



Effective supervisor-PhD interaction: a two-way process

Supervision is a two-way process. Clear and frequent communication, management of expectations, and giving and receiving feedback are crucial components. Instrumental in this are the right attitude and behaviour of both supervisors and PhD candidates. The GSLS aims to support in supervision, by providing an interactive training course on our view on what good supervision entails.

In the absence of a clear 'job description' for PhD supervisors, it is difficult to know what is required and expected from everyone involved. Currently, Utrecht University is working on a policy for PhD supervision to bring about transparency. This will make it easier for supervisors to focus on their responsibilities, and to encourage PhD candidates to take initiative and ask for support. While waiting for the policy, the Graduate School of Life Sciences has adopted the 'Golden rules for PhD supervision' of Leiden University. Because these guidelines are about expectations, attitudes and behaviours of both the supervisor and PhD candidate, we refer to it as *Effective supervisor-PhD interaction: a two-way process*. It is balanced for supervisor and supervisee. By setting these guidelines and offering training to develop supervision skills, we aim to help in establishing professional work relationships between supervisors and PhD candidates.

	Supervisory team	PhD candidate
Be professional	<p>Be aware that all PhD candidates are different, with their own individual story, culture, competencies and needs.</p> <p>Being a supervisor is a demanding job. There is no template for supervision. Keep an open mind and adapt to your PhD candidate.</p> <p>Co-supervision can be difficult. Invest time to come to a joint view on the process so that your PhD candidate is not left with uncertainty.</p> <p>For a professional environment to function well it needs to be a safe environment. Be aware of the hierarchical character that marks the supervisor-PhD candidate relationship. Build bridges to overcome the distance. Respect the social boundaries that mark a professional relationship.</p>	<p>Be aware that all supervisors are unique human beings, with strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>During supervision, you will encounter your supervisors' personalities and leadership styles. If something bothers you, discuss it.</p> <p>The four-eye principle (at least 2 supervisors) is here to help you and to support your supervision process. If you observe friction in the supervision, this has to be discussed, if necessary, with the help of your independent advisor(s) or another neutral conversation partner.</p> <p>A professional environment is created by all who participate in it. A professional relationship requires respect for the social boundaries that come with it. If you feel a lack of respect in the way you are approached, or if other problems occur that you cannot solve on your own, the independent PhD advisors and confidential advisor of your institute are here to give advice and support.</p>
Be committed	<p>Be aware that doing a PhD is a lengthy process that requires long-term commitment from both sides.</p> <p>PhD candidates need to feel that you care about the project's progress and outcome. Your input on the project and its development is essential for your PhD candidate to grow and carry on.</p> <p>Take responsibility for the project. Be up-to-date, provide your PhD candidate with valuable scientific input, and involve your network in the process. Be a coach when their spirit is low.</p>	<p>Be aware that the PhD journey will be lengthy and not always easy, and that it can, at times, be hard to maintain your initial motivation and enthusiasm.</p> <p>If things are tough and motivation is low, bring this up during conversations with your colleagues and supervisors. These are stages that all PhD candidates go through.</p> <p>If working conditions are not optimal, be aware that there is not one fixed structure. You are free to bring up suggestions for change if you think this will improve the situation.</p>

		As a PhD candidate, you are member of a larger academic community that is here to support you and we invite you to contribute to it.
Be available	<p>Be aware that your regular availability is key to the success of the project.</p> <p>It is part of your responsibility as a supervisor to take initiative in planning regular supervision meetings.</p> <p>You are expected to be sufficiently available to your PhD candidate in a professional way. The frequency of meetings and who participate(s) when may vary through the process. Be aware that previous arrangements may need regular adjustment.</p>	<p>Be aware that the success of your project is a joint responsibility.</p> <p>It is your PhD project and you have a responsibility towards the success of the regular meetings with your supervisors. Take initiative to plan regular meetings. Be well prepared when meeting with your supervisors and ensure that your supervisors can be prepared, too.</p> <p>Make sure that you get the time you need from your supervisors while being aware of their time constraints.</p>
Be a team-player	<p>Be aware that your supervision includes team building.</p> <p>Supervision is by definition a joint enterprise: together with the other (co-) supervisor(s), you are a team. Make sure you define your roles and act as a team for your PhD candidate.</p> <p>If you supervise a team of young researchers, it is your task to balance the common good as well as each individual's needs. The division of tasks within the team is your responsibility. Train yourself as a team builder and be a team player yourself.</p> <p>Be aware that you combine different roles and responsibilities as a supervisor and a project leader.</p>	<p>Be aware that you are, with your research project, part of a team that can have various shapes and sizes.</p> <p>Doing research is teamwork. Apart from you and your supervisors, there may be other researchers involved. Define your contribution to the team that you are part of.</p> <p>Be willing to develop as a team player and to contribute to the teamwork that you are part of, be it the collaboration with your supervisors, your local research team, the research institute or the GSLS.</p>
Be part of the Graduate School	<p>Be aware that the PhD projects you supervise are part of the GSLS.</p> <p>The relationship between a supervisor and a PhD candidate can suffer from (perceived) interdependence. At the same time, the GSLS forms the larger</p>	<p>Be aware that your PhD journey is part of the GSLS.</p> <p>The relationship between a supervisor and a PhD candidate can suffer from (perceived) interdependence. Be aware of the larger context in which you work</p>

	<p>academic context in which you, as an academic supervisor, and your PhD candidate, as an academic researcher, work and relate to.</p> <p>Be aware of and commit to the rules and regulations of the GSLS as well as its expectations with respect to professionalism. Be aware of the responsibility the GSLS has towards the quality assurance of all PhD journeys. Please read the Quality Assurance Plan for more information.</p>	<p>as a PhD candidate and member of the GSLS.</p> <p>Be aware of the possibilities the GSLS offers in terms of professional development and support. The GSLS also offers support in cases of difficulties with regard to your supervision.</p>
Be consistent and clear	<p>Be aware that the (perception of) research progress should be discussed. Be open and realistic about your expectations.</p> <p>Doing research is, by definition, charting unknown territory. Your view on the best next step may change with the development of the project. Be honest about this and show ownership of your changing views. Remember what you say and advise.</p>	<p>Be aware that being honest about your progress is key to the success of your project. Be open about what you need and expect from your supervisors.</p> <p>Meetings are there to discuss progress as well as struggles and obstacles. Include your questions and uncertainties in the documents you prepare for your meetings. Make notes of the discussion and what next steps to take.</p>
Be time aware	<p>Be aware that realistic planning is essential for a PhD candidate.</p> <p>The plan as initially foreseen, will undoubtedly change during the course of the project. Be prepared for a change by thinking about a plan B when the original plan needs revision. Set short-term goals and celebrate the successes with your PhD candidate.</p> <p>Make certain that your PhD candidate knows what, in terms of thesis content, is sufficient to graduate.</p>	<p>Be aware that planning is one of the harder things to do in research and that the original plan is almost certainly going to change.</p> <p>Keep track of the time you spend on a particular issue. Discuss planning issues with your supervisor on a regular basis. Discuss short-term goals with your supervisor and celebrate your successes together.</p> <p>Be informed about the expected level and scope of your dissertation and be realistic about its contents. You will write a master proof, not your life's work.</p>
Be willing to receive feedback	<p>Be aware that feedback is a two-way exchange.</p>	<p>Be aware that receiving feedback is very helpful for your progress.</p>

	<p>You should expect feedback from your PhD candidate just as the latter expects it from you. Be open to the feedback you receive and take it seriously. If no feedback is given, ask for it. You are encouraged to do so a couple of times a year, and at a minimum, during the annual PhD progress meeting with the PhD candidate.</p> <p>Remember that your reaction to feedback will have an impact on the openness of your your with the PhD candidate.</p>	<p>Keep in mind that feedback is meant to help you and is not targeted against you as a person. Feedback is needed to advance your project. If it is not forthcoming, ask for it and use the feedback to your best advantage. Do not be afraid to ask for feedback at an early stage; this prevents you and your supervisor from going in separate directions.</p> <p>If you experience the feedback as unhelpful, reflect on it for a while (with others) and discuss it with your supervisor in a professional and inoffensive way.</p>
Be willing to give feedback	<p>Be aware that a PhD candidate needs regular feedback that has to be professional, objective, constructive, and balanced.</p> <p>Feedback may have a large (emotional) impact on a PhD candidate. Be cautious in choosing where and when to give feedback and be aware of the cultural/ethnic/gender/etc. variation in the research group. Employ language that is inclusive and not hurtful to people with different backgrounds and traditions. Positive feedback is as important as critical comments.</p>	<p>Be aware that your project will benefit from your feedback on the supervision.</p> <p>Supervision is meant to guide and accompany you through your PhD journey. You can contribute to your supervision by giving open feedback to your supervisors, always with respect and consideration.</p>
Be aware of stressors	<p>Be aware, that as a supervisor, you are a role model for your PhD candidate, also in terms of stress management and work-life balance.</p> <p>Be aware that your work attitudes are easily seen as a professional standard. Stimulate your PhD candidates to take breaks and set an example with your own practices.</p> <p>Be aware that your PhD candidate's personal life can affect their work and have an open ear for signals that might indicate (too much) stress.</p>	<p>Be aware that your life involves more than your work.</p> <p>Manage your stress level and respect your boundaries. Also talk to your colleagues and peers about their struggles with doing research. Sharing experiences may help make life as a PhD candidate more agreeable.</p> <p>Maintain communication with your supervisor and remember that your supervisor has followed the same path before you and can help you put things into perspective.</p>

<p>Be future-oriented</p>	<p>Be aware that your PhD candidates need stimulation to think about their career after graduation.</p> <p>Many PhD candidates focus on an academic career only, where jobs are rare and competition is fierce. Anxiety about future career development triggers and increases stress. You can make a difference in discussing this point timely and with well-balanced frequency with your PhD candidate.</p> <p>Make your professional network available to your PhD candidates.</p> <p>Help your PhD candidates become aware of different ways to explore the job market.</p>	<p>Be aware that you need to think about your post-graduation career.</p> <p>Consider your future career, in or outside academia. Spend some dedicated time on this issue. Pursuing a career in science can be stressful and is highly competitive, with fewer jobs in academia. Your supervisor knows you well and can advise you, including about the job market outside academia.</p> <p>Work on building and growing your network. Let the outside world know who you are.</p> <p>Invest time in (university-wide) career events.</p>
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