Studying the supervision of PhD writing at a STEAM university – what's its WAC potential?

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Agenda of sorts

- Thanks for joining us!

- Introduction of examples to exemplify existing frameworks or approaches

- Data related to potential frameworks

- So what? Of any relevance to WAC?

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Support for supervisors at Chalmers University of Technology and Aalto University

Chalmers offers:

- Faculty training courses for
  Supervision of research
  Supervision of writing processes
  Writing to enhance learning

- The Division for language and communication also provides
  PhD Academic writing
  Introduction to writing for publication
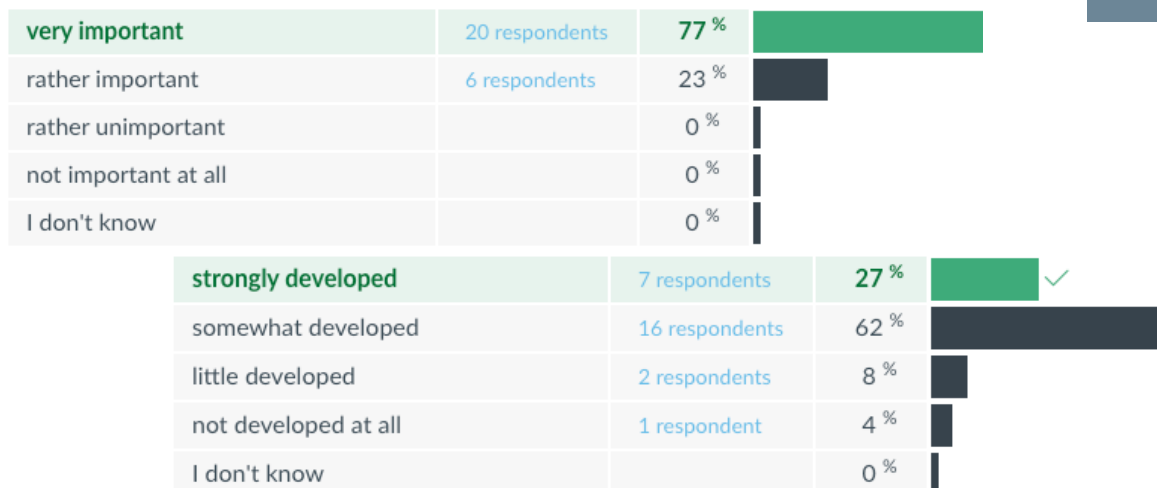
Aalto university offers its course for supervisors for the second time this term

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Communication (importance / skill)

very important	20 respondents	77 %	
rather important	6 respondents	23 %	
rather unimportant		0 %	
not important at all		0 %	
I don't know		0 %	

strongly developed	7 respondents	27 %	✓
somewhat developed	16 respondents	62 %	
little developed	2 respondents	8 %	
not developed at all	1 respondent	4 %	
I don't know		0 %	

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Writing support <> Thesis standard

Supervisor assists – students' own work

1 (fully agree with statement to the left)	3 respondents	13 %	✓
2	1 respondent	4 %	
3	4 respondents	17 %	
4	7 respondents	30 %	
5 (fully agree with statement to the right)	8 respondents	35 %	

Supervisor responsibility – student responsibility

1 (fully agree with statement to the left)	8 respondents	35 %	
2	8 respondents	35 %	
3	5 respondents	22 %	
4	2 respondents	9 %	
5 (fully agree with statement to the right)		0 %	

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What we'd like to study more…

The initial set of research question we want to investigate at this stage of the study includes three core concerns:

- How do established or semi-generic supervision models translate to our STEAM, English-Medium-Education, and intercultural context in terms of research and publication? (supervisor surveys, self-assessment plans, and reflective essays)

- What expectations do supervisors have of doctoral students and themselves in terms of research and publication? (surveys, self-assessment plans, and reflection essays)

- What are the potential tensions in division of labour between PhD students and supervisors for research and publication? (surveys of both supervisors and PhD students as well as self-assessment plans from both groups)

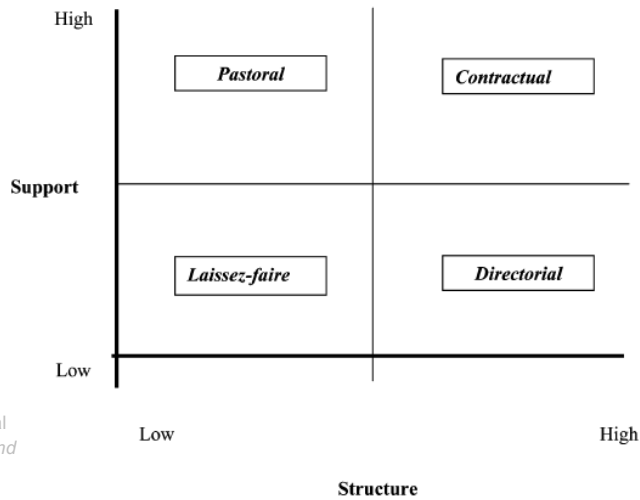**And today's focus – What is the WAC/WID potential of this faculty training?**

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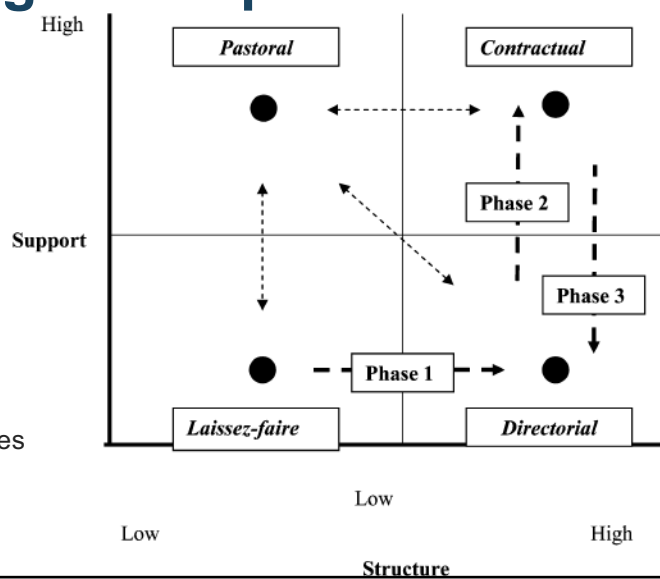# Gatfield: Modes of supervision

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Figure 3. Supervisory management grid

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Gatfield: Stages in supervision

According to Gatfield, the
phase 3 move back to
'directorial' can occur
specifically in the writing stages

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Lee: Foci and emphases in supervision

Functional	Enculturation	Critical thinking	Emancipation	Relationship development
Being proactive to keep in contact with candidates over a longer time frame	Supporting candidates to manage time and career pressures whilst learning how to do academic work	Engaging with the creation of new professional, transdisciplinary knowledge	Enabling candidates to cope with changes in identity from expert to student	Supporting the development of social (as well as intellectual) skills so they can become effective agents of change

- A suggestion that foci are situated and contextual and change over time
- Two datasets suggest that 'enculturation' gets ranked as less important and 'functional' as the most important when supervisors and candidates are asked to rank the foci
- No specific focus in the study on ERPP

Anne Lee (2018) How can we develop supervisors for the modern doctorate?, Studies in Higher Education, 43:5, 878-890, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2018.1438116

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What have we found so far?

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Current distribution of profiles

Data collection in today's presentation:
- 18 Reflective self-assessment plans from Chalmers supervisors
- 11 Reflective essays from Aalto supervisors

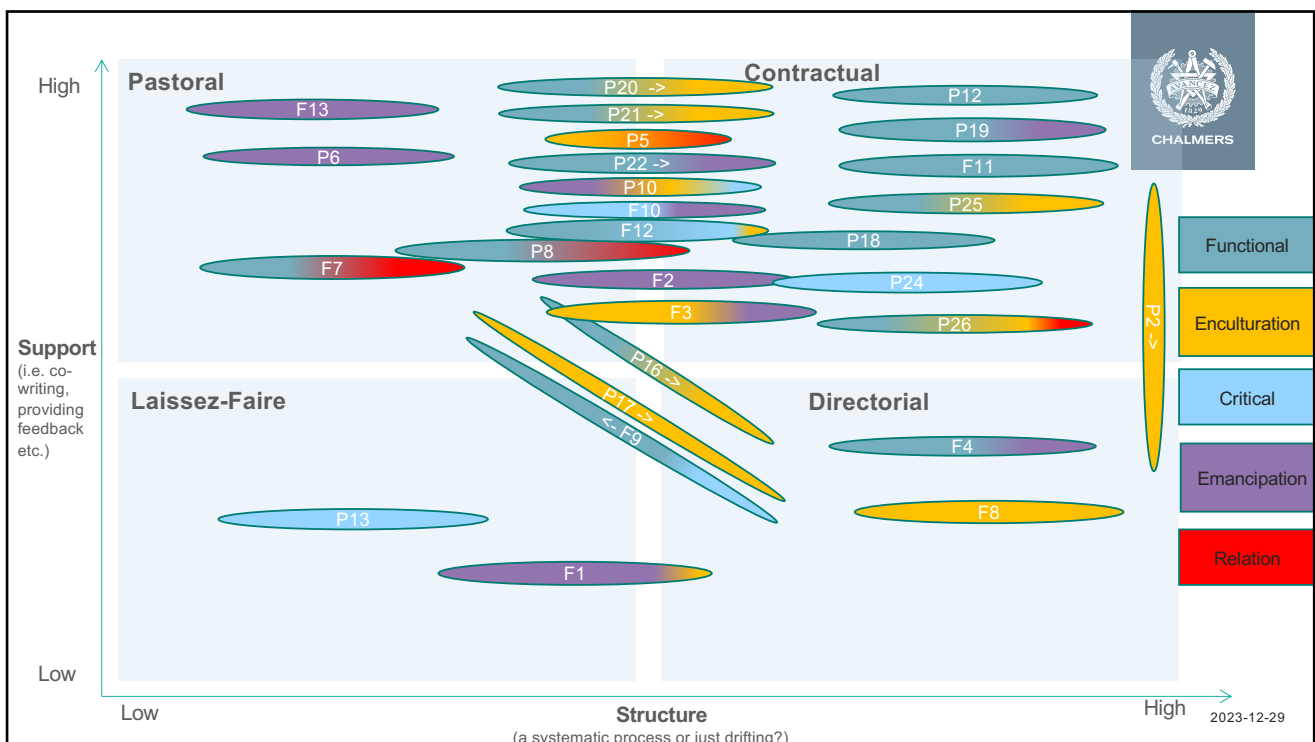Coding for the themes primed via the prompts for the assignments

- E.g experience, legacy, approach, challenges, writing process, learning, action

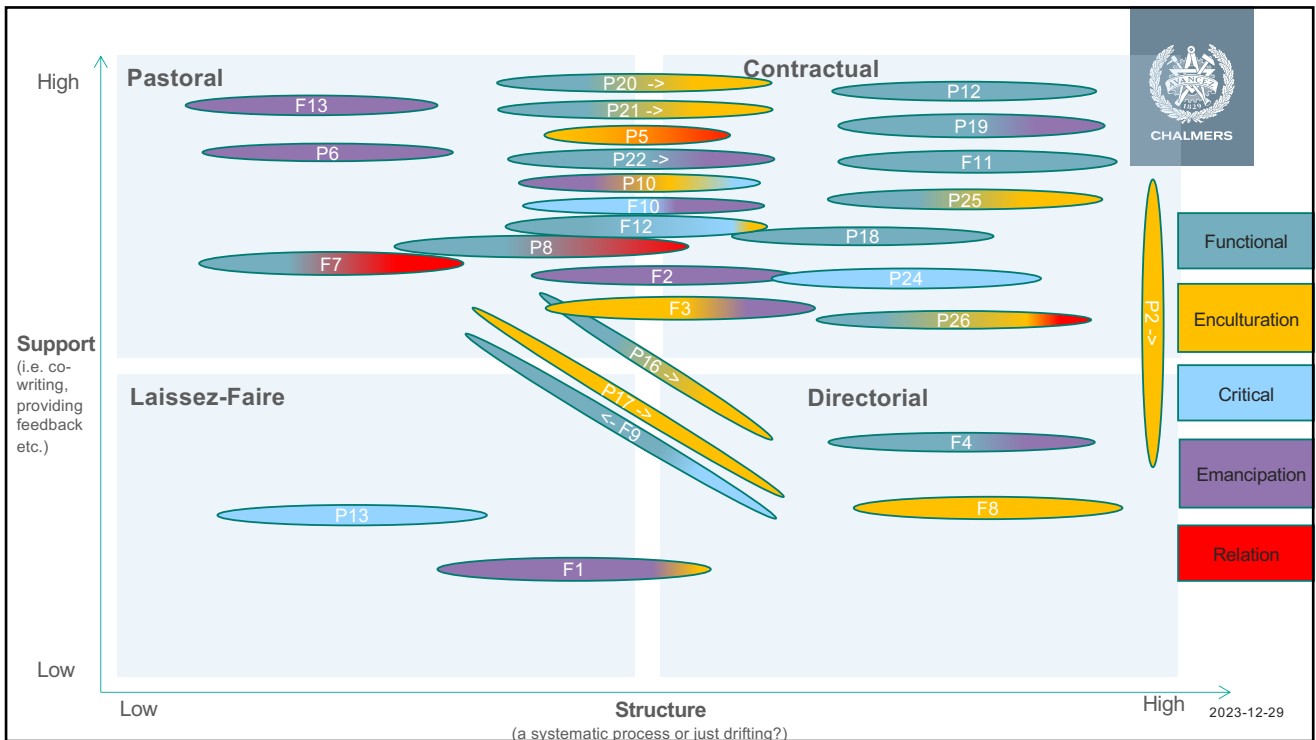Current focus in question 1 – are frameworks applicable or considered meaningful?

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So what?

Is this at all of any relevance to this wise community?

Why are you talking about this with us?
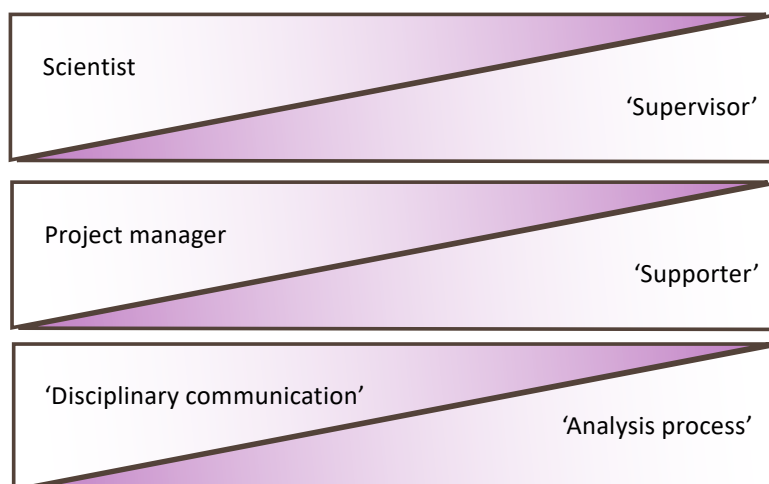
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A Chalmers supervisor's approach

A Chalmers supervisor-cum-co-author and her articulation of the roles during her supervision and publication processes in her self-assessment after a faculty training course for supervising writing and writing processes:

Table 1. Main roles and key tensions over the writing process.

Phase	Project manager	Scientist	Supporter	Key tension
1	Define *small enough* problems	Define *big enough* problems	Ensure the student owns the problem	Project manager defines *small enough* problems Scientist defines *big enough* problems
2	Complete research and deliver	Close all the vulnerabilities	Support the students' development	Scientist wants to explore all the vulnerabilities which make the research lengthy and be psychologically challenging for the student
3	Drive the project to completion on time, taking whatever role necessary	Ensure the article is complete and meets the journal requirements	Facilitate the student completing the article by coaching the student through submission	Project manager needs to ensure delivering the scientific product on time and the scientist needs to ensure it is high quality. The final push can be confusing and difficult for the student.

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Rationale: Balancing priorities

Scientist

'Supervisor'

Project manager

'Supporter'

'Disciplinary communication'

'Analysis process'

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A Chalmers text history: Issues

Basics and strategies from a self-assessment plan:

As a supervisor, Hildur starts the writing process early along with the first promising results and the project outline to generate a set of questions. She works by article sections with her PhD student and starts at methods and the introduction. The results section is comparatively simple in being largely descriptive, but in the first pre-print version, they had not quite arrived at a sufficient discussion section:

"[The] pre-print version had solid data and science, and had high quality in the introduction and first part of the results/discussion section, however the discussion regarding the later findings could be considered to be more analysis of the data and its implications within the particular project, rather than a discussion on implications for the broader scientific community."

Hildur articulates a weakness in the discussion section that was not understood by the PhD student.

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A Chalmers text history: Issues II

"our communication failed along the way. I did not follow up in detail on the timeline and minor deadlines. I asked the wrong questions and did not micromanage enough to ensure we were on the same page. At a certain stage I had the impression that we had final results, when we actually didn't. **I interpreted her answer "Yes we have the results", as actually having the analysis done, whereas she was referring to "Yes we have the data collected", but she hadn't realized how long it would take to get the actual results**. … Her background and experience made her a well-informed writer in the way she made data commentary, critically analyzed data, and how to articulate and express an argument with sound evidence. **The student's issues were instead how to limit the scope of the argumentation, expressing herself in a coherent manner, and making the strategic choices on what to present and how to present it, the more analytical stage of writing**"

We believe Hildur articulates stages in PhD writing development that are known but might not have quick fixes.

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Closing comments and discussion

These are our (current) questions

• How do established or semi-generic supervision models for / of supervision translate to our STEAM, EME, and intercultural context in terms of research and publication?

• What expectations do supervisors have of doctoral students and themselves in terms of research and publication?

• What are the potential tensions in division of labour between PhD students and supervisors for research and publication?

Right now, we aim to formalise and tighten the study and apply for funding to pursue it.

Is this at all to your WAC-liking? Can information like this inform your practice, your faculty training etc?

What's really stupid here and what might be worth keeping from a WAC-perspective?

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