

# Chapter 17

## The Development of a Master Thesis Mediated Through Technology: Challenges Felt in the Master of Administration Assistance

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### **ABSTRACT**

*It is not always easy to start a research process. When doing a master thesis, it is necessary to take into consideration that there is no previous experience in the scientific process. Usually, during the development of a master thesis, student and supervisor work side-by-side or at least with a stronger support from the side of the supervisor. It is expected to have the supervisor close by to clarify doubts or point ways. But what happens when student and supervisor are not close by? When they communicate at distance, using different means to reach their purposes? How to help the student to find his/her way and, even more important, to keep him/her motivated in this solitary road? In this chapter, the authors present a situation where supervisors and students are separated by an ocean. They describe the challenges faced by both supervisor and students and give some recommendations in order to help other similar key players to overcome the difficulties and be successful.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, in order to acquire the knowledge and develop the necessary skills to enter the job market, more and more students that complete their graduation look for a program of studies at a Master level. This is due to the decrease level of salary of undergraduate citizens when compared with those holding a Master (Almeida et al, 2017). There are also evidences that a diploma of graduation (Master level) is useful to avoid the risk of a citizen to occupy jobs that are less well paid and less attractive. Moreover, a student with a Master degree seems to be more employable than one with less studies (Ravazi, 2014).

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This happens because a postgraduate student develops other types of skills and abilities such as time management, self-discipline and working within deadlines. Master degrees are also highly regarded by employers (European Commission, 2017). They are a way to gain deeper or additional skills and knowledge to help a citizen to develop his / her career while contributing to professional status.

The beginning of a Master Thesis (MT) is not easy, not only because a research process encompasses several challenges but, also, due to the lack of experience and practice of the student to perform such activities. To be successful in the MT, students count on the support of the supervisor with whom he / she expects to have discussions and several meetings during the research phase. However, in a globalized world, where students enroll in courses in one country while living and working in another country, this process may be more difficult. Meetings are not easy and discussions occur remotely (via email or videoconferencing) with all the challenges this may represent. As Winchester-Seeto et al (2014) refer, the increasing number of international students, set new requirements for supervisors who are expected to be more culturally sensitive, among other characteristics.

In this scenario, it is important to know if this relationship, that is mediated by the technology, is as good as the student expects it to be or if this entails challenges and presents new barriers that need to be addressed by both student and supervisor. Moreover, although Master degrees have undergone extensive growth over the last decade, little is known about students' experience of research or research supervision, a central component of the degree. In fact, research on Master degrees remains limited, in particular on thesis writing supervision (Filippoua, Kalloa and Mikkilä-Erdmann, 2017). This lack of research is even more evident for remote supervision of MT.

In this chapter, after a literature review about Master degrees and the role of the supervisor, a case study is presented where students and supervisors are not close by and where communication is done remotely. The objective was to identify the challenges faced by students during the development of the MT, in particular when both actors interact and communicate remotely during all the process.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **The Master's Degree and Its Importance**

To complete the Master degree, students need to write a MT. This project can be characterized as having a substantial research component in which the direction is determined by the author / student, with prolonged engagement, and with the support of a supervisor (Todd, Bannister, & Clegg, 2004). Usually it requires the integrated application of most learning outcomes acquired in the previous courses. Students also need to do commitments in order to meet the goals established, while they manage their own time to reach them. This is also a collaborative work, at least with one supervisor, for several months. Finally, it requires the writing and exposition of the acquired knowledge. Although the supervisor guides students in the development of the MT to ensure they meet the objectives in terms of learning outcomes and quality of work, students encounter several difficulties when adapting to the particularities of this kind of subject (Triviño & Martin, 2014). The quality of the supervision process is deemed one of the most important factors contributing to a successful research project (Drennan & Clarke, 2009).

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