networks. Competencies were ranked from 1 to 11, with 1 being most important and 11 being least important.

The two competencies that candidates and recent graduates ranked as most important were good communication skills ($m = 3.28$) and understands doctoral process ($m = 4.36$). These same competencies were also ranked as the top two most important by the academic advisors ($m = 2.3$, $m = 3.67$, respectively). Also, being highly published was the competency ranked as the least important by the candidates and recent graduates ($m = 9.21$) and by academic advisors ($m = 6.69$), although the mean for the academic advisors is slightly higher than the mid-point of the possible range. Similarly, subject expertise was rated by candidates and recent graduates and academic advisors as in the mid-range of importance ($m = 5.26$ and $m = 5.59$, respectively). Although slightly more highly ranked than the mid-range by academic advisors, successful experience in the practice and being a good methodologist were more important to advisors (means = 4.05 and 4.86, respectively) than to the candidates and recent graduates (means = 5.93 and 6.53, respectively).

Two competencies rated by candidates and recent graduates were highly valued by them: develops candidate as a researcher (mean 4.62) and understands candidate's research goals (mean = 4.72). Understands candidate's non-student context had a mean rank of 8.08, indicating that it was of low value just before the lowest ranked item of the advisor being highly published.

Academic advisors ranked two competencies for advising that were not on the candidate recent graduate survey as slightly more important than the mid-rank. Encourages dissemination of candidate's research had a mean rank of 4.13 and links candidates and graduates to networks had a mean rank of 4.95. (Table 2).

Table 1. Desirable qualities of academic advisors: categories and comments ($N = 31$).

Categories	Candidates/Graduates ($n = 18$)	Advisors ($n = 13$)
Relationships and mentoring	She became a friend and colleague. It meant I got invited to her house for social events. … he knew me very well and my writing style and my research style. I respected him. He was very, he was very practical and realistic. It was an opportunity for me to sit down and show her what I was currently working on and get her advice on how to proceed. We really led the way in what we wanted to do. He was always there for advice and to answer questions. We are on a new level playing field. I am coming to her with new ideas and new situations that we can change and make better.	I think you actually have to care about the student. A good supervisor needs to really care about students. I care about my students. Empathetic to circumstances of the student; compassionate to the stress the student is facing academically, professionally and in their personal lives. A note from a student 'I'll never forget your interest and patience.' I try to be as positive as I can. Work well with people. Journey together. Walk the path together.
Communication and feedback	I was the one that really kept the communication and always made sure to be in touch because I never liked to feel left out or that I wasn't making an effort. The turnaround time can be several weeks. While … he is fairly well respected, he's not the best at communication. Mainly through telephone and a lot of emails. The best thing was that she was readily available.	Tell them in such a way that you don't break them down. Ability to be with them through the process of improvement (research/writing). … very thorough feedback, being very patient. … very effective communicator. You're dealing with nuances of thought that are often difficult to communicate in complete meaning. Good, honest communication.
Structure and resource utilization	Offering me some resources as an expert in the field was helpful. Writing workshops, time offline, faculty hours-- those kinds of things. … our advisor did not have any expertise in that topic, but had extensive research experience. She handpicked the faculty that would be appropriate specifically for my project.	Provide structure so they can be successful. Meet with each student 30 minutes each week. Mastery of the discipline in terms of the content and methodology. Knowledgeable as to the science you are pursuing. Keep it as a group … meet virtually in the middle of the month and then face to face at the end of the month. Timeline of everything. Meet often with them.
High expectations	None	Be proud of who we're sending out there. Written guidelines that are very specific. I keep expectations clear. High expectations. Best gift I can give is having high standards. I don't want them to be disappointed with what they've produced 10 years from now. Important that both the student and I are excited about the project.
Commitment	None	Be curious enough to bring something to it. Time and dedication to the student's project. Most successful are truly engaged with their students**.** Help them grow and develop his or her own style of communicating and disseminating scholarship. Understand what a commitment it is to supervise doctoral students. Willingness to continue with students even when barriers arise or unforeseen things happen; reset a course, and keep moving forward.

Most important ways of advising

When considering the ways of advising of a university academic advisor to be most important, there were some differences between how candidates and recent graduates thought compared to the academic advisors. The four characteristics that both surveys examined were: being directive, acting as a

Table 2. Ranks of important competencies (candidates/recent graduates n = 151; academic advisors n = 24).

Competency	Candidates/Graduates mean	Academic advisors mean
Good communication skills	3.28	2.93
Understands doctoral process	4.36	3.67
Develops candidate as researcher	4.62	_a
Understands candidate's research goals	4.72	_a
Subject expertise	5.26	5.59
Successful experience in practice	5.93	4.05
Good methodologist	6.53	4.86
Leader in the field	6.90	6.14
Proven academic record	7.10	5.04
Understands candidate's non-student context	8.08	_a
Highly published	9.21	6.69
Encourages dissemination of candidates' research	_b	4.13
Links candidates and graduates to networks	_b	4.95

Note: Possible ranking of 1 (most important) to 11 (least important).
[a]Data were not collected through the academic advisor survey.
[b]Data were not collected through the candidate/recent graduate survey.
Source: Whaley (2017, 69).

critical friend, having a kind disposition, and being able to coach in a constructive way. These characteristics were given a ranked value from most important (1) to least important (8).

The two groups, candidates and recent graduates and academic advisors, did not agree consistently when examining the four common items related to most important ways of advising. Out of the common ranked items, candidates and recent graduates selected coaches in a constructive way to be the most important (m = 2.84) while academic advisors rated this way of advising as least important (m = 3.42). Candidates and recent graduates found being a critical friend (m = 5.12) and having a kind disposition (m = 4.93) in the middle of the ranked list of important ways to supervise. However, the academic advisors thought differently with having a kind disposition (m = 1.96) and being a critical friend (m = 2.50) ranked as most important.

Items related to ways of advising on the candidate and recent graduate survey that were not on the academic advisor survey were: honest dialog, relationship of trust, autocratic, and laissez-faire. Honest dialog (2.04) and relationship of trust (2.5) were the two highest ranked ways of advising by candidates and recent graduates, in contrast to laissez-faire (7.37) and autocratic (7.11) as the two lowest ranked ways of advising. These data may be viewed on Table 3.

Discussion of desirable qualities for academic advising in the USA

Our research findings provide interesting implications for the professional practice of doctoral advisors and for the design and implementation of professional or modern doctoral programs. There

Table 3. Ranking of most important ways of advisement (doctoral candidates and recent graduates n = 148; academic advisors n = 24).

Competency	Mean candidates and graduates	Mean academic advisor
Honest dialogue	2.04	_a
Relationship of trust	2.45	_a
Coaches in a constructive way	2.84	3.42
Directive	4.18	2.50
Kind disposition	4.93	1.96
Critical friend	5.12	2.50
Autocratic	7.11	_a
Laissez faire	7.37	_a

Note: Possible ranking of 1 (most important way of advising) to 8 (least important way of advising).
[a]Data were not collected through the academic advisor survey.
Source: Whaley (2017, 71).

were qualities detailed as desirable by academic advisors, but not by candidates and recent gradu-ates, such as being a critical friend, a good methodologist, and successful in the practice. Interest-ingly, being a critical friend, a good methodologist, and successful in the practice may include characteristics that emerged from the qualitative research of the important contribution that com-munication and feedback, relationships and mentorship, and structure and resource utilization make to the successful completion by candidates of doctoral programs. Two of these qualities inherent in communication and feedback and relationships were highly ranked by candidates and recent graduates: honest dialogue and relationship of trust. These consistencies in the voicing of honest dialogue, good communication, and feedback for continuing the process of completing the doctoral research speak to advisors to reflect on their philosophy and practice in doctoral advis-ing. Perhaps changes are needed in the approach to feedback and communication so that a context of trust exists to give and to receive feedback that advances the candidate's expertise.

The contrasts in values between the two groups of desirable qualities of academic advisors may reflect greater understanding of institutional processes and experience in assisting doctoral candi-dates to program completion. For example, both groups noted the importance of understanding the doctoral process. On the other hand, both groups ranked similarly the value of subject expertise and leader in the field. In academia in the USA, tenure line faculty realizes that possessing subject expertise and being recognized as a leader in the field can lead to funding, presentations, publishing, and recognition nationally and internationally as required for promotion. Not surprisingly, the aca-demic advisors ranked being highly published as more valuable than did the candidates and recent graduates as this is an expected criteria for professional academic success, but may not be essential for an excellent academic advisor.

One may argue that being a subject matter expert is important in academic doctoral advising from a resource perspective. Being able to offer publication outlets, to recognize quality literature related to a particular research topic, or even to recognize misinterpretations of literature and findings all relate to having subject matter expertise which includes familiarity with other research professionals and related literature.

With reflection on these practices, doctoral academic advisors should continuously review their philosophy and practices. If they regularly invite feedback from candidates they can be flexible and perhaps avoid delays in a candidate's program completion. By holding exit interviews with can-didates who successfully complete their programs and those who do not complete their programs, with a disposition to seek authentic feedback much may be learned about how their advisement is perceived in relation to which actions and communication may be more helpful. Open dialogue about the perceptions of the experienced advisement will inform program and advisement adjust-ments to be made, as necessary. Advisors will be able to better understand the kinds of communi-cation, relationships, and resources the candidates they work with need.

Advisors should also ask their recent graduates about the advisement practices that were most helpful in degree completion and also practices that may have been less helpful. Knowing what to do less of and more of are equally valuable. It is possible that as advisors we practice in ways that are enjoyable to us, and without feedback regarding our advisement we may continue in ways that are not conducive to program completion or timely completion. These conversations can make contributions to the tailoring of doctoral advisement for greater candidate success in a timely manner.

In an effort to provide supervision that benefits candidates most, advisors should consider having meetings with their candidates early in the supervisory relationship to develop mutually agreed upon expectations and structures. By developing agreed-upon processes and structures from the onset of the research development proposal, it is more likely that the path to program completion will be smooth.

Beyond advisor reflection based on our research and emerging research on doctoral supervision, universities and programs should consider implementing professional development and preparation programs that curate the tools, attitudes, and practices for advisors (both new and veteran) to advise

candidates. A focus on consistent communication, relationships based around honest feedback and personal connection, and resources that align with the needs of the candidates are areas that can strengthen the supervision in doctoral programs, and perhaps increase completion rates and time to completion. Successful completion rates may also encourage greater numbers of applications and quality of applicants which contribute to continuous program improvement.

Those who lead doctoral programs should also review structures and resources provided to candidates. For example, candidates and recent graduates in this study highlighted that their relationships were more successful with their advisors when they chose them on their own. However, when candidates were assigned an advisor, they reported that it was more difficult to develop an authentic relationship and to connect with the research to be conducted. Finding the right program advisement structure may be critical to the success of doctoral candidates.

The implications of survey data seem to indicate that it may be incumbent on both academic advisors and doctoral candidates to have a lengthy conversation in the beginning about what is most important to each other. These rankings seem to indicate that at present each group values a different set of competencies which could lead to confusion and frustration for candidate and advisor as the candidate moves further into the dissertation process. In addition, it should be important for academic advisors to note that being able to serve as a critical friend and have a kind disposition were the characteristics that they believe to be the most helpful, but candidates and recent graduates indicated to be less valued. Also, knowing that being directive and being able to coach in a constructive way were valued by candidates can help academic advisors serve their advisees in a manner that is productive.

As with any relationship, each has a perspective on what is preferred and in the case of this unique relationship there is a person more experienced with a holistic view and one that is less experienced with a more narrow, self-focused perspective. It is worth considering that if the academic advisor approaches the relationship as one that is instructive for the candidate, then findings from literature on improved achievement outcomes related to the effect size of the learner–instructor relationship ($d = .74$) and effect size of feedback ($d = .75$) may be important (Hattie 2009; Hattie and Timperley 2007).

Conclusions: modern doctorate advisor desirable qualities

Perceptions of qualities of academic advisors that are desirable have consistent themes and yet the candidates and graduates did not necessarily experience those qualities. For example, they did not have advisors who provided frequent and timely feedback. Or, their advisor was at a distance, hard to contact, or often unavailable. Responsiveness of an academic advisor may have implications for faculty assignments to allow time for availability to candidates.

The two additional qualities noted as desirable for academic advisors by their peers (commitment and high expectations) may be a reflection of the need for advisors to understand the long-term expectations of working closely with doctoral candidates, which may take place for three months to over one year. Again, consideration by institution administrators on the time required to be an effective doctoral academic advisor may improve the quality of experiences of candidates.

High expectations benefit the candidate, graduate, and also the program and college or university as the outcomes reflect on all parties. Commitment to the candidate and to successful completion has to do with willingness to provide: time, helpful and timely feedback, and to develop the candidate to an independent researcher and eventually a colleague. Advisors who are unwilling to go on this journey with the level of commitment indicated within this study and supported by high expectations for scholarship, may not have the positive results in program completion that are hoped for. Furthermore, academic advisors who prefer to continue in a subordinate–superior relationship and not scaffold the candidate to mastery and independence or colleague status may also not be as effective as those who see their work as developmental and instructive.

The contrast in perceptions of candidates and recent graduates to academic advisors on importance of ways to advise deserves attention. Candidates prefer their academic advisors to provide honest, authentic feedback. They want a relationship of trust so that they can be coached in a constructive way. Given that the candidates and recent graduates ranked style – autocratic or laissez-faire – as the lowest in importance of ways of advising, they may not care about an advisor's style, but do care about the outcome of the academic advising related to program completion with their research.

These findings provide insight into implications for the practice of doctoral academic advisement, including some consideration by administrators in providing time and expectations for academic advisors. Doctoral academic advisors need mentoring and preparation to become advisors so that the choice to do so is one that is carefully made.

In the professional or modern doctorate programs, candidates often are part-time students who have professional work responsibilities outside of the university. Unlike, the traditional full-time PhD candidate, these candidates are not necessarily present to conduct research for their advisor or to do other work for the advisor. This difference in candidate role impacts the relationship with the advisor as one of advisement or instruction in service to the candidate's successful completion and not in service to the academic advisor's research, grant applications, or other agendas.

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