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Supervising industry-inspired PhD projects: A collection of practical ideas

Supervising industry-inspired PhD projects: A collection of practical ideas

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We report on practical experiences concerning supervising industry PhD projects. An industry PhD project is especially interesting because of the added complexity (Borell-Damian et al., 2010). Within this frame, we define an industry PhD project to be a training setting at the graduate level that finally leads to a doctoral thesis, including as well a substantial industry presence in the background and during the project. The candidate can either be an industry employee performing a PhD project under academic supervision from the university side, or a university employee with direct or in-kind industry financing, or simply an academic working on a PhD project with a topic inspired by direct collaborations with the industry.

We have been engaged ourselves in several such projects and hold expertise in supervising 'pure' academic PhD projects. In our view, both supervision situations are challenging (Lee, 2008) and have specific and interesting features, as well as rewarding ones (Knowledge Foundation, 2024) that are here of interest.

Looking from the supervisor perspective, we pose three main questions: (1) What are the benefits of being a supervisor enrolled in an industry PhD project? (2) What are the typical involved drawbacks? (3) What impact are you expecting as a result of your supervision work in a project where the industry company plays an important role? To address these questions, we rely on our own experiences as PhD supervisors and on the feedback collected from a large number of other supervisors. This feedback is analyzed statistically using data assimilated via questionnaires.

References:

Borell-Damian, L. et al. (2010), Collaborative Doctoral Education: University-Industry Partnerships for Enhancing Knowledge Exchange Higher Education Policy, 23, 493–514

Lee, A. (2008) How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision, Studies in Higher Education, 33:3, 267-281, DOI: 10.1080/03075070802049202

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