RESEARCH STUDENT SYNDROME: THE COVEY CURE

Geetha G
Ph. D. Research Scholar
Mother Teresa Women’s University
Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu, India
Email: geethagovind74@gmail.com

Dr. S.K.Zareena
Assistant Regional Director
IGNOU Regional Centre
Vatakara, Kerala, India
Email: skzareena@ignou.ac.in

ABSTRACT
There are several unpleasant incidents reported in media about scholar suicides. There are many cases of bitter experiences faced by research supervisors on account of unscrupulous research scholars. There are matters involving relationship issues in personal and organizational episodes. This article highlights the root cause for research student syndrome and suggests curver to make research a pleasant experience, replicating Stephen R Covey’s The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

Keywords: Research syndrome, Interpersonal relationship, Research

INTRODUCTION
‘Syndrome’ is a medical term, which means a group of signs and symptoms that collectively indicate or characterize a disease, a psychological disorder or other abnormal conditions. Many research scholars develop certain unsettling signs and symptoms at different stages of research-in-progress. Such a problem suffered by research scholars may be called ‘research student syndrome’ Broadly these include the following: mental depression; a feeling that you are lost; inability to take the next step; frustration; procrastination; blaming others; inferiority complex; and the like. In extreme cases there have been a few suicide attempts, change of guide or hate campaign against the guide and supervisor. And, there have been attempts to sabotage the work of fellow researchers.

SYMPTOMS OF SYNDROME
The syndrome may be felt at different stages of a research project. Some have it even at the early or initial stage. They question themselves whether they can pursue their work successfully. Many get vexed as they are unable to find a viable research problem. Some are in a dilemma with regard to the choice of a suitable guide and supervisor. And then comes many questions like, ‘How shall I proceed next?’; ‘Am I on the right path?’; ‘Is my questionnaire okay?’, ‘Are my hypotheses okay?’, ‘What statistical tools are appropriate?’, ‘How to start writing my research report, and so on. Such dilemmas create myriad doubts in the researchers’ mind and the syndrome sets in most of the times. And in some cases it persists throughout the research period till the scholar is the proud winner of a research degree.
THE COVEY CURE

In this connection, practicing some habits suggested by Stephen Covey (Dr. Stephen R. Covey: 7 Habits of Effective People. Simon & Schuster) would be a great remedy to greatly reduce the intensity of the symptoms of the research student syndrome. Covey enumerates the following seven habits of highly effective people: 1. Be proactive; 2. Begin with the end in mind (What do you want to prove/disprove?) 3. Put first things first; 4. Think win-win; 5. Seek first to understand than to be understood; 6. Synergies; 7. Sharpen your skill at each stage.

Be proactive

The word ‘proactive’ is common now in management literature, but it is a new and not found in many dictionaries. Proactive is contrasted with reactive. The reactive persons respond to the developments in their situations. They do not blame circumstances, the other, themselves or the system. They try to use the system and its constituents as they exist to their advantage and research their goal. ‘They make me so mad’, etc. They take the merits for their benefit. Self-awareness and not of self-pity is necessary for this. When they make a mistake, they admit it and correct themselves. Knowledge, skill and desire to get things done are factors under their control; they keep them high and use them well. They manage time properly; they manage people properly. The proactive research students for example will identify their own skill and merits of guide and use them to their advantage and choose the topics and techniques that fit their skills and their guide’s abilities.

Begin with the end in mind

Starting with the end in mind is the second habit. Covey says everything is built twice. When you build a house you have already build in your mind and had prepared its blueprint before you laid its foundation. Similarly, the research student should plan their project with end result in mind. For example, instead of starting like “I shall study advertising”, start like “I shall see whether the image of women in advertisement has changed over the last ten years in India”. Then decide how you can prove it either way. What data is required and what techniques should be used to arrive at the result, and so on. This of course, requires a detailed study of advertisement appeals, images, etc. One should go through articles in research journals like the Journal of Advertising Research, and the Journal of Marketing that relate to above topic, after going through the books on marketing, Marketing Research. Advertising, Advertising Research. Such study and contemplation about what have been studies by others will help the research student to determine the various steps for achieving the research objective.

First things first

Putting the things first is another important dictum. After adequate survey of literature as detailed above, the primary decisions are in the order given

1. What should be proved or disproved? – The research problem or hypotheses.
2. How can this be done? – Details of data required and techniques of analysis.
3. What type of enquiry? – Whom to ask, what to refer to, what to ask or refer to, for the data required.
4. Preliminary enquiries and discussions.
5. Determining the questions to be asked, the type and size of the sample to the respondents: testing the questionnaire for language, reliability, validity/ planning of Interviews, getting the necessary introductions, the fixing of appointments with the respondents.
6. Collection of data; editing of the schedules.
7. Tabulation of the data; Analysis of the data; forming the conclusions.
8. Writing the rough draft of the report; editing it.
9. Typing the thesis out and fulfilling the necessary formalities for its submission.

At every step, of course, the guide is there to help the researcher. If the work is done step by step in proper order, it is easily done.
Think win-win

The fourth habit emphasized by Convey is “thinking win-win”. When there is a situation involving two parties there are four possibilities: Both lose: both gains and one of them wins and the other loses. To be an effective person, one should get such a solution to a conflict that both the parties win and neither loses. If each party considers the merits and good features of the other and uses them to get the project completed in a joint effort, a win–win result is the outcome. In our case, the parties may be the student and the guide. If you see outside yourself and empathize, take the initiative and be proactive, a win-win result is possible and there would be synergy.

Synergy

‘Synergy’ means the whole is bigger than the sum of the parts. Two plus one would be higher than three. If the student and the guide have self-awareness, imagination, conscience and independent will and use them to advantage empathetically and stimulated each other, the research project would be a synergetic product, very much superior it what either f them initially thought would be the standard of the thesis.

First understand, than be understood

An important dictum in communication is to seek first to understand rather than to be understood. A popular prayer by St. Francis of Assisi reads, ‘O lord! Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console: to be understood as to understand: to be loved as to love”. If the student does not understand what superior says but keeps on doing what he thinks the latter said, there is frustration for both, for the result would be poor. Also, if the student does not explain his difficulty properly such that the supervisor understands it, the supervision tends to be of poor quality. If the level of communication between the researcher and the supervisor is high, there is synergy; the situation is high win-win.

Sharpen your skill

And then the researcher has to sharpen his skill at each stage. For example, when you prepare your questionnaire, look at those of others and find out where there defects so that you may avoid them in yours. Or, when statically analysis has to be made, observe what tools have been effective in other similar cases, and see if there are more effective in other similar cases, and see if there are more effective tools that would be apt for your project. Learn about the tools in detail so that you can form the right conclusions and properly report them in your dissertation.

So, to reduce the symptoms of the research student syndrome, one has to do the project work in an orderly, systematic way methodically. There is no short-cut to success. The only way out is to create a climate for research which will not cause stress in any way. To be otherwise will make research an unpleasant experience both to the research student and the research supervisor, as well.

REFERENCES