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## Understanding and overcoming challenges in research supervision

Research supervision plays a fundamental role in advancing academia by fostering the professional development of scholars and the progression of scholarly discourse. However, this vital role is not without its formidable challenges and research supervision can often be complex. To begin with, the parties involved - the PhD student and the supervisor(s) - are in a hierarchical and unequal situation where one must learn something from the other. On the other hand, doctoral education is about nurturing doctoral students over time to become independent researchers.

The relationship between a PhD student and her/his supervisor is often singled out as the most important factor for the success of PhD studies (Schmidt & Hansson, 2021). Nevertheless, challenges of various kinds often arise. One such challenge can be to balancing the demands of research, teaching, and administrative duties. Supervisors often find themselves stretched thin, juggling multiple responsibilities while striving to provide effective guidance to their PhD students. Aligned with this, PhD students are often burdened with a heavy workload. Previous research has underlined that this should be a major concern for universities who wish to increase their rates of PhD completion and PhD candidates' satisfaction (e.g. van Rooij et al, 2021).

Another common challenge in research supervision is managing the work-life balance of both the supervisor and the doctoral student. Research projects often involve long hours, tight deadlines, and intense intellectual engagement, which can take a toll on the well-being of both parties. Supervisors may struggle to maintain boundaries between work and personal life, leading to burnout and reduced effectiveness in mentoring.

Similarly, PhD students may face challenges in managing their time effectively, balancing research commitments with other responsibilities such as coursework, part-time employment, or family obligations. In a study that examined students' top challenges and coping strategies during the COVID-19 crisis, they found one of the top challenges to be blurring of work/family time (Sverdlik et al., 2023).

Yet another example of a supervision challenge could be navigating conflicting expectations between the supervisor and the student (Calle-Arango & Ávila Reyes, 2023). For instance, the supervisor may have specific methodological preferences or theoretical frameworks they want the student to adhere to, while the student may have alternative ideas or preferences based on their own research interests or prior experience. This misalignment can lead to tension and frustration within the supervisory relationship, requiring effective communication and negotiation to find a mutually acceptable approach.

In this paper we explore different complicated researcher supervision cases with the aim of reaching a deeper understanding of the complex nature of PhD supervision situations and to contribute with knowledge about how complicated supervision cases can be handled and, in the best case, avoided.

### Formulärets överkant

**Keywords:** Challenges, Complex cases, PhD students, Research supervision, Supervisor.

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