

Workshop on “Stress management in research supervision”

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Petra Persson (HR) , Anna Mård (HR)

March 9, 2020

Workshop on “Stress management in research supervision”

Agenda

10:00-10:05 Welcome and short introduction, Ana Rusu, EECS vice-FA responsible for the ICT Doctoral Program

10:05-10:15 Survey Results, Sarunas Girdzijauskas, PA for the ICT Doctoral Program

10:15-11:00 Stress management in research supervision, Petra Persson and Anna Mård, HR Officers, EECS

11:00-11:15 Break

11:15-12:00 Stress management in research supervision - practical part, Petra Persson and Anna Mård, HR Officers, EECS.

Recruiting PhD Students

- Recruitment is key since it affects the quality of our personnel and our research.
- A PhD student is a major investment of your time and budget.
- Make sure that you select the right candidate, which is committed to pursue PhD studies and can graduate in 4-5 years (at 100% - 80% activity) and produce excellent theses.
- Evaluate the applications and interview the candidates together with other senior colleagues (at least with co-supervisors).
- Wrong decisions in the recruitment process led to short- and long-term issues, such as irritability, conflicts, changing main supervisor, human and financial costs, low-quality research, failure (students leaving their PhD studies without degree), etc.

Supervising PhD Students

- Supervisor should be a role model and a source of inspiration for PhD students.
- Create and maintain a fair, healthy and competitive environment.
- Build a fruitful student-supervisor relationship based on mutual respect, trust, cooperation and communication.
- Clarify expectations and requirements at an early stage.
- Meet your students regularly (in individual and in group meetings).
- Revise the ISP as its required, evaluate the student's progress and provide constructive feedback within acceptable time frame.
- Show interest in your PhD student development and career planning.
- Show that you care for your students' wellbeing (during covid-19 is even more important than in normal time).

Survey on Supervision and Working Environment at ICT Doctoral Program

Sarunas Girdzijauskas, PA

Background

- ICT Doctoral Council has prepared a survey for ICT doctoral students in order to identify potential issues on the **quality of doctoral supervision** and **working environment** within the ICT doctoral program.
 - Short survey, 8 questions, possibility to leave "free text" comments.
- The survey was open from April 30 to May 15th 2020 and received 48 anonymous replies (out of 95 current ICT doctoral students).
 - We did not separate by specialization, gender, phd year etc.

Survey Questions

1. Are all supervisors actively involved as is indicated in the ISP?

1. Main Supervisor : YES, Partially, NO, Can't answer, Comments
2. Co-Supervisor(s) : YES, Partially, NO, Can't answer, Comments

2. Do you get conflicting advice from your supervisors?

YES, Partially, NO, Comments

3. Do your supervisors clearly communicate their expectations?

YES, Partially, NO, Comments

4. Are your teaching/departamental duties aligned with the reported percentage in your ISP?

YES, Partially, NO, Comments (please comment to which extent)

5. Do your supervisors usually expect you to work overtime?

YES, Partially, NO, Comments

6. Do your supervisors care about your well being?

YES, Partially, NO, Comments

7. Have you experienced any work related mental-health issues (e.g., Insomnia, stress, burn-outs) during your PhD studies?

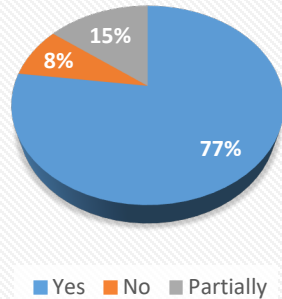
YES please comment to which extent, NO

8. How would you rate your supervision ?

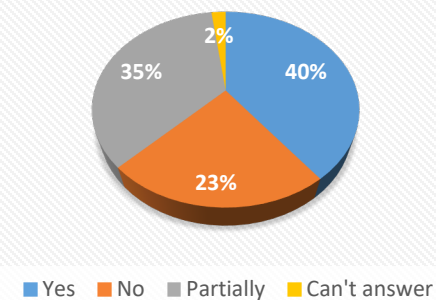
Satisfied, rather satisfied, rather not satisfied, not satisfied

Q1: Are all supervisors actively involved as is indicated in the ISP?

Q1.1 Is your main supervisor actively involved as indicated in the ISP



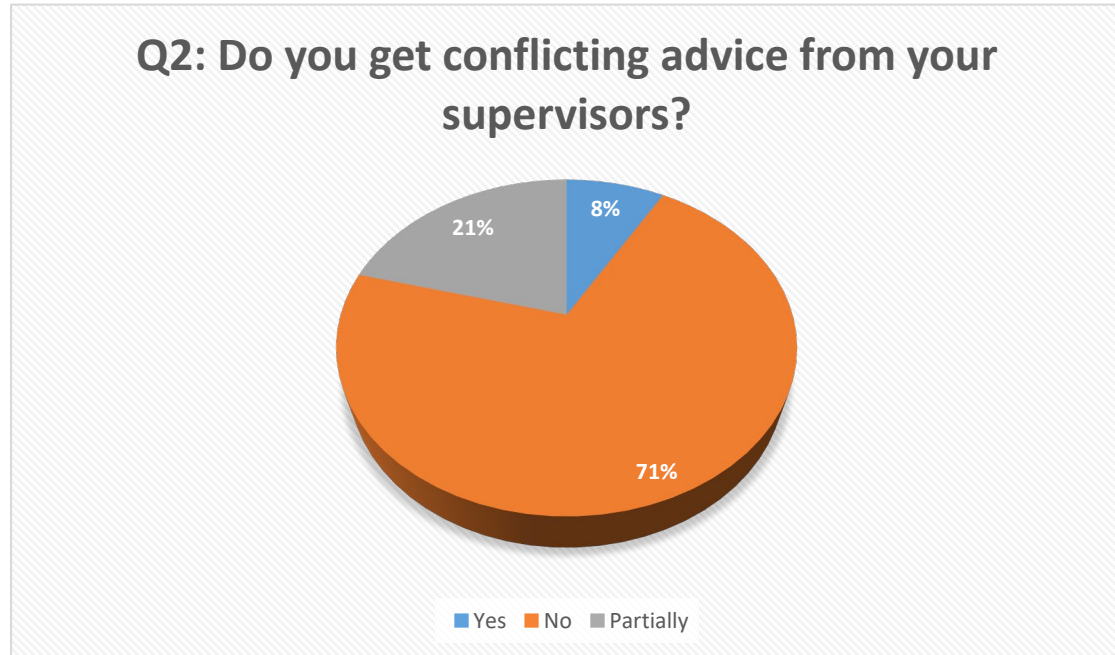
Q1.2: Is(are) your co-supervisor(s) actively involved as indicated in the ISP?



	Q1.1 Is your main supervisor actively involved as indicated in the ISP		Q1.2: Is(are) your co-supervisor(s) actively involved as indicated in the ISP?
Yes	37	Yes	19
No	4	No	11
Partially	7	Partially	17
	48	Can't answer	1
			48

- Summarize the free text answers:
 - Some students never met their co-supervisors
 - Negative and non constructive criticism from co-supervisors
 - Co-supervisors are not from students' research fields

Q2: Do you get conflicting advice from your supervisors?

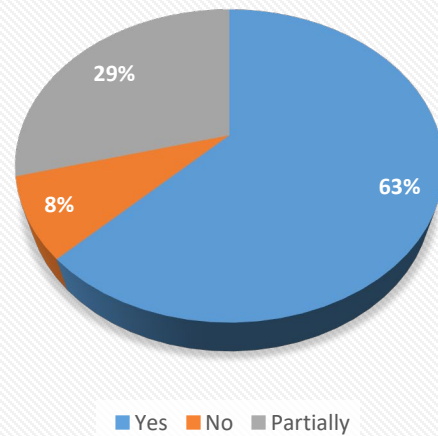


Q2: Do you get conflicting advice from your supervisors?	
Yes	4
No	34
Partially	10
	48

- Since most of the students rely on the main supervisor only, the free text answers **did not indicate many conflicting issues**
 - Those that get conflicting advice say that they sort them out (except one person)
 - *“Sometimes having many supervisors can be a problem.”*

Q3: Do your supervisors clearly communicate their expectations?

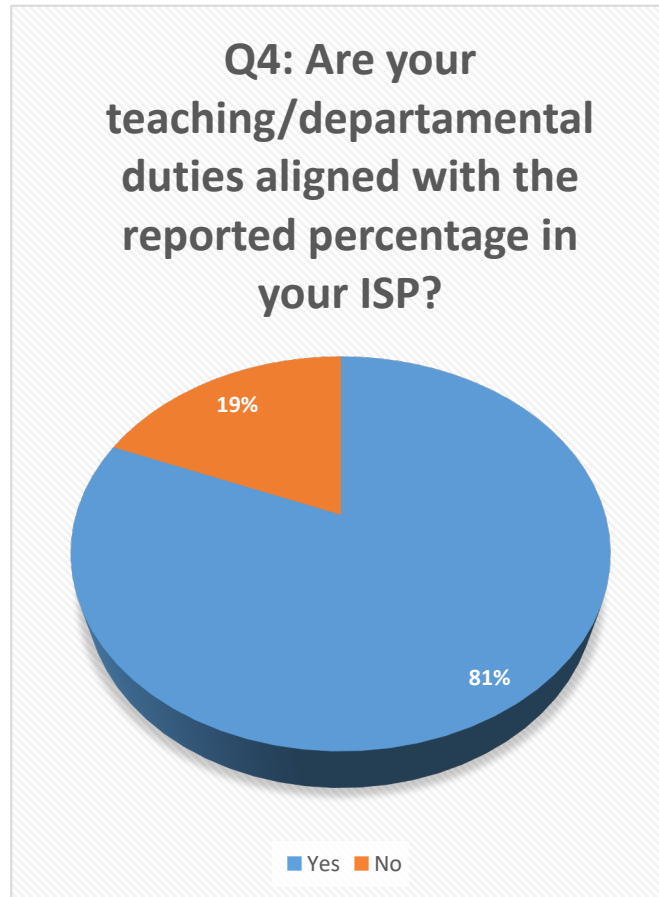
Q3: Do your supervisors clearly communicate their expectations?



Q3: Do your supervisors clearly communicate their expectations?	
Yes	30
No	4
Partially	14
	48

- Students with "No" replies did not provide free text answers.
- Summary of free-text answers:
 - **It would be better to have a quantifiable metric from the beginning** (i.e., the number of papers, conferences, etc.)
 - Expectations are clearly communicated but **the bar is set very high** which can lead to stress.

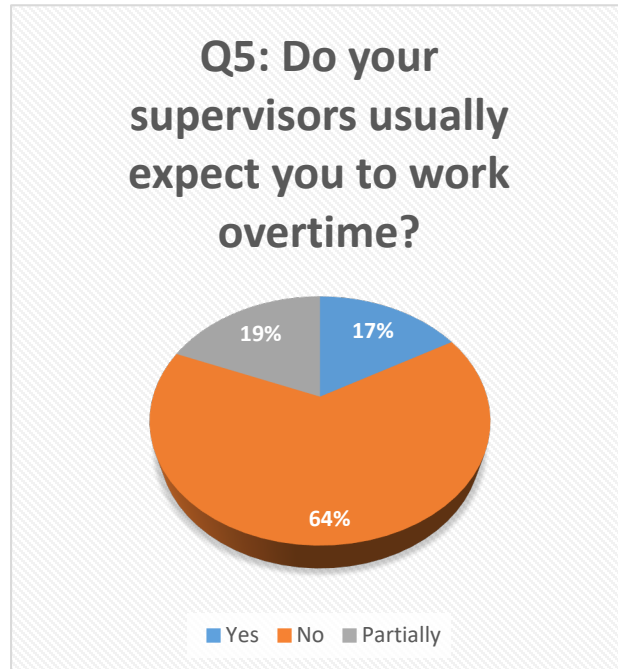
Q4: Are your teaching/departamental duties aligned with the reported percentage in your ISP?



Q4: Are your teaching/departamental duties aligned with the reported percentage in your ISP?	
Yes	39
No	9
	48

- Those students that said "No" believe that they are doing way beyond 20%
- Few excerpts:
 - "Way beyond the expectation in the eISP"
 - "I feel like I do more than I supposed to do"
 - "I am doing 10-15% more than what is expected of me however it is reflect as 20%"
 - "Significantly more than the 20%"
 - "Much more than that"

Q5: Do your supervisors usually expect you to work overtime?



Q5: Do your supervisors usually expect you to work overtime?	
Yes	8
No	31
Partially	9
	48

- Many students that answered in free-text seem to take it as a **norm to work overtime during their PhDs, especially around the deadlines.**
- Few excerpts:
 - “I don't think supervisors expect me to work overtime. But I normally work overtime to try to get things done before deadlines. “
 - “It seems to be expected to work overtime, especially close to deadlines. “
 - “My supervisor works a lot, so do not expect less from his students. “
 - “They don't expect me to, but I do it anyway. “
 - “I am happy with that “
 - “...**my supervisor genuinely care for my well-being** and continuously advices me to take breaks and never work overtime”

Q6: Do your supervisors care about your well-being?

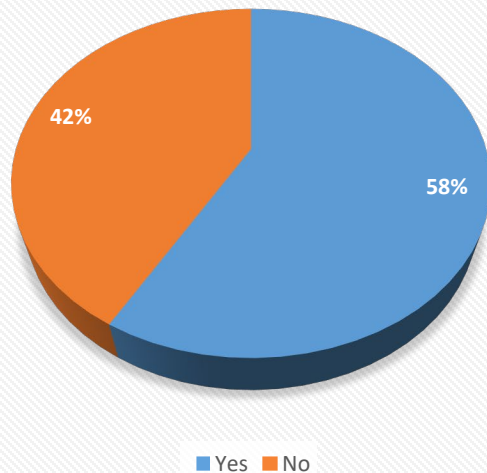


Q6: Do your supervisors care about your well-being?	
Yes	37
No	6
Partially	5
	48

- Very few free text answers on this question.
- “My supervisor is mostly focused on the research and results.”
- “...if I'm sick due to work-stress, it is not his/her problem”

Q7: Have you experienced any work related mental-health issues (e.g., Insomnia, stress, burn-outs) during your PhD studies?

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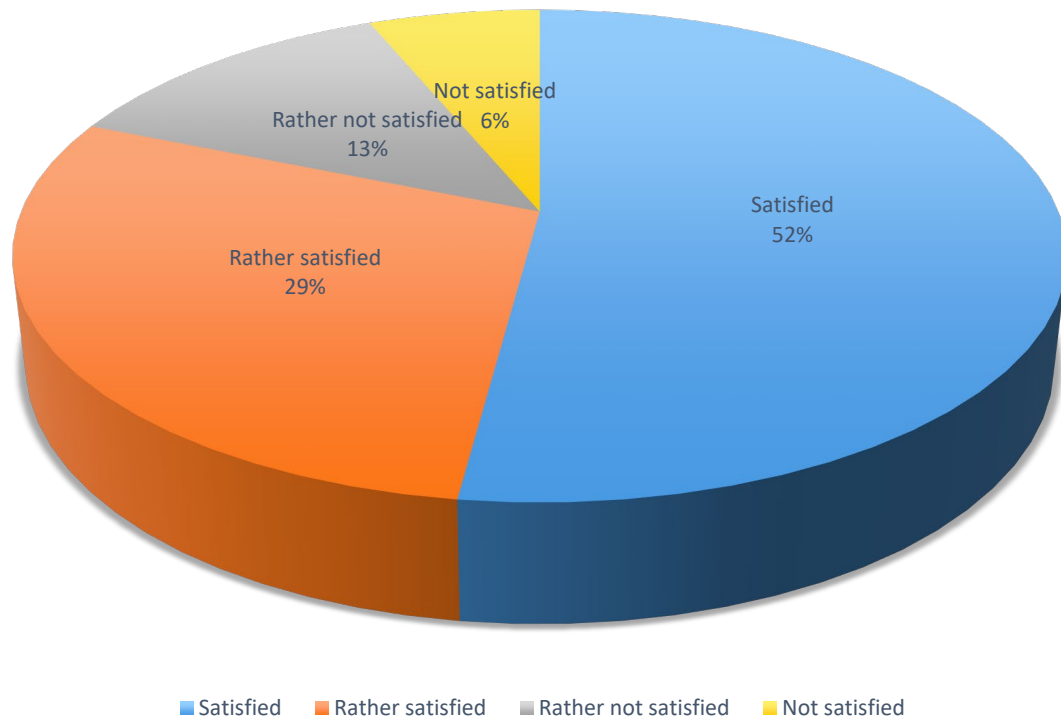


Q7: Have you experienced any work related mental-health issues (e.g., Insomnia, stress, burn-outs) during your PhD studies?	
Yes	28
No	20
	48

- **The most concerning numbers - 42% suffer from mental-health issues.**
- We got most "free text" answers for this question
- Summary:
 - Stress around deadlines and approaching end of PhD.
 - Stress due to overall workload and expectations
 - Multiple **Insomnia** cases due to work
 - " It has been months since I last got a good night's sleep"
 - **Reported Anxiety, stress, panic attacks, amnesia**
 - etc

Q8: How would you rate your supervision ?

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Q8: How would you rate your supervision ?

Satisfied	25
Rather satisfied	14
Rather not satisfied	6
Not satisfied	3
	48

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- Larger survey of PhD students
 - Enrolled between 2012-2016
 - Mostly graduated (71%)
 - 1586 phd students (46.5% response rate) from all around KTH
- **Favorable feedback for ICT program**
 - **Higher than KTH average** as well as **than other EECS doctoral programs** on the questions relating to the:
 - environment during doctoral studies;
 - constructive criticism by the main supervisor;
 - academic career guidance and leadership;
 - ability to carry out independent research;
 - no reports that any of ICT students were anyhow insulted in their study environment.
- Concerns:
 - At EECS only in ICT doctoral programme there were **changes of main supervisor due to student requests** (8% of cases)

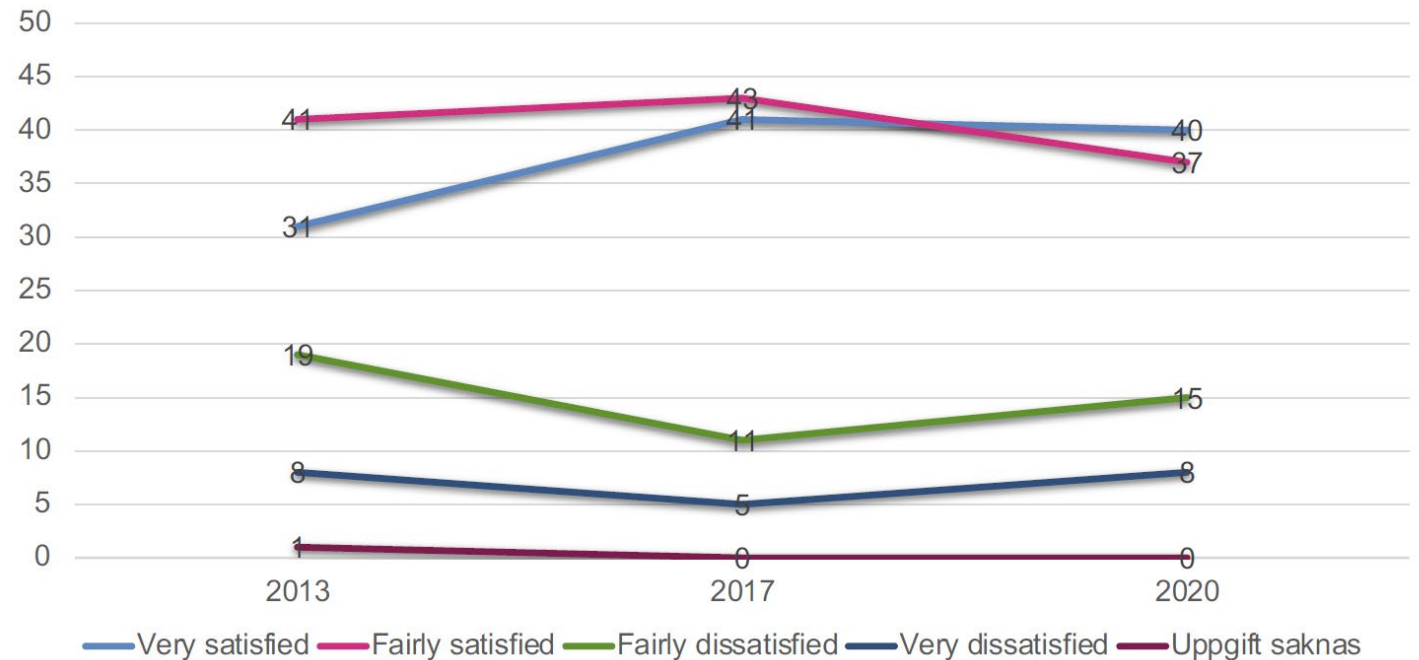
How satisfied are you with the supervision you had during your doctoral studies at KTH?

- Similar "positive" fraction (**very satisfied**+fairly satisfied) to our ICT survey

- **40**+**37** (77% at KTH)
- **34**+**41** (75% at EECS)
- **34**+**42** (76% at ICT)

vs

- **52**+**29** (81% at ICT in our survey)



Thank you!