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Chapter 7

Seeking superaddressees: Research collaboration in a doctoral supervisory relationship

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One key potential research collaboration is the relationship between doctoral students and their supervisors. While this relationship is vital to training new researchers and expanding knowledge frontiers, it is fraught with the risks of miscommunication, exploitation and learned dependency. This chapter presents an account of a small section of a digitally-recorded conversation among the authors: a current doctoral student and his principal and associate supervisors. The account is presented as three reflections on the data, with an analysis centred on M. M. Bakhtin's concept of 'superaddressee' or 'third listener' who is implicitly called on by each speaker in the conversation to support her or his view of what doctoral supervision should entail. Seeking to make these superaddressees explicit and involving them in ongoing dialogue with the authors constitute an effective strategy for enhancing effective research collaboration and sustaining the doctoral supervisory relationship.

Introduction

The relationship between doctoral students and their supervisors is a key arena of research collaboration. It is also the subject of a growing field of scholarship (see, for example, Cribb & Gewitz, 2006; Paglis, Green & Bauer, 2006; Zhao, Golde & McCormick, 2007). Despite the importance of that relationship, it is as liable to abuse, exploitation and misappropriation as any other. If these scenarios are to be avoided, it is crucial to identify the elements of doctoral student-supervisor relationships that help to make them effective. It is also vital to analyse the foundations of such relationships in sustaining the synergies of successful research collaboration. These processes highlight the intended innovative approach of the chapter to a topic that has been under-researched until recently.

One among many means of contributing to that outcome is to consider the utility of the concept of 'superaddressee' as developed by the Russian philosopher M. M. Bakhtin (1986). As we explain below, this concept is central to Bakhtin's view of human dialogue and hence to individuals' capacity to express their perspectives and to communicate with others. We are interested in exploring the extent to which the notion of superaddressee can be used to analyse selected aspects of a recorded conversation between a doctoral student and his two supervisors. In particular, we seek to investigate the value of this notion in demonstrating the research collaboration benefits of this potentially fruitful, yet fraught, doctoral student-supervisor relationship.

The chapter begins with a brief literature review about that relationship vis-à-vis research collaboration. It then identifies a conceptual and analytical framework focused on the superaddressee, before introducing some empirical data and analysis distilled from the transcript of the recorded conversation. The chapter concludes by discussing some of the implications of that analysis for maximising the research collaboration potential of doctoral supervisory relationships.

Literature review

The literature about the relationship between doctoral students and their supervisors is diverse, ranging from aspects of difference between students and supervisors to the benefits of seeing the relationship as a research collaboration to strategies that can enhance that

collaboration. Despite this diversity, the review presented here highlights the collaborative dimension of interactions between students and supervisors as central to harnessing the relationship's potential strength and impact.

Some of that literature clusters around questions of gender (Dua, 2007; Felder, 2009; Harden, Clark, Johnson & Larson, 2009; Hilmer & Hilmer, 2007; Kurtz-Costes, Andrews Helmke & Ülkü-Steinder, 2006) and encompasses issues of ethnicity (Grant & Simmons, 2008; McKinley, Grant, Middleton, Irwin & Williams, 2009). Other scholarship focuses on various dimensions of doctoral student socialisation (Austin, 2009; Gardner, 2007; Gardner & Barnes, 2007), the tensions around doctoral students becoming independent scholars (Gardner, 2008; Sambrook, Stewart & Roberts, 2008; Sweitzer, 2009) and the particular perspectives of students (Gurvitch, Carson & Beale, 2008) and of supervisors (Barnes & Austin, 2009). A recurring theme in this literature is the need to recognise significant differences in formal status and power between doctoral students and their supervisors, the potentially deleterious effect of such differences (Kamler & Thomson, 2008; Rosenberg & Heimberg, 2009), and the impact of less tangible but equally significant stressors if the relationship fractures (Gardner, 2009; Knox, Schlosser, Pruitt, & Hill, 2006).

A more specialised literature has emerged around the doctoral student-supervisor relationship as a form of research collaboration. Applying psychological contract theory to the survey questionnaire responses of 170 doctoral students, Wade-Benzoni, Rousseau and Li (2006) contended that the quality of collaboration varied significantly across such factors as research philosophies, research methods and perceived motivations for participating in the collaboration. Sherren, Klovdahl, Robin, Butler and Dovers (2009) observed the definite but unpredictable impact of alterations to the structures of university academic departments on the character of research collaboration, including the involvement of doctoral students. Murray (2004) identified the enduring influence of the interface between individual social capital and associated and diverse networks in shaping academics' relations with others, including their doctoral students and the entrepreneurial firms with which their students and they interact.

The literature has identified the doctoral student–supervisor relationship taking the form of a rigorous and sustainable research collaboration as having several benefits and making important contributions to wider debates. For example, such collaboration can assist underrepresented minorities in completing their doctoral study (Kim, Holm, Gerard, McElmurry, Foreman, Poslusny & Dallas, 2009), and also support scientific and engineering researchers striving to generate understandings that cross disciplinary boundaries (Cummings & Kiesler, 2005). Kozeracki, Carey, Colicelli and Lewis-Fitzgerald (2006) established that a collaborative and immersive approach to undergraduate education for science students maximised their prospects for success as doctoral students, suggesting the value of a more systematic approach to aligning undergraduate and postgraduate education. Likewise, Louis, Holdsworth, Anderson and Campbell (2007) found that the degree to which the organisational climate in which doctoral science students were working was collaborative, competitive and/or individualised affected the willingness of students to share their findings with others.

Some literature has focused on practical strategies that will enhance research collaborations between doctoral students and significant others in their networks, including their supervisors. Waters (2008) outlined ways that online technologies may maximise a sense of connectedness with physically isolated doctoral students, while Olson and Clark (2009) propounded leader–scholar communities, centred on doctoral students conducting applied research in their local educational contexts, as a means of increasing the likelihood of graduation and socialisation into new identities as leader–scholars. Roland (2007) insisted that doctoral supervisors and the institutions where they work have an equal responsibility for

providing opportunities for genuine research collaboration with their doctoral students as part of a "master–apprentice model" (n.p.) of doctoral supervision.

This selective review of current literature demonstrates the complexity and contentiousness of the doctoral student–supervisor relationship. In particular, it indicates that, while there is a significant reservoir of goodwill on both sides of the relationship, that goodwill is occasionally insufficient to ameliorate the sometimes negative impact of institutional, disciplinary and paradigmatic culture and individual positioning. At the same time, scholarship in this field also reveals that, when the student–supervisor relationship is enacted in the form of a mutually valuing and sustaining research collaboration, the positive outcomes are beneficial for student, supervisor and organisation alike. We turn now to elaborate a conceptual framework intended to provide one theoretically informed means of identifying the factors and strategies most likely to bring such collaboration into reality.

The superaddressee

The term *superaddressee* is an English translation of the Russian word *nadadresat* found in the theoretical writings of M. M. Bakhtin (1986). McGee's English translation presents Bakhtin's introduction of the term as follows:

> Any utterance always has an addressee ... whose responsive understanding the author of the speech seeks and surpasses .... But in addition to this addressee (the second party), the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher *superaddressee* (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 126)

The superaddressee is higher in the sense that he or she[1] always understands the speaker's meaning (no matter how poorly expressed), always evaluates justly (without any ulterior motives or hidden agendas) and always responds appropriately (through affirmation and approval). Morson and Emerson (1990) argued that the superaddressee was the embodiment of hope, without which all attempts at dialogue would degenerate into terror. The reason for this lies in the contingent nature of all dialogic encounters. I have no way of knowing whether or not you truly understand what I am saying. You may nod, but I do not really know whether you are nodding about what I mean, or about what you think I mean, or simply out of habit. Even restating my case in your own words, to demonstrate that you have understood, does not entirely eliminate the possibility that you and I are using similar words with different meanings, or that you are pandering to or even mocking me. In this sense, I have no way of knowing that you have really heard me.

Bakhtin (1986) likened this failure to be heard to "the Fascist torture chamber or hell in Thomas Mann" (p. 126). He argued that the very nature of speaking demands a listener, and that for human beings "there is nothing more terrible than a lack of response" (p. 127). Since human addressees can potentially fail to hear or respond, the superaddressee is necessarily present in all human communication – a metalinguistic necessity for all such communication, whether written or spoken (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Whilst the superaddressee is always present, Bakhtin noted that "deeper analysis" (p. 127), was required to reveal it, although he did not go on to explain what kind of analysis he had in mind.

Despite the seemingly rich potential of a theoretical concept that is necessarily present in all human communication, there has been very little published research that explores the possibilities of Bakhtin's deeper analysis by adopting the superaddressee as a concept for

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[1] As Mey (1998) noted, Bakhtin used masculine singular personal pronouns when referring to the superaddressee, whereas Morson and Emerson (1990) chose to depersonalise the superaddressee with the impersonal pronouns "it" and "which". In this chapter, we follow Bakhtin in using personal pronouns to highlight what we consider to be an important human dimension of the characteristic of superaddressees.

analysis. In education research, Bryzzheva (2006, 2008) has discussed the role of the superaddressee – or third listener – in providing support for teachers in classrooms. She argued that teachers may find strength to endure in difficult classroom situations, despite opposition from various quarters, because they carry with them in their minds an idealised mentor who agrees that what they are doing is right. Thus when the teacher says, "You have to do your homework", even if all the students in the classroom disagree, the superaddressee hears and (from his or her superior position of knowledge and understanding) affirms that what the teacher has said is both correct and appropriate. This sense of affirmation provided by the superaddressee is the kind of response needed to support the teacher in that difficult context.

The influence of such powerfully present superaddressees in dialogue suggests to us other important implications for the outcome of the dialogue. We contend that, when two people are speaking in the presence of similar superaddressees, they are better able to form connections for meaningful dialogue (see Midgley, under review). For example, two teachers speaking about raising awareness may be addressing superaddressees who advocate critical pedagogy, and therefore for both teachers the term *raising awareness* refers to theories, beliefs and values about which they have a common understanding. However, one of the teachers might attempt the same conversation with a parent who is completely unaware of theories relating to critical pedagogy. This parent may be speaking about "raising awareness" in the presence of a superaddressee who advocates a transmission-of-knowledge model of education. Both the teacher and the parent are affirmed in the appropriateness of their understanding of the term *raising awareness* by their respective superaddressees. In this instance, it is less likely that the teacher and parent will achieve the same degree of mutual understanding as the teacher would with a colleague. Indeed, unless one or the other of them realises that they are speaking to different superaddressees (and therefore with different understandings of what "raising awareness" should mean) they may continue to speak at cross-purposes. The influence of superaddressees, therefore, can be conceptualised as an important factor in the outcome of dialogic exchanges.

Examining the data

As noted above, this chapter presents an account of a recorded conversation among the authors: a current doctoral student (Warren), his principal supervisor (Robyn) and his associate supervisor (Patrick). Following the transcription of the recording, we decided to concentrate our discussion in this chapter on one small section of the conversation. As Interview Transcript 1 demonstrates, this part of the conversation focused on a particular incident that had worried Warren in his considerations of the context within which his doctoral research was taking place. Whilst the incident was not directly related to his data collection or analysis, it raised some significant issues about racism, a topic relevant to his doctoral study which involved working with international students in an Australian university context.

Interview transcript 1

1	Robyn	Now, how did you go with the last issue? You know, the last time I saw you. I don't know whether you told – did you talk to Patrick?
2	Warren	No, I didn't talk to Patrick about it. Nothing actually has happened any further. The waters seem to have settled.
3	Robyn	Did the visitors arrive?

4	Warren	The visitors apparently did arrive but they didn't take – the university didn't take any action other than to say, "We'll make sure that doesn't happen again".
5	Robyn	So for Patrick's benefit, some brief allegations of racial [Warren – racism] – racism, yeah, racist comments …
		[*At this point, a section of the interview has been left out, to maintain the anonymity of the event and of those involved.*]
6	Robyn	It raises a really interesting question about what you do with the information you receive [Patrick – yes] because not saying anything you can actually be complicit in behaviour that's inappropriate.
7	Warren	That's right. And it can damage the students, it can damage the institution, it can have all sorts of implications [Patrick – yes] but the reverse is also true. If I say something it can be seen as libel or whatever [Patrick – yep]. So it's a very complex issue. I was just very glad that they didn't decide to cancel all the scholarships, which I think was the threat but I think it was just a –
8	Warren	Because you start to think about, you know, situations where a thesis gets embargoed so that people can't access it. I mean, there are all kinds of things that happen.
9	Patrick	And you always wonder why.
10	Warren	I want to read that thesis.
11	Robyn	Sometimes it's simply something like Indigenous knowledges are contained and they're not to be shared, and things like that. Warren was just having a little panic one day.
12	Warren	I did when I heard this was happening. We just had the big discussion about whether I should or shouldn't say anything. Just leave it out would be the easiest, but then it just made me aware of the implications of not –
13	Robyn	But again it's about the complexity [Warren – that's right] of the whole situation, isn't it? There's no one right or one wrong answer. It's shades of grey everywhere.
14	Patrick	It's making judgments all the way along the line.
15	Robyn	That's right.

We developed a metalinguistic analytical framework based on the theoretical concept of the superaddressee in an attempt to explore the influences of superaddressees in the conversation. The framework posits three distinct dialogic functions which we seek to identify in the transcript of the conversation. Firstly, we look for evidence of *calling on superaddressees* – that is, instances in which speakers are addressing authorities or experts who are not physically present in the conversation. Secondly, we search for evidence of *acknowledging superaddressees* – that is, ways in which listeners affirm the acceptability or appropriateness of superaddressees called upon by speakers. Thirdly, we examine the concept of *listening for superaddressees* – that is, ways in which listeners try to identify superaddressees who are not explicitly called upon, but are nevertheless likely to be powerfully present.

We present the analysis as three reflections, thus providing three perspectives on the data and the influence of superaddressees. In Reflection 1, Warren views the data by thinking back to the original incident. In Reflection 2, Robyn identifies the way that the conversation called on superaddressees in relation to future usage of the data. In Reflection 3, Patrick ponders the opportunities for (mis)communication in calling on, acknowledging and listening for particular superaddressees.

Reflection 1: Warren thinking about the original incident
In reflecting on this excerpt from the data, I notice that I have discussed with my two supervisors concerns I had about an incident in the past which culminated in accusations of discrimination from one group against another group. I spoke in the presence of a superaddressee who agrees with me that the incident constitutes discrimination, and that such behaviour is unacceptable. My supervisors appeared to me to be listening and speaking in the presence of superaddressees with similar perspectives, and therefore I felt comfortable in having this discussion on such a delicate topic. Interestingly, I did not feel comfortable talking to the people involved in the original incident in the same way, even though I knew them all. There are several possible explanations for this. It could be that I was simply demonstrating conflict-avoidance behaviour. It might also be that my understanding of institutional, professional and social expectations and constraints on what can and cannot be discussed in such contexts influenced my reluctance to discuss these things. However, another useful way of explaining this reluctance to discuss these issues in the same way with the people involved in the original incident is to call on the theory of superaddressees.

I would suggest upon reflection that I did not believe that the superaddressee present in my discussion with my supervisors would be present in a discussion with the people involved in the original incident. In other words, even if I were to have spoken of discrimination to the people involved in the original incident, I do not believe they truly would have heard what I was saying, because they either did not know or did not acknowledge the presence of a superaddressee who agrees with my beliefs about these issues. In my assessment of the situation, it would have been a case of speaking to the proverbial brick wall.

One important thing to reflect upon, in the context of this chapter, is why I thought such a superaddressee would not be present in a discussion with the people involved in the original incident. The theoretical framework we are deploying in this chapter suggests that up until that point I had not noticed such a superaddressee listening in to any of our previous conversations. In other words, nothing those people had said indicated to me that they were addressing a higher authority that believes such behaviour is discriminatory and not acceptable. However, when speaking with my supervisors about it, I did believe such a superaddressee was present. This, I would say upon reflection, is due to the fact that in previous conversations we had spoken of ethical issues with a degree of resonance that suggested to me that we were speaking in the presence of superaddressees who had very similar ideas about discriminatory behaviour.

Reflection 2: Robyn considering future data usage

In the interview transcript, it was evident that I called on a number of superaddressees, including personnel in the university hierarchy and emergent dissertation examiners, to look forward to future usage of the data discussed in the conversation. In an earlier conversation, Warren had talked about the incident and the advantages and disadvantages of including it as part of his dissertation data. In the process of telling Patrick about the incident, the dilemmas were again highlighted. On the one hand, the incident exemplified the way that racist comments could occur within the institutional context, thus providing useful contextual data for Warren's dissertation (Turn 5). On the other hand, the inclusion of the information in the dissertation – which would potentially make the information available to a much wider and public audience – raised a plethora of ethical and political questions, with potentially negative consequences for the institution, international students and Warren himself (Turn 7).

Our discussion of these options revolved around the issue of whether the data could or should be used or if the potential for damage was too great. We called on superaddressees from the university when considering the moral and ethical implications of discussing an issue that could cause embarrassment for the institution (Turns 7 and 8). We also called on emergent examiners for Warren's dissertation, as there were perceived implications for selectively including or not including data as part of research practice (Turn 12). Yet it was also apparent that Warren was influenced by a superaddressee who would judge the appropriateness of his actions. As stated in Turn 6, inaction could be a negative, because "you can actually be complicit in behaviour that's inappropriate". During the conversation, the discussion focused on the presentation and representation of research data. Whilst there was no specific mention of news media, there was a sense throughout the interview transcript that a decision to use the data being discussed may have had much wider implications in a public arena. This was implied in Turn 7, where the possibility was canvassed of cancelled scholarships that might have been a newsworthy event.

It was evident that there were no easy answers to the issues that were discussed. In fact, the complexity of the situation was raised in Turns 7, 13 and 14 and it was noted that one decision was not going to solve the issue; rather, it would be an ongoing process of "making judgments all the way along" (Turn 14). Part of that process was going to be the negotiation of the possibilities afforded by the range of superaddressees who were called upon. However, at the same time, the discussion implied that there were opportunities to be agentic and to take responsibility for most, if not all, decisions that were made in relation to the data in question.

Reflection 3: Patrick pondering opportunities for (mis)communication

Rereading the interview transcript for the purpose of co-writing this section of the chapter, I am conscious now, as I was during the section of the conversation reproduced in the transcript, of the performativity of a few of my multiple roles in the relationship with Warren and Robyn: principally that of associate supervisor, but also of friend, colleague, supporter, writing and editing collaborator, and interested other. Not being aware of the incident that clearly was and remains so important to Warren until Robyn asked about it and Warren explained it during the conversation, I felt the need to enact some specific strategies of that performativity, including active and empathetic listening, identifying a range of possible responses, explicating the response that I considered most appropriate to the context and evaluating how that response appeared to be received and perceived by Warren and Robyn.

My verbal contribution to Interview Transcript 1 was relatively limited, and might appear non-committal or even disengaged. Yet, even though I was not thinking explicitly at the time in terms of one or more superaddressees, in retrospect I was certainly wondering what particular people might have made of the incident as relayed by Warren and reinterpreted by

Robyn. These individuals were people whose intellects and integrity I respected highly. Some of these people had been co-doctoral supervisors with me in the past; others were close colleagues with whom I had co-written and/or co-edited research publications. In this way I was calling on specific superaddressees, not so much to endorse what I was saying but to assist me to listen empathetically to what Warren and Robyn were telling me.

Also in retrospect, although the evidence for this was not apparent from a textual transcript without non-verbal cues or other clues to my thinking at the time, I was seeking to acknowledge the two other speakers' shared and respective superaddressees. I did this partly through verbal reinforcement (Turns 5, 6 and 7) at points where superaddressees might implicitly be seen to be called on, and partly by means of listening without interrupting in order to make possible connections between their and my superaddressees. I was therefore simultaneously listening for points at which Warren and Robyn might make statements that suggested resonances with my superaddressees that might encourage me to call on those superaddressees more explicitly in my subsequent contributions to the discussion.

Given the relatively short duration of the section of conversation under review, and in view of the speed of verbal interactions among the three participants, there was clearly considerable potential for miscommunication at different times in the dialogue. Yet there were also opportunities for communication of deeply held attitudes and values. While those attitudes and values could not – and should not – be identical, there was a sufficiently strong foundation of mutual regard and trust for a sensitive issue to be canvassed and its importance to Warren's dissertation to be considered. The processes of calling on, acknowledging and listening for one another's and one's own superaddressees were crucial elements of that canvassing and consideration.

Implications for maximising doctoral supervisory relationships as research collaboration

What might the preceding discussion suggest in terms of strategies for developing and sustaining research collaboration between doctoral students and their supervisors? For the authors of this chapter, Interview Transcript 1 provided some insights into the ways in which they construct and enact their relationship, including as doctoral student and supervisors. That construction and enactment positions Warren as an independent learner and skilled scholar and Robyn and Patrick as supporting and encouraging him in the doctoral study journey. Reflecting on our shared and separate understandings of superaddressees and their influence on the conversation reported in the transcript highlights the collaborative character of our relationship. This in turn makes possible and helps to identify particular areas of possible synergies (including co-writing this chapter). Yet we need also to acknowledge areas of possible misunderstanding that could have emerged if addressing our respective superaddressees had led us to express contradictory views about the issue under discussion. Nevertheless, we believe that the collaborative relationship provided a framework for working through a process of talking about such contradictions had they emerged.

Secondly, other doctoral students and their supervisors might well have similar or dissimilar relationships to the one outlined here. In some ways, our relationship is both accidental and incidental, in the sense that it was certainly not inevitable that we would be able to work together so closely. On the other hand, we have had many informal opportunities of getting to know one another before and during the supervision phase of our relationship that provided us with informal and non-verbal signs of a developing respect and trust that we see as vital to our continued collaboration. This might also be the case with other doctoral students and supervisors. Alternatively, they might attach higher priority to different aspects of research collaboration, such as the supervisors' capacity to introduce the student to networks of professional influence and/or to secure funding necessary for the student's

doctoral and post-doctoral study. Nevertheless we contend that in such a scenario superaddressees would be at work, even if they were not sought explicitly.

Thirdly, conceptually, methodologically and empirically, seeking superaddressees, whether in doctoral supervisory relationships or in other research endeavours, is predicated on assumptions and attitudes related to research collaboration. Indeed, superaddressees can function effectively as additional collaborators in the relationship and can assist indispensably in challenging and extending team members' thinking and understanding. For this to occur, however, the relationship must have strong and resilient foundations and must exhibit sufficient mutual trust to make explicit generally unstated and even unconscious worldviews. That trust is even more crucial if collaborators are to enter those no-go areas of sensitive issues – such as the one underpinning Interview Transcript 1 – that evoke potentially contradictory viewpoints. Such contradictions might indeed lead to the development of irreconcilable differences among research team members. On the other hand, enlisting superaddressees as collaborators can occur by means of calling on, acknowledging and listening for particular individuals to take on those roles. That process can go a long way towards talking through such areas of debate and actually strengthening the synergies among members as a result.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have been seeking superaddressees or 'third listeners' who can potentially enhance research collaborations, in this case between doctoral students and their supervisors. Interview Transcript 1 was useful in eliciting our respective contributions to that process of seeking, in the process highlighting commonalities as well as differences in the ways that we construct and engage with our own and others' superaddressees.

Co-writing the chapter has also been helpful in our ongoing research collaboration. Doing so has enabled Robyn and Patrick to learn about a concept to which Warren introduced them. All three of us are keen to develop our understandings of the concept and to consider its applicability to other dimensions of our collaboration and of our relationships with other colleagues, including other members of the research team. We see a vital element of activity following the book's publication being this kind of follow-up endeavour, taking further some of the insights gleaned from co-writing the book and applying them more widely.

Finally, seeking to make research team members' superaddressees explicit and involving them in ongoing dialogue with other team members are effective techniques for helping to enhance and sustain the synergies among the team. Indeed, as a result of writing this chapter, we now consider those techniques a required part of a research team's continuing collaboration.

Acknowledgments

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Strategies for sustaining synergies

- Identify a process of helping research collaborators to explicate their respective superaddressees and apply it during a meeting of the team or the doctoral student and supervisors.
- List the opportunities and risks of including doctoral students as members of research teams and use the list to reflect on team members' interactions with doctoral students and their supervisors.
- Discuss the possible implications of such a list for research training and professional development requirements for research team members and doctoral students and their supervisors.
- Write a refereed publication comparing and contrasting the respective superaddressees of a group of research collaborators.
- Topic for debate: "Seeking addressees too early in a research team's collaboration is potentially fatal to its continued existence".

Further reading

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