



UNIVERSITAT
ROVIRA i VIRGILI

The doctoral candidate's perspective on “engaging and training supervisors”

Dr. Alexandra
Samper Martínez

9th EUA-CDE Workshop
Doctoral Supervision – practices and responsibilities
Delft University of Technology
20 – 21 January 2016



Index



- Brief Introduction
- Starting Point
- Supervisors training – My impressions
- After Ercilia got trained
- My reactions and improvements
- My own learning from Ercilia's behaviour
- My own conclusions



Brief Introduction

- ▶ PhD program I belong to was in Tourism and Leisure at University Rovira i Virgili.
- ▶ Ercilia offered me to be part of a Leisure and Culture research project she was enrolled in.
- ▶ To start a new research line about Internet.
- ▶ The project was about social network games (SNGs). We decided to focus on the social side of SNGs.
- ▶ At the beginning we didn't know much about it. Today I am part of the most ambitious videogame independent studio nationwide



Starting Point

- ▶ PhDs when I arrived depended on other doctoral candidates than on supervisors to be guided.
- ▶ I created two PhD informal networks of students to give support to new doctoral candidates.
- ▶ Basically, doctoral candidates were lost because academic world and its rules are different from what is known before:
 - ▶ How to research?
 - ▶ What are international research standards?
 - ▶ How to teach?
 - ▶ How to be trained?
- ▶ There was the need for:
 - a transferable skills training program,
 - more involvement from supervisors in this regard,
 - the institutionalization of self-organized PhD supportive groups.
- ▶ After three years those networks weren't that necessary.

Supervisors training – My impressions

- My impression was supervisors were doing what they feel was enough
- General lack of involvement
- Many supervisors were supervising more doctoral candidates than what they could actually do
- Supervisors are the first and the key point in doctoral candidates' development as an academic professional
- Supervisors don't take into consideration the general collapse of the academic system - we should be ready to get a job outside the academic world
- It would be very much helpful to have supervisors trained from the very beginning

After Ercilia got trained

➤ Main changes

1. Relationship

- Empowerment – balance among personal and professional relationship, allowing a growing independence, roles have definitely changed. Nowadays I've got a partner.
- Enhanced communication – frequency, fluency.
- More focused on skills training – explaining in detail: her own experiences, how international standards work, creating solutions for my specific needs (e.g. I used to get lost in literature review, she invented a system to teach me abstract thinking).

2. Motivation – she became more supportive.

- She helped me to overcome personal frustrations (feeling of senseless, I was overtaxed, lack of prestige in the community).
- She understood even deeper my need to seek for support and the need to achieve my own independence. I started to build my own networks:
 - Academic networks – seek for external experts and new academic ties (e.g. mobility).
 - Professional networks – industry conferences, activities for knowledge transference.

- Main challenge → to progressively reconfigure our personal and professional relationship.



My reactions and improvements

- ▶ I've lost the fear of being proactive, taking initiatives – empowerment balance was the most important change that I was needing.
- ▶ I relied more on her professional side.
- ▶ I trusted her further and gave importance to her advice.
- ▶ I felt supported not just supervised.
- ▶ I improved doing what I felt was right (e.g. trying to publish in high-rated journals)
 - ▶ I've been recognized by the international scientific community – sense of self-achievement.
- ▶ I developed a professional network which allowed me to immediately get a job after the doctoral period.

My own learning from Ercilia's behaviour

- To enjoy the experience of becoming a doctor.
- Consciousness about all aspects of an academic career.
- To be involved with the institution and supervisees in a professional and personal way.
- To understand her responsibilities and work.
- To follow her example in order to become an effective and supportive supervisor.
- To be sensitive enough and to seek balance among personal and professional worlds, and among professional relationships
- I got fully aware that doctoral candidates supervision is one of the core tasks and responsibilities of being an academic – **I want to get trained.**

To guide, which means to be part of the same path



My own conclusions

Although many supervisors and doctoral candidates are getting committed through punctual initiatives...

- ▶ Institutional structure, at least at the URV, is not ready yet.
- ▶ Doctoral candidates supportive networks are not part of a collective culture.
- ▶ Supervisors' trainings on doctoral candidates supervision are not a regular practice and essentials are not fully implemented yet. Example: every single doctoral candidate has his/her own needs.

There are still tons of work, but I've felt part of an important and necessary change...



There is a general lack of AWARENESS.
Be conscious, be professional, get involved!