

Professionalization of Supervision



eurodoc Conference 2021

The European Council of Doctoral
Candidates and Junior Researchers

LUCAS ZINNER, July 2021

What is supervision?

- Providing help, support and mentoring to enable doctoral candidates to complete their research and produce a thesis to the best of their ability
- Supporting the personal and professional development of a doctoral candidate on the journey to becoming a young scholar
- A negotiated practice between supervisors and candidates, between experienced scholars and early stage researchers
- An intensive form of teaching

Why is Professionalization needed: because the context und expectations have changed

- Traditionally, doctoral supervision has been a 'lonely business'. Doctoral supervisors, unprepared for the role, have tended and still tend to supervise doctoral candidates as they themselves were supervised.



- Now supervision is framed as pedagogy in higher education with its own theoretical frameworks beyond the master-apprentice relationship with tacit understanding of the supervision process.

Why is Professionalization needed

Observed “learning assumptions” on the PhD level:

- through sink or swim exercises,
- by self-discovery,
- by survival of the fittest like training,
- by following a given track ...

“Now with all the ones that I have been working with, right away I sit them down and say ‘Okay, this is the big picture and what we are going to do is we are going to chunk it out so you are not overwhelmed and anxious about it so that it is manageable ... Together we will decide – really collaborative.”

“I have a very hands-off management style. I’ll let them sink or swim on their own so they need to be highly motivated and independent ... they are going to become reputed experts in their area and so they have to rely more on themselves”

From: Cheryl Amundsen & Lynn McAlpine (2009): ‘Learning supervision’: trial by fire, *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 46:3, 331-342

Anne Lee's framework for concepts of research supervision

	Functional	Enculturation	Critical thinking	Emancipation	Relationship Development
Supervisors Activity	Rational progression through tasks	Gatekeeping	Evaluation Challenge	Mentoring, supporting constructivism	Supervising by experience, developing a relationship
Supervisor's knowledge & skills	Directing, project management	Diagnosis of deficiencies, coaching	Argument, analysis	Facilitation, Reflection	Emotional intelligence
Possible student reaction	Obedience Organised	Role modelling	Constant inquiry, fight or flight	Personal growth, reframing	Emotional intelligence

A framework for concepts of research supervision by Anne Lee (2008), published in How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision. *Studies in Higher Education* Vol 33, No 3, 267-281

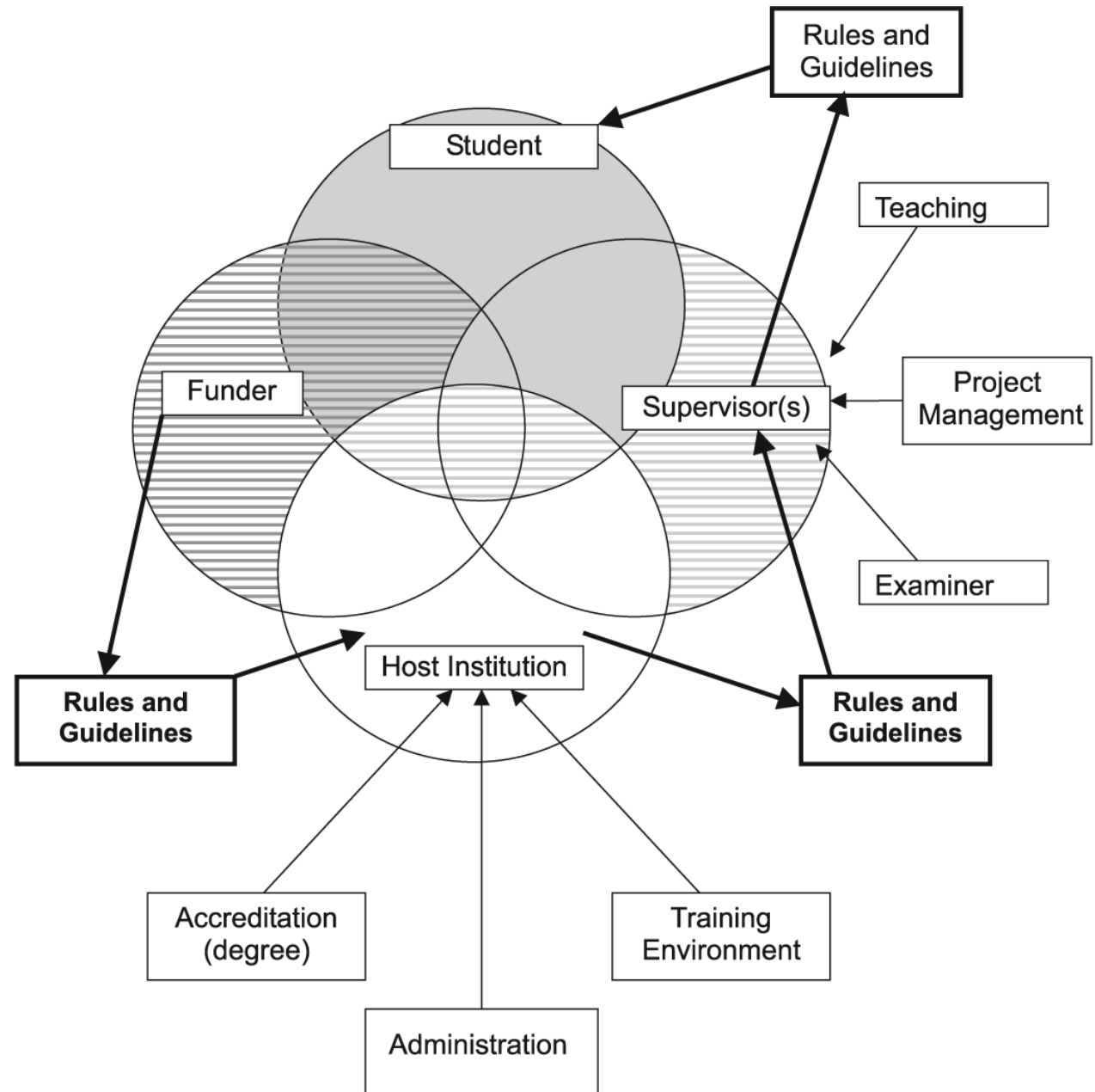
Universities must ensure compliance for quality supervision

- Do we know whether or not a department provides quality supervision?
- Are there any pre-requisites to becoming a supervisor and, if so, are they sufficient?
- If poor supervision becomes evident, how is it managed?
- What do we mean by „poor“ or „good“ supervision?
- What kind of support do or should we offer?
- Do we meet international standards of supervision?

The master-apprentice relationship is history.

Many groups are concerned with doctoral education and supervision

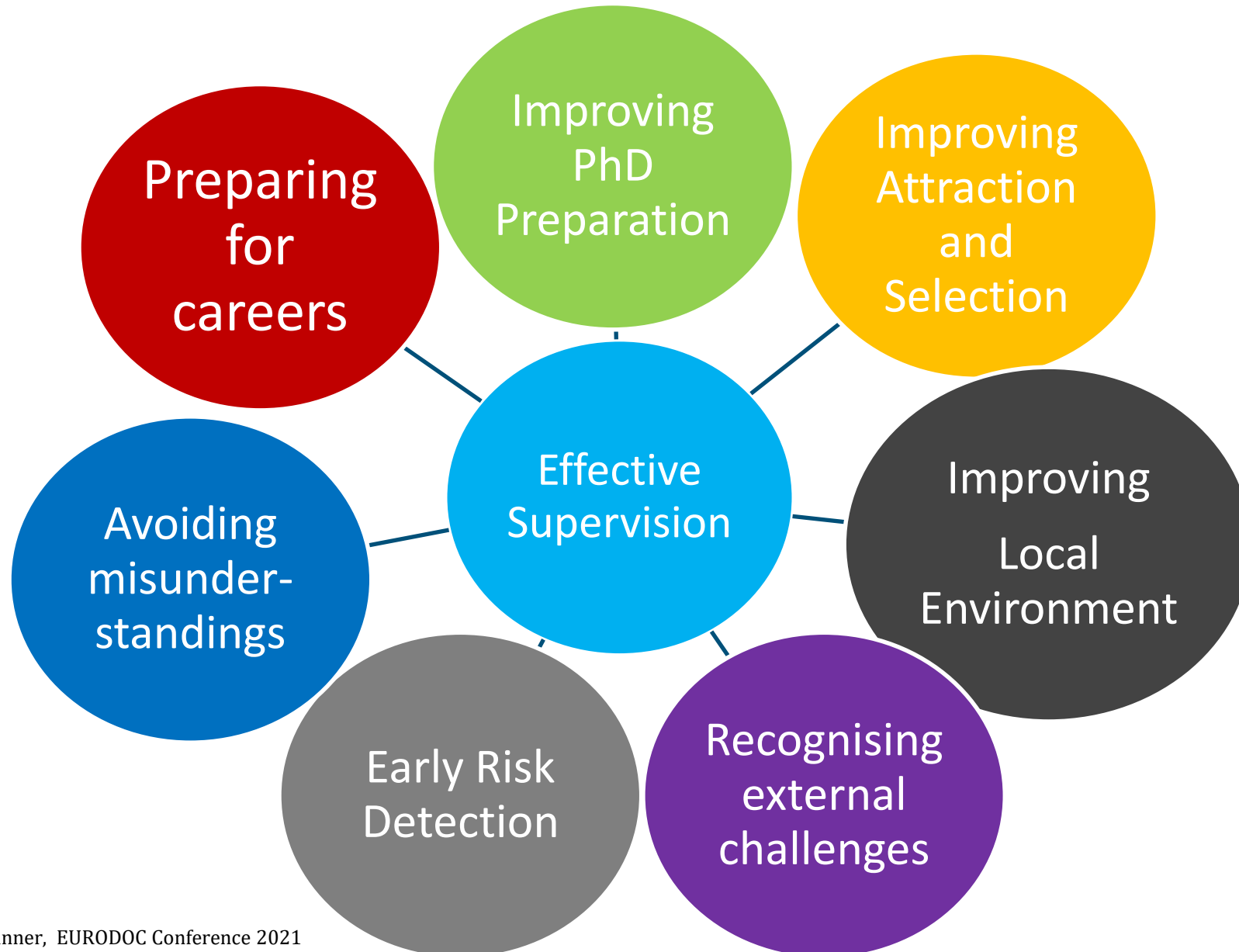
From: Cryer, Pat, and Peter Mertens. "The PhD examination: Support and training for supervisors and examiners." *Quality Assurance in Education* 11.2 (2003): 92-99.



Common topics for sound supervision.

- » Global context of supervision and local rules and guidelines
- » Formation of a talent pool of high quality PhD candidates and improving the quality of our selection and admission policy
- » Ensuring a maximum of clarity as regards mutual expectations and uncertainties
- » Developing a professional working relationship
- » Reflecting on and making explicit the supervisor's own, often unconscious, supervisory practice.
- » Early detection if our candidate has major problems and possible lines of actions
- » Supporting our PhD candidate in the planning of the project and their future
- » Dealing with common dilemmas in supervision
- » Providing a collegial exchange where supervision practices can be discussed and negotiated

Supervising is a Balance Act



Goal of training: raising effectiveness of our supervisor behavior



Optimistic Outlook

- Entry-level and continuous professional development programmes for supervisors are becoming good practice and are increasingly embedded in institutional guidelines and national codes of conduct.
- By establishing doctoral schools, universities have underlined their institutional responsibility. Besides transversal training opportunities for doctoral candidates, supervisory training opportunities are the next logical step.
- The younger generation of academics has already had positive experiences with training in the context of continuing professional development during their doctoral studies and will increasingly demand this as faculty members.

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