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# Ethics and supervision

## TRANSCRIPT

### Research Ethics Online Course

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1. Everyone is unique. At the doctoral level students are more diversified than in the earlier stages of study. Supervisors also all have their own interests, skills, limitations and personalities.
2. Preparation and transparency and willingness to work together are the keys to finding a way to work closely and productively with your supervisor. The supervision relationship is very important to the PhD journey, so it is worth your while to put in this effort as early as possible.
3. Before we dip into the practical tips for looking after your supervision relationship, let's discuss the potential for ethical challenges in the relationship. This will provide a frame within which the relationship building takes shape.
4. Most commonly the ethical challenges are born out of expectations as Erika Löfström mentioned in her video and her research - you can also find a link to one of her articles on ethics in supervision relationships below. The role expectations in an ethical sense are often questions of rights and responsibilities. When roles are poorly defined, we are likely to see growing number of ethical challenges around achieving the best outcome (beneficence), avoiding harm (non-maleficence), ability to make decisions (autonomy), keeping promises and respect (fidelity), as well as fair treatment of everyone (justice).
5. All of these challenges provoke us to consider what is expected of both parties in the student- supervisor relationship and what does it take to make it work. There is a direct link between the values we hold, how we develop a set of rights and responsibilities and how these get translated into role expectations. These values are important, as challenges in them usually develop into significant challenges on the PhD journey.
6. From the perspective of rights and responsibilities, the challenge is born when the student or the supervisor considers themselves to have a right that the other party has a matching responsibility to perform. For example a student may hold a belief that as a student she has a right to meet with the supervisor in a particular pattern. We usually become aware of role expectations when they are not met. This is often expressed in statements like: 'my supervisor is never available when I really need him' or 'he is just

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never around, I am left to sort everything out on my own.’ In this situation it is most likely that the supervisor has defined his responsibilities differently, possibly considering that PhD work is independent and assumed their appropriate role of support is far less regular or ‘hands-on’.

7. At the same time the supervisor may have a sense of right that the student takes responsibility for certain things like performing tasks other than those directly related to the PhD work, possibly expressed in terms of ‘I heard there had been a problem for months and I only heard about it today, why did they not tell me earlier that they are now behind in their research work’ or ‘the student is really unhappy when she is asked to contribute to helping others, but that is just what we do in this research group’. If you wish to explore your expectations, take the role perception scale for which you can find a link below. You may also explore the changes in the role expectations as you gain more experience through your PhD work.
8. Publishing results creates more challenging ethical questions related to rights. There are enough legends out there to let us believe that ownership of research data between students and supervisors can become challenging and this was also found in the research by Erika Löfström and Kirsi Pyhältö. Supervisors have been known to publish their students’ work/ideas in their own names, given results to other students to publish, or inviting authors in the papers their students have written.
9. This is when the power imbalance of supervisory relationship intersects different assumptions of rights and responsibilities with basic principles of research ethics. The situations are complex and require looking both at the relationship and the core ethical problems with these types of actions.
10. Role definition also invites us to consider our needs and preferences - what do you need to get your PhD done and from there you can ask, what is the supervisor responsible to provide me with. Everyone is different, some people wish for a close supervisory relationship that also nurtures their social needs, while others wish for a supervisor that would leave them alone and be there if there is a problem. Knowing what you need is an essential starting point.
11. A few years ago I asked Finnish PhD supervisors in an informal study what they most wanted from PhD students, and the overwhelming winner was ‘no surprises’. The supervisors wanted to know what was going on, what was needed, missing or troublesome. The key appears to be communication.
12. If your relationship with the supervisor is problematic, your first step is always to seek a way to discuss this with your supervisor. If you are not able to sort the challenges out together, please talk to someone else before the challenges turn to ethical problems. Another faculty member or someone at the graduate school is a good place to start.

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13. Below you can find tools to explore these questions in your supervision relationship. You may wish to complete a simple Role Perception scale to explore your own role expectations given below and possible share that with you supervisor and see how many areas will need further discussion.
  
  14. There is also a set of reflective questions for you to consider that are designed to help you to avoid the most commonly experienced ethical problems in the supervisory relationship as discovered by Löfström and Pyhältö (2014). There is also a document on effective supervision, which may help you to explore what you need and how the supervisor may be able to meet your needs.