The Communication Guide

PhD student and supervisor!

Congratulations to the both of you, for starting a new exciting research collaboration!

The next couple of years will be filled with ground-breaking research, fruitful collaboration, laughter and hard work. One of the most frequently occurring elements during the PhD period is communication; writing papers, giving oral presentations at conferences, decision making with collaborators and at last but not the least: the communication between the PhD student and the supervisor.

The factors for productive teams have been published within the research area of organizational development and the key factors described for productive teams are: members are clear about group goals; the team receive, gives and uses feedback about its effectiveness and productivity. As obvious as it seems, translating words into practise is sometimes harder than one might think. A support in the development of your team as PhD student and supervisor, is this communication guide.

Why should I use the communication guide?

During the doctoral studies, it is essential that communication and expectations between PhD student and supervisor are clear and realistic. The need of supervision changes during the PhD period. It is therefore of importance that the PhD student and the supervisor take mutual responsibility in the communication and collaboration. The purpose of the communication guide is to stimulate the dialogue on these subjects.

How should we use it?

The communication guide will be discussed by the PhD student together with the main supervisor and/or a co-supervisor. It is recommended that this is done during the first three months. It is then recommended that the communication guide is discussed and rewritten at least yearly. Some of the questions might be difficult to answer the first year of the PhD studies. The communication guide should be regarded as a “living document” where the answers in the guide will evolve during the PhD period. During the development of the communication guide, PhD students newly accepted and those who were about to defend their thesis, and supervisors with different experiences of supervision took part in the evaluation of the guide. Both groups found it very useful (see the report “Kommunikationsrapport”).

The communication guide was written by Patricia Wennerstrand as part of a communication project at the Department of Physics, Chemistry and Biology (IFM) during autumn 2013 and spring 2014. The work was summarized in a report (in Swedish) available at https://people.ifm.liu.se/stekl/kommunikationsrapport.pdf The attachments are more than 200 pages and can be received by contacting stefan.welin.klintstrom@liu.se

The use of the communication guide is voluntarily. There are also other ways to receive the same result. Eg, in the course “Research supervision – Advanced Course in Higher Education Pedagogy” provided by Didacticum, LiU, the supervisors will learn about a so called Supervisory contract.

Some information relevant for these discussions can be found at: http://www.ifm.liu.se/edu/graduate/ and at http://www.lith.liu.se/forskarutbildning?l=en As a start, read the guidelines for supervision of a PhD student and discuss them: http://www.ifm.liu.se/edu/graduate/handledning/ The guide can be found on the next page.

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Expectations
What kind of expectations do the PhD student have on the supervisor?
What kind of expectations do the supervisor have on the PhD student?
For info on this, see http://www.ifm.liu.se/edu/graduate/handledning/
What are your primary motivations in your work (both the PhD Student and the Supervisor)?
How do you deal with setbacks (both the PhD Student and the Supervisor)?

Supervision
How frequently do you plan to have supervisory meetings?
How are the PhD student and the supervisor expected to prepare in advance before the supervisory meetings?
When are you available for work or contact? In which contact form?
What are the roles of your supervisor and your co-supervisor/s?

Project
What kind of project decisions should be decided by the PhD student and by the supervisor, respectively? What kind of decisions should be made jointly (minor or major decisions)?
What are the PhD student and the supervisor’s responsibilities internally/externally in a joint project?
Supervision of master thesis students or external collaborators (e.g. PhD students or Post docs)? What parts in the project will be handled by the PhD student and by the supervisor respectively?
What is your opinion on the writing of scientific papers currently in pipeline?
Whom apart from the main supervisor is available for scientific advices and daily practical questions?

Feedback
(Remember that the questions are aimed to stimulate a discussion)
Do you give positive and/or negative feedback concerning the work effort or the ability to collaborate? If so, in which situations?
In what way do you prefer to give and receive feedback?
Are you good at giving and taking feedback?
How will the feedback on written manuscripts be organized? What time frames?

Teaching and courses
How do you balance research in relation to teaching and courses?

The last questions are to be answered by the PhD student from the second year of the PhD studies
Reflect upon your accomplishments developed during the last year
Reflect upon how the supervision and how the collaboration with you supervisor has developed during the past year regarding, supervision, feedback, project planning, expectations, teaching and courses. Is something in need of a change in your collaboration?