Summary conference the Role of the Supervisor, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 10 June 2024

Supervision meetings
- Guide PhD candidates on how it is to work in academia.
- Set limitations and direction of the research at the start.
- Swimming and exploring is also part of the PhD project but ensure that swimming does not change in drowning.
- Regular and frequent meetings are important. The frequency of the meetings can differ per person and can change during the PhD trajectory.
- Prepare the meetings well (this is a shared responsibility for supervisors and PhD candidates): a PhD candidate should make clear what questions, doubts, struggles (s)he has, and on which part (content wise) (s)he would like to get feedback. Both have an active role in the meeting.

Feedback
- Feedback must be honest, timely, clear, constructive, to the point, manageable and has a certain level of detail. It should be given in a compassionate way. Encouragement is also needed.
- The PhD candidate must be willing to receive feedback during the whole PhD trajectory, it is expected from the supervisor to give that. Feedback can hurt, it feels often personal, as it is about your work.
- Agreements must be made about the supervision in the Training and Supervision Plan (TSP).
- *Summary for supervisor*
    - *Preparation (e.g. on candidate's expectations of feedback)*
    - *Sincere interest in the candidate and/or sincere time or attention*
    - *Concrete (e.g. concrete examples, supporting feedback with concrete texts)*
    - *Alignment of needs (e.g. 'how was the writing process and what did you encounter?')*
    - *Communication and how it is received (check how the candidate takes it)*
    - *Closing (e.g. summarising and agreeing).*
- *Summary for the supervisee*
    - *Keep own needs in mind*
    - *Active attitude*
    - *Think about questions you want feedback on*
    - *Mutual expectations in plan ('living document', like the TSP)*
    - *Agree about way of supervision.*

Training and Performance
- Supervisor course:
    - A good researcher is not always a good supervisor, do not assume that everyone can do this. Training is necessary.
    - Supervisor course is useful, but it is only once, it has to stick. Follow up is necessary: every (two) year intervision, including a case.

- Supervisor course: should this be mandatory or not? At the moment there are no sanctions in place if a supervisor does not participate. For newly hired (co)supervisors it can become part of the employment contract or make the course part of SKO research (if applicable). If the course is mandatory, there could be a risk of just 'ticking the box', without intrinsic motivation to improve in supervision.
- Performance:
    - It is challenging how to deal with underperforming supervisors. Evaluation of performance of supervisors is complicated: how to get honest feedback from PhD candidates, who are depending on the supervisor for the finalization of their thesis but also their future career, or from colleagues, who work in the same group. Possible ways to deal with this:
        - 360° feedback or feedback within the supervisory team of a PhD candidate.
        - buddy-system.
        - give the PhD candidate a voice in the go- no- go meeting to propose to change supervisors.
        - Mediation by the PhD dean when there is friction between a PhD candidate and the supervisor. If the issue cannot be resolved, ask the dean to change the supervisors or to add someone to the supervisory team.
        - When a PhD project stops or is problematic, invite the supervisors for a conversation with the vice-dean of research. However, most of the time it is difficult to determine who is to blame if the project does not run as it should be.
        - In most cases, signals come much earlier, and intervention should start earlier. However, as the PhD candidate must be protected, this is not so easy.
    - There are no clear consequences for bad performing supervisors, such as a ban on supervising new PhD candidates (which is also very difficult, e.g. in a situation a PhD position is granted externally to the supervisor). It is difficult to define sanctions that can be operationalised.
    - In order to perform well, a supervisor should make sure that (s)he has time during the PhD trajectory, before accepting the new PhD candidate. It is not desirable to have strict guidelines about a maximum number of PhD candidates per supervisor.

Different roles
- The roles that should be discussed:
    - Academic supervision (content)
    - Mentoring ('habitus'/how to be an academic)
    - Sponsoring (open doors/make own network available for the PhD candidate)
    - Coaching
    - Monitoring
    - Education/training
    - Community (include PhD candidate)

- Faculty/university must check:
    - Do supervisors **know** the different roles and what is expected from them (familiar)?
    - **Can** they fulfil these roles (capacity)?
    - Do they **want** to fulfil these roles (willingness)?
- Possible steps to be implemented:
    - Raising awareness (course, guidelines for both parties).
    - Enhancing capabilities:
        - division of tasks and roles is a shared responsibility of the supervisory team and the organization (e.g., the graduate school).
        - Allocate specific supervisory hours per PhD candidate.
        - Implement effective evaluation system (see performance).
    - Encourage willingness: fostering a culture of feedback and continuous improvement (see training).
- When the different roles conflict with each other, make sure you know which role has priority.

    Additional remarks for supervisors:
    - Important to make a project planning and steer to timely completion.
    - Introduce PhD candidate in 'academic life' (how to write a book review or grant proposal, how to peer review, ethics, etc.).
    - No psychological support from supervisor but be compassionate and protect. the wellbeing of the PhD candidates. Moral support is separate from feedback on the content.

Challenges of heterogeneity
- Differences in PhD candidates should be considered: cultural, international, generation, PhD-type (internal/external). It is important to get to know your PhD candidates and to see how they are doing.
- Interdisciplinarity:
    - Core skills in methods are necessary to obtain.
    - Think about possible challenges upfront (what skills/trainings, everyone 'on the same page' regarding theory, process is also trial-and-error, not everything needs to be there from the start, but there must be confidence that a PhD candidate can do this).
- Cultural differences:
    - International PhD candidates may have a different view on hierarchy.
    - PhD candidates should inform themselves about these differences.
    - Balance the freedom of PhD candidates but ensure that they deliver. Respect is important.
    - The extent of structure that PhD candidates from different backgrounds need.