

## **Finding Your Pace and Learning by Doing**

This short essay is a reflection on the interviews with respect to the writing of doctoral dissertations with graduate Dr. Katharina Cepa and her supervisor Professor Henri Schildt. Through talking with them, I benefit a lot from their advice and gain a better understanding of the doctoral studies life. I also realize that it is normal to experience confusion and stress during studies and the key is to find your pace and learning by doing. This essay includes three sections. In the first section, I introduced the main research question of Katharina dissertation and the writing phases and discussed why the dissertation like it is. Next, based on the views of Katharina and Prof. Schildt, I summed up four important factors contributing to the completion of a dissertation. At the end of the essay, advice from Katharina and Prof. Schildt was shared.

### **A general review on Katharina's dissertation**

The doctoral dissertation writing stages of Katharina was described below. Before Katharina officially started her doctoral studies, she had been worked as a research assistant in Prof. Schildt's research project which focuses on the digitalization in management. Then naturally, she went with this research area and had begun to collecting data before she formally embarked on her doctoral studies. In her first one and a half years, Katharina mainly worked on coursework and data collection. She spent most of time on taking courses and suggested to take courses of Industrial Engineering and Management, School of Science. She produced her first essay in her first two years, and another two essays in the third year. One of main challenges she encountered in the dissertation writing is the access to companies' data. Most companies do not trust her and are not willing to give her data. For the schedule of writing, Katharina took a course which gives instructions on planning dissertation and wrote her essays as instructed, which she found useful and helpful. Speaking of writing styles, Katharina pointed out that she personally prefers to write in the first person rather than passive tense.

A brief introduction and discussion on Katharina's doctoral dissertation were presented in this paragraph. Concentrating on how international big data technologies affect interorganizational relationships and their management, Katharina developed three essays (one theoretical essay and two empirical essays) to respond the main research question. In the first essay, driven by the phenomena that "big data" technology has been applied in

interorganizational management, she did a conceptualizing work toward the phenomenon and develop the term “technological embeddedness”, providing a conceptual ground for further empirical investigation in the second and the third essays. Katharina explained that her data did not approve the propositions and thus this essay is theoretical. The second essay explored how organizations apply interorganizational technologies to manage interorganizational tensions and collaboration. The third essay investigated various types of transparency brought by interorganizational big data technologies and how technology-induced operational transparency affect the development of interorganizational trust. From my point of view, the dissertation addresses the research questions well. And I personally think that studying how interorganizational big data technologies shape organizational structures can also be interesting.

### **What made a successful dissertation?**

In this section, what made it possible to finish the dissertation successfully is discussed from both the perspectives of Katharina and Prof. Schildt. From Katharina’s point of view, good funding environment, supportive supervisor, and supportive community contributed to the completion of dissertation. From Prof. Schildt’s point of view, determined personality, and good working relationship with supervisors play important roles. The factors mentioned by Katharina and Prof. Schildt are, to some extent, intertwined and overlapped. And therefore, I concluded them into following five aspects: available funding, feedback and comments from experts and peers, personality, good working relationships, and community.

Firstly, a good funding environment allows students to be able to participate academic conferences in which students can not only gain feedback and comments from others but also know what is new in the field and listen to other’s research. In addition, submitting deadlines of conferences also is a promotor which pushes students work and write regularly and arrange schedules well.

Secondly, feedback matters. Both Katharina and Prof. Schildt mentioned the critical role of feedback and comments in the successful completion of the dissertation. Participating conferences is one of the most effective ways to get feedback from experts and peers. Taking courses is also a good way to share with other students and get comments.

Thirdly, building a good working relationship with supervisors is of great importance. On the one hand, a supportive supervisor who accommodate time to reply to emails within a couple of days and provide guidance makes the process the dissertation more smoothly. On the other

hand, students are supposed to take comments seriously. To be specific, read and think about supervisors' comments and feedback carefully, and further make modifications and improvements based on them.

Fourthly, community is an important source of both information and energy. As an information source, community is a place where you can discuss practicalities such as funding application and conferences with your colleagues and peer and a place you can ask advice from senior or more experienced researchers, formally or informally. As an energy source, community is a place where you can get emotional support and keep energized. Doing doctoral studies is challenging and it would be nice to go to the department office, have lunch with others and share your research and life regularly.

On top of aspects above, other factors including well preparation, good dataset, determined personality are also have an impact on the completion of a doctoral dissertation.

### **Advice for first-year students**

Both Katharina and Prof. Schildt kindly provided advice for first-year doctoral students. Their advice was summarized below.

First of all, find your own pace. Although comparing yourself with others could be helpful to check if you are on the right way when you do not know what you are doing, pushing yourself too much can be backfired. It is critical to find your own pace and work for your goals in a sustainable way.

Secondly, it is good to have multiple projects going on but may not be necessary in the first year immediately. These research projects do not need to be under the same topic. You even can work on other paper while you are working on your dissertation. In the first year, it would be helpful to start thinking about what you are going to study and doing several interviews even you are doing quantitative research.

Thirdly, learning by doing is an effective studying strategy. Active engagement facilitates deep learning. You learn more when you actually do the activity. Your research skills will be improved during spiraling processes of doing, finding problems, seeking solutions, solving problems and in the experiences of learning from mistakes.

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Fourthly, writing with other people. Do not always write by yourself only. Although it is essential to have your own single-authored work, it would better to work with others especially those who already have publications on your targeted journals.

## **Reference**

Cepa, K. (2019). Digitalizing interorganizational relationships: How technology-induced transparency and digital mediation shape collaborative dynamics. Aalto University.