File 20110908.1317: After-action report on confirmation of status viva:

The assessors grilled me for two hours and gave me a very hard time of it. In the end, I asked for and received clarification that they would call it confirmation of status. I got it. I got what I came out here for. The university can no longer kick me out arbitrarily; this was the equivalent of thesis defence. Now I should be in the writing up stage.

I'm not, because the analysis is not finished. The assessors praised part of my work, the coding of CS1, but said I hadn't done the second part of the analysis properly. They don't see a link from the coded incidents to the model, and from the model to the grounded theory. Dr Jirotka grilled me especially harshly on the contributions I am claiming: is the accreditor model one of them, is the proof of Spence's job market signalling one of them, and what about the risk market? How do I tie this to the risk market? I feel like they are telling me to re-start work on the risk market, when I put that on the shelf at their command nine months ago.

They want a coherent story from model through analysis to contribution. They want to see model diagrams like the ones in Atlas.ti. They were OK with my reasons for doing CS1 on paper, but really want to see CS2 and CS3 done in the software. It was agreed that re-coding CS1 in Atlas.ti would take too much time, and I will just have to defend that decision in my viva. He would really prefer to see all three done in Atlas.ti, but at least do the second two that way.

Atlas.ti makes the links from incidents through codes through the model to the theory explicit and visible. They criticised me for not having a model at all. They were only slightly interested in the adjacency matrices, which they said were descriptive, not explaining. I protested that I can't read minds; that I only know what participants told me, which show faithfully in the adjacency matrices, but my own interpretations, in my memos, are not evidence based. Wrong, they said. Your memos are the beginning of analysis, but not the whole analysis. I need to make models that explain, not just describe, why Phyllis is so antagonistic towards RM, and why Emily behaves the way she does (including the 'role reversal'). The assessors were impressed with how readily I could backtrack to collected evidence from my codes, but they still want to see the model, and they want to see it in Atlas.ti.

I asked them to shred the reports I gave them, because I overlooked the anonymisation problem in them. They reports contain no classified or export controlled information, but do contain LMPI. Dr Jirotka left her copy of the report with Ivan for shredding, gladly I thought.

I need to think about external examiner immediately. If Prof. Sasse, expect to be grilled extremely harshly. She might just tell you to go do more work. Ivan seemed chary of her. If Ivan is my supervisor, he cannot be an internal examiner, but another could. I need to choose an external soon and begin targeting the thesis carefully towards that external.

(Update: I spoke to Dr Martin about the external examiner. He said it is unusual to bring in an external from overseas, but not unheard of. I told him I wish I could have a DIACAP person rather than a CC person for an external; he agreed, btut it should be an academic. It may be hard to find an academic. I haven't run across many PhDs in the cross domain world. I hope they will pay more attention to me when I have one.)

I have a co-supervisor now. I have no problem with that. Shamal emailed later to offer help with managing Ivan. The assessors will recommend extra time: one calendar year. That is two terms past Michaelmas. They will also recommend a co-supervisor who is an expert in GT methodology.

On the methodology, I need to write it up as a single methodology, not varying. The three different case studies is my methodology. Read the methodology chapters in Shamal's thesis, Ivan's thesis, and Anne Adams' thesis. I have an electronic copy of that one in email now.

I need to move from description to explanation. Description is nice but it's not an academic contribution. Currently, my theory explains why accreditors do not communicate; it needs to explain how they can communicate. I need guidance and time. Avoid distractions. A co-supervisor will help me avoid any more blind alleys.

I talked to Dr Martin afterward. He is cool with the co-supervisor thing. Ivan sure processed Shamal through in good time; I am hopeful he will keep me on track as well. I told Dr Martin everything and we visited for a little while. I told him I'm stuck here for another 2.5 days waiting for cheap plane fares out, and it was actually cheaper to stay out by LHR than in Oxford. So I'm going into London this weekend to visit the British Museum. Plane tickets on September 11, unaccountably, are like $1300 more expensive than Monday. No idea why that is. I thought no one would want to fly that day, but if I could have a whole row to myself, sure, I'll fly then. Dr Martin says the airlines still charge more for Saturday night stay, at least on transatlantic flights.

I talked to Julie Sheppard afterward and she explained a few things. I should apply for extension of time in early December. No point in doing it immediately; wait for early December. The form will require Dr Martin's signature, a description of work done so far, and a plan for finishing. Extensions can only be granted one term at a time, so it will be necessary to do it twice, once for Hilary and once for Trinity.

If I should happen to need more time, there is a way, she said. The University is tracked, and penalised, on students who do not finish in four years. The penalty comes in the form of limitations on the number of new students allowed in. The way the department gets around that is by letting their student status lapse, which gets them off the books. Officially, you have no supervisor support during that time, but unofficially many people continue it. There are a number of students with lapsed status in the department right now; it's locally accepted practice. Keep it in mind if needed. I probably won't need it, but it's an option.

I will add more notes later when I remember them.

References