Successful doctoral Supervision

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Outline

Why focus on doctoral supervision?

What are key advice for doctoral supervisors?

How to support supervisory development?

Why
focus on doctoral supervision?

Supervision is an increasingly complex task

(Taylor & Wisker, 2023)

The modern supervisor

- project leader & supervisor
- orchestrate a team of supervisors
- extended academic responsibility: skills development, time mangement, funding, publishing, network, career, …
- **supporting PhD candidates' well-being and personal development**

(E.g., see Jackman et al., 2022; Hazell et al., 2020; Evans, 2018; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018; Levecque et al., 2017)

UK survey among doctoral supervisors (UKCGE, 2024)
"Doctoral supervision has become more demanding over the past 5 years?" 69 % Agree; N=3,570

Supervision is key to candidates' success

The quality of supervision is the key determinant of doctoral candidates' well-being, learning, and study progress.

(Haley et al., 2024; Brownlow et al., 2023; Polkinghorne et al. 2023; Masek & Alias, 2020; McAlpine et al., 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Engebrechtson et al., 2008)

What is quality in supervision?

According to PhD candidates, **a good supervisor:**

- Is **accessible**

- Enables **trust**

- Is **respectful**

- Shows **engagement**

- Is generous with their own **network**

Interpersonal skills

(Haley et al., 2024; Brownlow et al., 2023; Polkinghorne et al. 2023; Masek & Alias, 2020; McAlpine et al., 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Engebrechtson et al., 2008)

Why is trust and respect so important?

Because supervision is an asymmetrical power relationship

(Blanchard & Haccoun, 2020; Buirski, 2022; Gucchione, 2018; Loudoun et al., 2020; Makhamreh & Kutsyuruba, 2021; Parker-Jenkins, 2016)

- Supervisors have more knowledge and experience - regarding research

- They validate candidates' work

- They can influence candidates' career opportunities

It calls for **professionality** by means of **aligning expectations**!

What
are key advice for doctoral supervisors?

Align expectations

EARLY AND REGULARLY

Align expectations **early** about:

- Goals and intended outcomes
- Contact and availability
- Roles and responsibility
    - Planning and progress
    - Writing and feedback
    - Resources and network
    - Candidates' independence

(Anttila et al., 2023; Palmer et al., 2023; Sonesson et al., 2023; Cardilini et al., 2022; Davis, 2020; Janssen et al., 2021; Parker-Jenkins, 2016; Woolderink et al., 2015; Moxham et al., 2013)

Tools for **early** alignment

EXAMPLES

- A questionnaire: Norwegian University of Science and Technology

- A dialogue guide: Implemented at almost all Danish Universities. The tool is shared afterwards

- A dialogue guide for alignment *in the group of supervisors*: University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences

Research				
Who defines the original research?				
Supervisor	1	2	3	4	5 PhD Candidate
Who is the driving force in the research project?				
Supervisor	1	2	3	4	5 PhD Candidate

2. **Meetings and availability**
- How often will you meet?
- Who participates in which meetings (also informal supervisors)?
- Who initiates the meetings?
- How planned and formal do you expect the meetings to be, e.g., with meeting agendas and summaries?
- How do you plan to be available and to communicate between meetings, e.g., code of conduct for using mails, SMS, expected response time, ….?

1. Contribution from each member of the PhD supervisor team
1.1. What professional/research skills do you each bring to the PhD supervisor team (knowledge of the process, the topic, the method)?
1.2. What personal skills do you each bring to the team (communication, support, network)?
1.3. How will you each define your role as a PhD supervisor for the PhD student?

Align guidance with independence
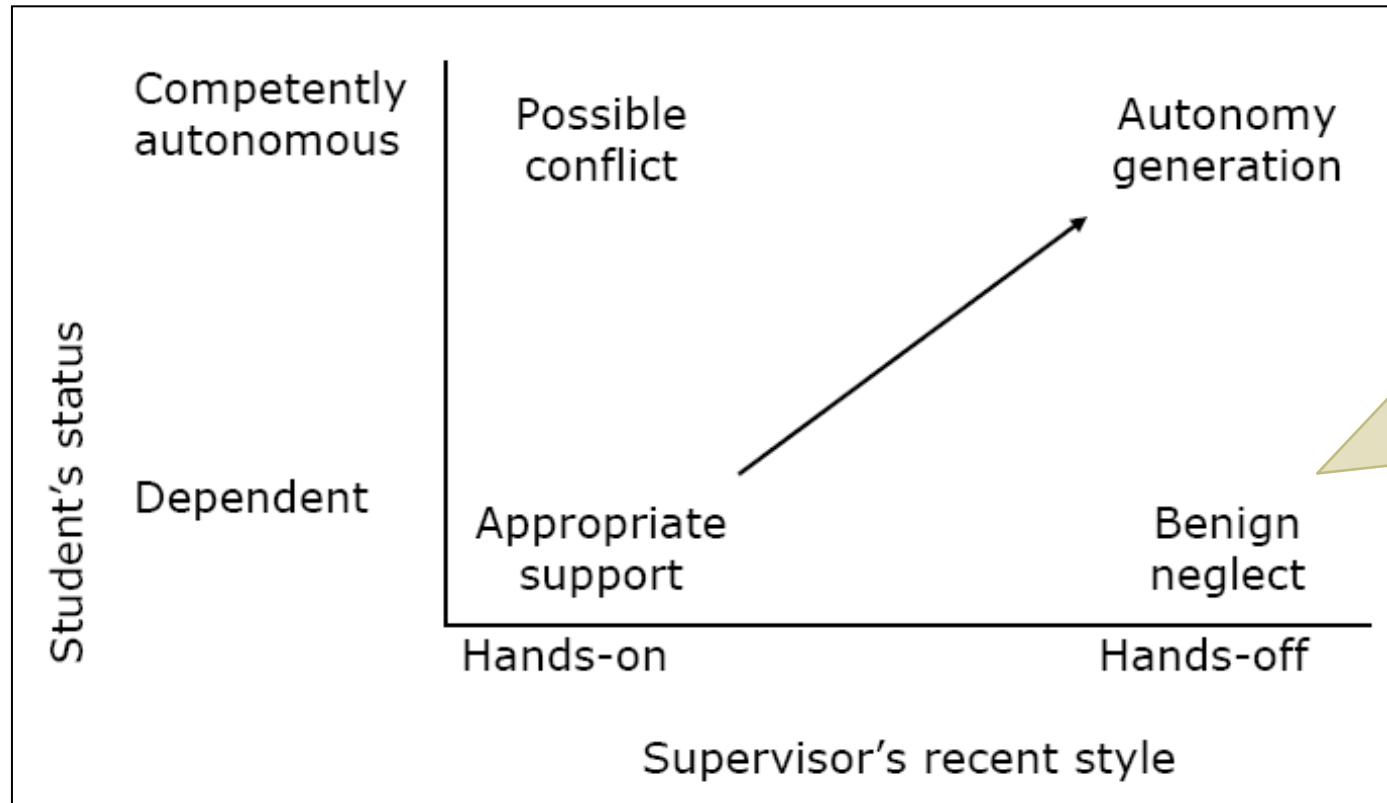
A tool for regular alignment

Individually: Where would you "plot" our relationship at present in the diagram? Place a single X

Discuss: Is it an ideal match or do we need to take actions for the collaboration to move in an appropriate direction?

Gurr, G.M. (2001). Negotiating the "Rackety Bridge" – a Dynamic Model for Aligning Supervisory Style with Research Student Development. *Higher Education & Development,20*(1), 81-92.

Align expectations on feedback
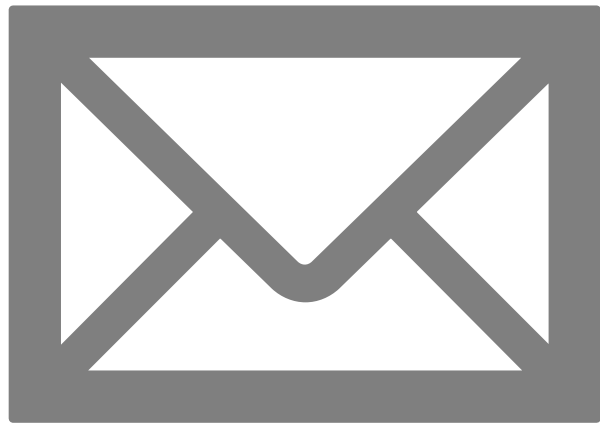
Make it a habit for candidates to answer some key questions when they send you drafts:

1. What kind of text have you sent?
2. How finished is it?
3. What challenges have you faced when writing it?
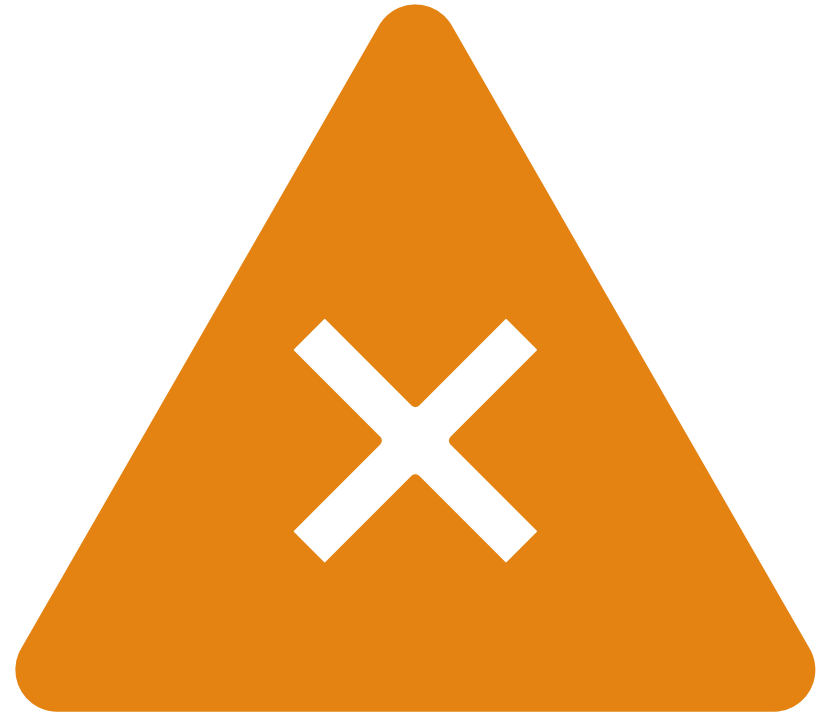4. What would you like feedback on?
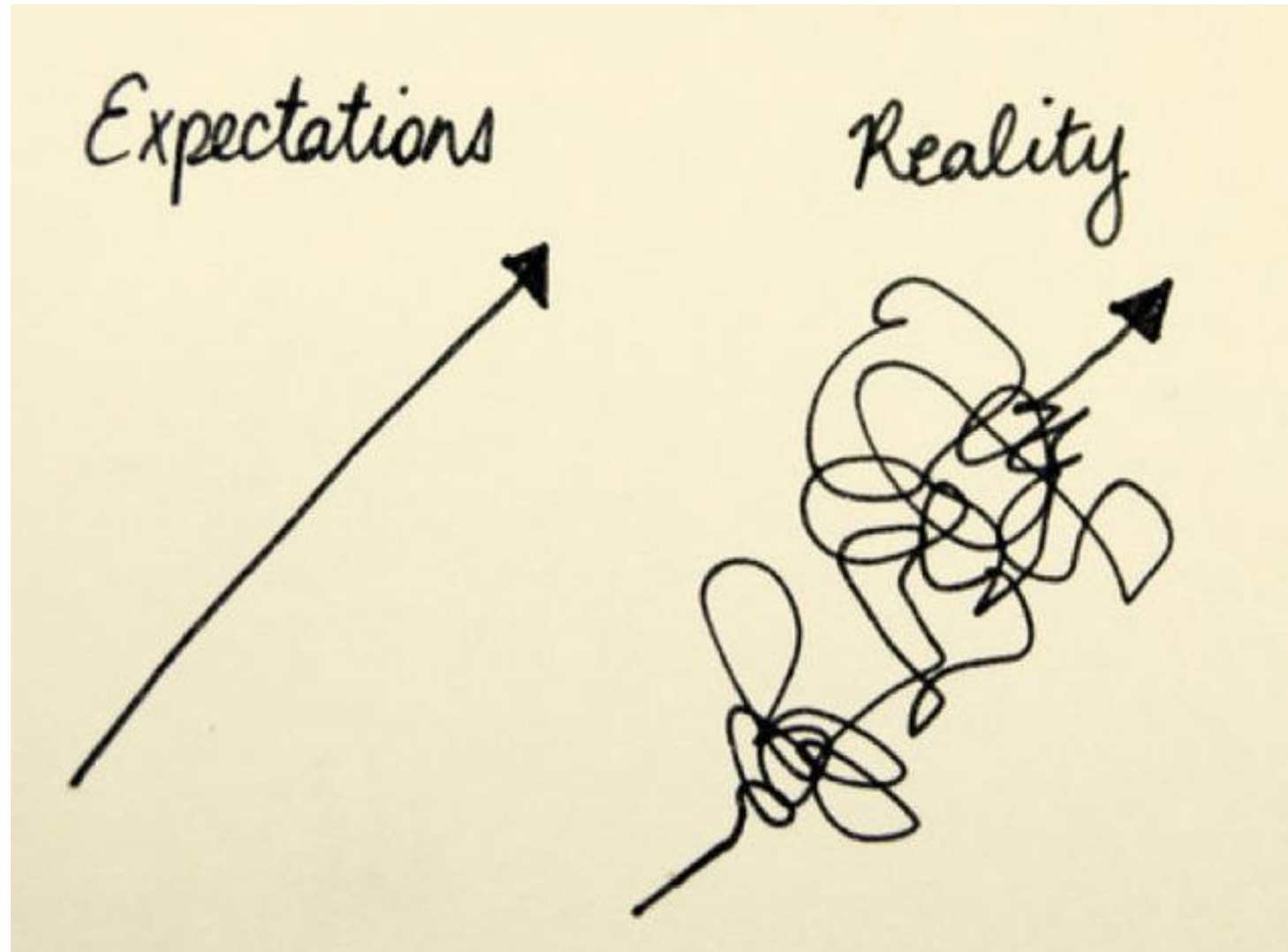
In case things don't go as planned

Become aware of early warning signs!

If candidates:

1. Avoid communication with the supervisor

2. Isolate themselves from the local research community and fellows

3. Avoid submitting work for review or sharing drafts with the supervisor

4. Constantly change the topic or planned work
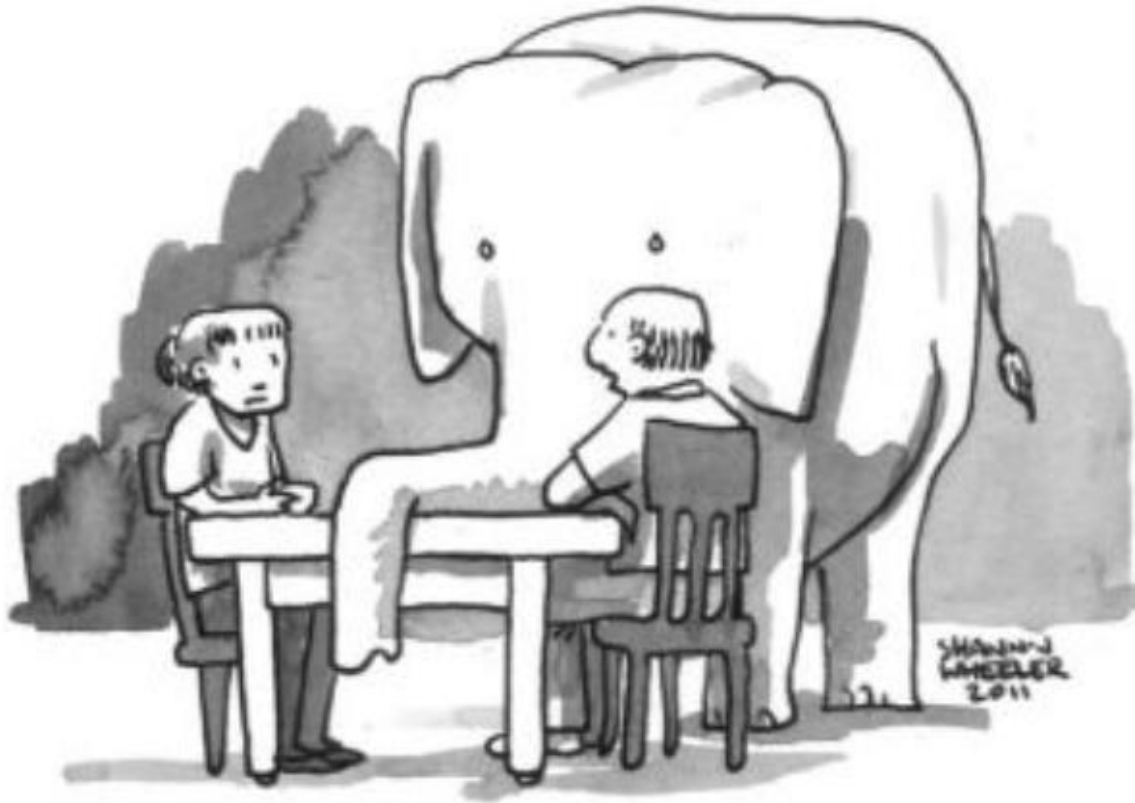
(Manathunga, 2005)

Awareness is the clue

"Highly effective supervisors remain alert for particular cues that their students may be experiencing some difficulty that could potentially limit their ability to submit their theses on time."

(Manathunga, 2005)

- Build trust
- Offer regular supervision
- Scaffold (break down tasks)
- **React promptly to warning signs, along the way**

Address the elephant in the room

Invite for a meeting

Prepare: Use the "Difficult conversation Planner for Supervisors"

Use the Three-stage rocket model
Inspired by Ahern & Manathunga (2004)

Steps	Examples
3. Act	How do we move from here? What do you suggest? I suggest that...
2. Identify	What is your perception of...? Do you recognize my observations?
1. Describe (Provide concrete examples)	I have noticed... It makes me think/worry/...

Support **ownership**; don't dictate or micromanage

Diagnose, Don't blame

Successful supervision calls for **flexible** supervisors with a **broad repertoire of pedagogical strategies.**

How
to support supervisory development?

Supervisors' main source of learning

Learning from experience

Learning by doing/failure

(Jacobsen et al., 2024; Whittington et al.; 2021;
Fulgence, 2019; Raffing et al., 2017; Henderson, 2018;
Turner, 2015)

Example: Impact of a supervisor course

PhD student survey

Item	Year	Faculty			
		Arts	**Social**	Health	Science
Overall, I'm satisfied with the quality of my research supervision	2013	79%	71%	82%	75%
	2017	78%	**84%**	79%	82%
I can warmly recommend my main supervisor	2013	78%	73%	78%	79%
	2017	80%	**88%**	78%	82%

Table 1. PhD students' satisfaction with doctoral supervision (percent of PhD students that agree or partly agree). 2013 / 2017. Response rate: 2013: 79%, n = 1780; 2017: 75%, n = 1739).

(Wichmann-Hansen, Godskesen, & Kiley, 2020)

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