

Erik Andersson

University of Gothenburg

## Surprisingly happy co-supervisors; general tendencies and preventive measures

Among the many changes that doctoral training has undergone over the last decades, institutionalizing team supervision and the establishing of co-supervisors as mandatory parts of such teams, is of vital importance (Taylor et al 2019). Despite this substantial change to supervision, there is so far quite few research projects on co-supervision. Those that have been undertaken are often small qualitative studies (e.g. Olson & Gul 2014). To fill this gap, we have done a university wide survey among co-supervisors, with a combination of open and multiple-choice questions. To deepen the survey results, we also made 16 open ended interviews with current and former co-supervisors. The preliminary results add three important qualifications of the picture given in the literature.

1. The received picture in the literature of supervisor teams as conflictual and stressful environments in themselves and in relation to supervisees (Olmos-López & Sunderland 2017), find very little and thin support in our material. On the contrary, a large majority of respondents describe co-supervision as agreeable and interesting social and scientific experiences.
2. The motive for accepting co-supervision changes over a research career. Young researchers see it as a steppingstone to professorship, whereas senior academics accept co-supervision for social reasons and for keeping a relation to the research frontier.
3. The sections of our material where disagreement and frustration are more visible, concern organizational and economic dimensions of supervision, rather than conflicts over substantial scientific or pedagogical issues.
4. The relevance of these results is twofold. On the one hand, research literature seems to overstate the problems that might arise in

team supervision, or the negative sides of co-supervising. On the other hand, where problems do arise, those can be remedied or managed largely with organizational and economic measures. In the final discussion, we point at some rules-of-thumb which might be useful to prevent problems in normally happy supervision teams and for co-supervisors.

### References:

- Olmos-López, P. & Sunderland, J. (2017). Doctoral supervisors' and supervisees' responses to co-supervision. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 41(6), 727-740.
- Paul, P., Olson, J. K., & Gul, R. B. (2014). Co-supervision of Doctoral Students: Enhancing the Learning Experience. *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship*, 11(1), 31-38.
- Taylor, S., Kiley, M., & Humphrey, R. (2019). Working relationships: 2. Working relationships. In *A Handbook for Doctoral Supervisors*. 89-100. London and New York: Routledge