

# Novice Doctoral Supervision in South Africa: An Autoethnographic Approach

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Received: September 2, 2021

Accepted: October 22, 2021

Online Published: October 29, 2021

doi:10.5430/ijhe.v11n2p135

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v11n2p135>

## Abstract

This paper presents an autoethnographic, narrative analysis through self-reflection of my own personal transition from doctoral student to doctoral supervisor. An evaluation of the importance of the PhD in South Africa, the role of doctoral supervisors, and characteristics of good supervisors was undertaken; against which my personal experience was assessed. This paper was important in challenging whether institutions of higher learning in the country are adequately preparing young academics to become independent, effective doctoral supervisors. Some of my recommendations include the need for universities to come up with PhD supervision development programmes, as well as to consider alternative supervision models so as to facilitate mentorship of new doctoral supervisors, to ensure the attainment of PhD standards. The limitations of this paper are that, the researcher and subject, are one and the same person, hence there may be concerns of objectivity.

**Keywords:** novice, doctoral supervision, university, autoethnography, narrative analysis, South Africa

## 1. Introduction

When one finally attains their own PhD qualification, they are overcome with a sense of relief. The realization that you have completed what seemed like a never-ending and daunting journey, can now enjoy many hours of sleep without having to get up in the dead of the night to write down ideas that creep up on you like a thief, is indescribable. However, as quickly as you celebrate, as equally fast does reality hit home – you are now expected to do unto others, what has been done for you: supervise PhDs. As a new doctoral degree holder, who may possibly even never have published, nor supervised a Masters' degree student, many questions arise. Am I ready? Can I do this? What exactly is expected of me? What is the role of the PhD supervisor? Will I make a good PhD supervisor? Will I be taught or mentored on how to supervise?

This paper seeks to examine doctoral supervision for novices through the transition from PhD student to PhD supervisor for young academics, by using autoethnographic analysis. Using existing scholarly literature, supported with the narration of the author's personal experience - we will discuss the transitional journey from one side of the fence, to the other, by first considering the role of a PhD in the South African context, the role of the supervisor, characteristics of a good PhD supervisor, and sharing my own personal experience as a novice supervisor. The paper ends with recommendations to improve the experience of a novice doctoral supervisor within the tertiary education space.

## 2. Literature Review

Despite the relative importance of the doctoral qualification, many young academics are expected to become supervisors of doctoral candidates, shortly after completing their own studies (Turner, 2015). Such academics often lack the acumen to produce quality PhD graduates largely due to inexperience, the absence of a transition structure within the institution to provide them with guidance, support, and mentorship and supervision personal development. As such, these new PhD supervisors resort to using their own personal experiences to guide them in their new role as supervisors (Lessing, 2011; Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009).

Doctoral supervision has been identified as one of the underlying factors that impact on completion and attrition rates of the doctoral degree. Hence, the role of supervision should not be taken lightly by higher education institutions (HEIs), nor those mandated with the responsibility to supervise doctoral students. In addition, HEIs should also play

their part by not overburdening the existing supervisors. A doctoral degree from inception to completion can take up to four years, or longer in some instances. This requires both the supervisor and supervisee (doctoral candidate) to establish and maintain a relationship for that period of time, a difficult task oftentimes; also while continuing with their day to day lives and tasks.

### 2.1 The Role of the PhD in South Africa

According to Duke and Denicolo (2017), globally, there has been increasing awareness and acknowledgement by governments of the value derived from an increase in doctoral graduates. The PhD was identified and recognized as a contributor towards economic development and integration of South Africa into the global sphere by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the National Research Fund (NRF) in 2007 (Herman, 2012). Since then, there has been an initiative by the Government, as part of the National Development Plan 2030 agenda, to substantially increase the number of PhDs produced in the country, particularly in the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

In addition to this, Mouton and Frick (2019) identified five policy discourses that augment these plans – the need for more PhDs, i.e. quantity; the transformation agenda; efficiency; quality and internationalization. While these may be plausible targets, universities in South Africa have found themselves under immense pressure to meet the proposed targets at whatever cost. There are not enough qualified academics required to produce the increasing number of PhD graduates. Also, the transformation agenda has been criticized by some quarters as resulting in lower quality PhD graduates being produced just to tick the right boxes.

The production of a PhD can thus be summarized as seeking to serve three main purposes: contribution to knowledge through the production of original research; doctoral graduates should become substantial subject knowledge in their respective fields; and a doctorate should result in professional and other competencies for use in one's area of specialization (Botha, 2019; Nerad, 2009). In order to achieve these targets, experienced supervisors are required to oversee the doctoral journey of students aiming to expand their own knowledge base, improve their career growth opportunities, and seeking to achieve their self-actualisation goals. Understanding the role of the PhD ensures that supervisors' mindsets are aligned to the institutional objectives and targets set.

### 2.2 The Role of the PhD Supervisor

Lessing (2011) described postgraduate supervision as the guidance of a doctoral candidate in their quest to undertake independent, quality research, to not only earn an appropriate postgraduate degree, but also to become a recognized subject specialist in their respective fields. Thus, successful PhD supervision requires ongoing interaction between the supervisor and student from inception of the project to completion. In this process, the supervisor is thus expected to wear several hats and juggle several roles. Brown and Atkins (1988) identified eleven key roles of doctoral supervisors. These include:

- A *director* that assists with the identification and fine-tuning of a researchable topic, and appropriate methodology;
- A *facilitator* who will provide opportunities to tap into resources, networks, as well as subject expertise;
- An *adviser* to provide guidance and assistance with technical problems;
- A *teacher* to expose the student to various research methodologies and techniques, academic writing, use of research databases, and related activities;
- A *guide* to hold the student's hand through the process of writing the proposal and respective chapters, coming up with a reasonable timeline with regard to expected milestones and time to completion, as well as advise on data collection and analysis;
- A *critic* who will give honest, timeous, constructive feedback on submitted work or ideas exchanged;
- A *freedom giver* that will be flexible enough to allow the student to explore the doctoral journey independently;
- A *supporter* who will remain committed to the project ahead, and constantly encourage the student;
- A *friend* that will extend an ear to listen and shoulder to cry on for matters that affect the student's wellbeing, particularly those of a non-academic nature;
- A *manager* that will oversee the project from inception to completion, periodically checking and monitoring progress; and
- An *examiner* who will provide the student with access to vital materials on pitfalls to avoid during the

doctoral process, for example such as mock *viva voce*, access to anonymized examiners' reports for other students, as well as encourage the student to attend and present their work in progress at conferences where it can be critiqued by independent audiences. In this case, the supervisor is almost equal to the devil's advocate.

Hallberg, Hjort, Löndahl, Magnusson, and Törmänen (2012) further averred that supervisors are considered a mentor, teacher, friend, parent, supporter, motivator, financier, project manager, critical reader, advisor, confidante, voice of reason to the student; all the while also carrying out their other key tasks of tuition, community engagement, academic citizenship, academic leadership, and own specialist research. Akala (2021), as well as Alfermann, Holl, and Reimann (2021) also advocated that the student-supervisor relationship plays a critical role in ensuring a successful completion of the journey. This they attributed to the multiple roles played by the supervisor as advisor, supporter and mentor.

For the more experienced Professors, this may now be an easy journey to navigate, but for the novice doctoral supervisor – it can be overwhelming. Some of the roles listed above, require some level of experience within academia itself. For example, the ability to provide financial support to PhD students means the supervisor should be aware of various funding opportunities, be able to successfully apply for grant money from not-for-profit organizations, government research funding bodies, and the private sector. This in itself requires experience in grant identification and writing of such applications. In South Africa for instance, the National Research Foundation (NRF) invites applications for competitive funding on an annual basis, for postgraduate students and academics alike. The bulk of the applicants and eventual recipients are established scholars with a long academic career, and established publication record.

### 2.3 Characteristics of A Good Supervisor

Oftentimes, young academics who have recently graduated with their doctorates are thrown into the deep-end, insofar as postgraduate supervision is concerned. As soon as news that one has graduated and now holds a PhD qualification fills the corridors, there is excitement that the workload on the few faculty members qualified enough to undertake doctoral supervision will be eased. Not wanting to disappoint, or be labelled as lazy or a “transformation PhD holder”, these young academics will accept PhD candidates for supervision. But the question still remains: what makes one a good PhD supervisor, and how does one learn to be a good supervisor?

As already mentioned above, the role of a supervisor shapes a person. González-Ocampo and Castelló (2019) advocated that a good supervisor should be able to provide academic and personal emotional support, possess reliable research skills, have adequate knowledge of available software in their field, be a subject specialist, and have access to resources (financial and others). A doctoral supervisor thus needs to be emotionally mature; a good reader and listener; possess specialist subject knowledge; possess good understanding of various methodological approaches; be empathetic; and firm, amongst others. Further, supervisors need to have good project management skills which account for finances, time, and other resources.

A perfect PhD is never complete, but the ability to shape a student's topic, direct their research trajectory, ensure that their research objectives are attainable, underpin their contribution to knowledge, ensure that appropriate methodology has been identified, provision of timeous and constructive feedback, and that the project is realistic and can be completed within the minimum prescribed period, are some of the attributes of a sought-after supervisor.

Amundsen and McAlpine (2009) provided evidence of how the role of supervision is learned. Their findings included that supervision learning came from:

- experience as a student – supervising the way that one was supervised during their own doctoral candidate journey;
- experience as a supervisor – using your previous experience in supervision gained from having supervised a Masters' degree to completion;
- learning from colleagues – this is mentoring through co-supervision, as well as gaining experience from opportunities to serve as an internal or external examiner of Masters' dissertations.

According to Halse (2011), universities have a “silent” code on doctoral supervision. Universities prefer to glamorize the doctoral supervision, yet in reality many experienced professors admit that learning to supervise took place “on-the-job”, similar to apprenticeships. González-Ocampo and Castelló (2019) also reiterated the notion that the majority of supervisors learnt the supervision role from their own personal experiences as doctoral students. Over time, experience is gained and confidence in supervision increases, thus improving the quality of doctoral

supervision. This paper therefore examines my own personal experience on learning to supervise doctoral students as a novice, which actually incorporates all of the above perspectives.

### 3. Methodology

Chang (2013) acknowledged that there has been growing recognition of autoethnography as a form of research method across and within several academic disciplines including social sciences, education, leadership, management, the arts, amongst others. According to Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis (2015), autoethnography is a qualitative research method that uses the personal experience (“auto”) to describe and interpret (“graphy”) experiences, beliefs, and practices (“ethno”). In autoethnographic studies, the researcher is the source of primary data, as they share evidence based on personal experiences.

Similar to the scholarly work of Daramola (2021), this paper adopted autoethnography as a form of qualitative research. This methodological approach was deemed appropriate in this instance since it presents a retrospective account of my journey as a novice doctoral supervisor at a South African university, based on my real life lived experiences. The shortcomings of this approach are that it has limited generalisability, since the author is at the centre of the research. Further, it may lead to bias, as the author is unlikely to be critical of self. Nonetheless, autoethnography is a plausible research methodology because the author writes authentically, is emotionally and mentally engaged, and highly personal.

According to Chang (2013), an autoethnographic approach to research goes beyond sharing personal stories, but rather aims to present a critical, analytical and interpretive perspective on emerging trends in the researcher’s field. As such, data was collected through retrospective reflection, and is presented in the form of a narrative analysis of my journey as a novice doctoral supervisor in South Africa.

### 4. Autoethnographic Account

Having attained my own PhD in December 2016, while on a three year sabbatical from work – I was faced with many challenges. I had been out of the university system for 36 months pursuing my PhD on a fulltime basis, and had thus long forgotten a lot of the policies and systems used at my institution, which offers online, long distance tuition only. Returning to the office in January 2017, I was given a number of modules to teach. In addition to this, I was roped into several committees, was expected to be involved in institutional initiatives that involved the communities around us, publish my own research, and yes – supervise postgraduate students. I had no experience whatsoever in this task. The closest I had done in terms of student supervision was limited to my involvement in “supervising” the honours research module students, prior to 2014. The honours research module supervision process was involving as it required one to take students through the background and contextualization of the research project, conduct literature review, formulate an appropriate methodology, collect and analyse data, and write up the discussion and conclusion thereof. The end product was a complete research paper of approximately 30 to 40 pages, for which I was both supervisor and examiner; it thus differed from Masters and Doctoral supervision in that respect.

My own PhD is in the field of Finance. I do not hold a formal teaching qualification. Hence at the start of my doctoral supervision journey, the only experience I had was that of having been on the other side as a doctoral student. So, when the opportunity to supervise arose, the novice PhD graduate in me took the bull by the horns. I was allocated a Masters’ student (ZM) that a colleague had previously been supervising, but there was no progress. In addition to this, I was allocated another Masters’ student (VA) that was also struggling to complete his studies. The latter student was for co-supervision with the most experienced Professor in the Department. On realization that I was an under-utilised asset in the department that already had very few supervisors, I was allocated a PhD student (FK) for co-supervision with the same Professor as for the Masters’ dissertation co-supervision student. However, FK’s topic was in a field that I neither had experience in nor any interest. However, as a new doctoral supervisor who was eager to learn - I accepted the tasks, and had to give off my best; not for me, but for the students as well whose academic futures had been entrusted in me. Within twelve months, ZM and VA had completed their Masters’ degrees. FK, on the other hand, was and still is struggling, to make progress with his studies. This is partially attributable to that he selected a topic that he had no background or prior exposure to, but because he wanted to be supervised by a specific Professor – he chose a topic in the Professor’s domain; a trap that many PhD students continue to fall into.

Supervision styles differ. Throughout my basic and tertiary education years, I have never been an enthusiast of group work. Hence, when I had to co-supervise these postgraduate students – I struggled. There were personality clashes, and both supervisors would give the students conflicting feedback. There was no agreement nor structure on how we would handle the supervision collectively. Thus, I would back down as the junior academic and novice supervisor, and the students would go with the Professor’s feedback.

After graduating my own sole supervised Masters' student in 2018, I became eligible to recruit and select my own PhD students for sole supervision. This was a welcome gesture, but was I ready? Most definitely I believed that I was. I had undergone a difficult personal PhD journey. My own journey was a lonely one. I would submit my work and receive timeous feedback. I would also annually present my work in progress at formal colloquia, until I submitted the final thesis for examination. But that was about all the supervision I received. I authored and submitted articles on my own; I wrote and presented conference papers by myself; I sourced funding on my own; I established my own network of people to know in the field. My experience as a student indirectly prepared me to be a doctoral supervisor. I learnt through a lived experience. As a student, I had my own expectations from my supervisor, many of which were not fulfilled. I did not want to be that person in the future. I wanted to be more than accessible, more than that supervisor that gives prompt feedback...I wanted my students to enjoy their doctoral student experience, with me playing the role of that supervisor that made an effort to be there for them in the manner that a student would need support in the current academic environment. Moreover, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, doctoral students have been derailed for various reasons, including struggling to find a life-work balance after lockdown forced them to work from home. Others were inflicted with the corona virus which left them ill, weak and unable to focus on their academic work for several months, while some lost loved ones and needed time to grieve and heal. The mental burden of COVID-19 on doctoral students continues to unfold. Besides being an academic mentor, I also became a friend, an advisor, a supporter. Today, I can proudly say that, beyond the generic doctoral supervisor roles', I have assisted students to source funding, we have co-authored articles to give them a head start in their publishing journeys, and we have present papers at conferences. Doctoral supervision in higher education requires team effort and adhesion between the student and supervisor, because their gain is also my gain at the end of the day.

From a personal development perspective, I think my greatest contribution towards being a PhD supervisor came from my role as an examiner of Masters' dissertations and PhD theses for several universities. To be appointed as an external examiner to assess entire dissertations and theses, and write external examiners' reports is a big task. On the one hand, I had made it into the elite club of recognized academics in my field. There was growing recognition of my existence through my pre-PhD publications, and the networks I had become part of, largely from conferences. On the other hand, the responsibility of examining Masters' and Doctoral theses is daunting because you essentially hold a student's future in your hands. Over time, I matured in my role as an examiner, and my confidence strengthened. I used this examiner's experience to further guide my postgraduate students accordingly. I studied other examiners' reports (including my own from my PhD studies) to understand the main aspects that were highlighted as challenging or areas of weakness for PhD candidates, and used these to crosscheck and ensure that my own students avoid those pitfalls. Needless to say, in 2019 I successfully graduated one doctoral student (an "orphan" that I adopted after he was abandoned in the process by his original supervisor), and similarly graduated another doctoral candidate in early 2021. At present, I have six sole supervised PhD candidates, and a further seven being co-supervised. This is not a bad record for someone that only began this supervision role in 2017.

I am grateful for my own experience as a PhD candidate, which moulded me and gave me the basic skills that I required to transition to become a supervisor. As an advocate of skills transfer, I am mentoring two junior staff members through a co-supervision arrangement to share the skills that I have acquired over the years. According to the review literature, there are three routes of learning to be a supervisor; I learnt through my personal experience as a PhD candidate, as well as partial mentoring by a senior Professor. I am now affording future supervisors the opportunity to be mentored in their learning process as they acquire skills to become seasoned postgraduate supervisors.

While acknowledging that some strides have been by universities to empower and prepare academics to be good supervisors, more can still be done. Supervision is a multi-faceted role which requires one to be exposed to supervision skills, ethics, and methodology, amongst others. Personally as a supervisor, some of the best courses that I attended were facilitated by retired Professors. For instance, the late Professor Chris Kaap provided an intensive week-long workshop on postgraduate supervision and assessment at a remote location in the Western Cape of South Africa. On identifying a knowledge and skills gap in doctoral supervision in South Africa, and other African countries - Professor Johan Mouton initiated the online DIES/CREST Training Course for Supervisors of Doctoral Candidates at African Universities, hosted by Stellenbosch University in South Africa. While still registered for my PhD, I found a course presented by Dr Erik Hofstee of Exactica which I attended early on as a PhD student, exposed me to both sides of the fence – that of a PhD candidate, and that of a future PhD supervisor and examiner.

Every doctoral supervision journey is different. In as much as I did not have someone to hold my hand and fully mentor me through this PhD supervision journey, I am grateful for my zeal to learn; and sometimes my application of common sense. I have availed myself to be a thesis examiner, as well as an external supervisor, at other

universities nationally. Participating in personal development courses such as the CREST one exposed me up to other supervision aspects that I was not aware of, such as the different models of supervision, e.g. team/ group supervision. Being an academic at an open distance learning university, I actually never get to ever see my students, except for the day they graduate – many years after embarking on their journeys with me. According to Huet and Casanova (2021), as well as Orellana et al. (2016), supervising doctoral students via long distance or online is more demanding for the supervisor, as they also need to reassure students due to the latter's seeming isolation from the contact university set up. However, online doctoral supervision is becoming more relevant, particularly since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced several traditional “face-to-face” universities to transition to virtual learning environments, both for taught modules as well as postgraduate supervision. Although my own PhD was at a contact university, I saw my supervisor once a year; so I think the experience is almost similar for my students too. I have found that, even if you pursue your PhD at a contact university, you are still on your own, just like the distance learning experience. The reasons for this are that, the same Professors that supervise, are still laden with their other academic responsibilities of teaching, conducting their own focus area research, community engagement and academic citizenship (sitting in meetings, active participation in scholarly bodies, serving as examiners for other universities, peer reviewing for journals, and so on). Hence, the amount of time dedicated to serving a doctoral candidate is limited; moreso because the assumption at the PhD level is that the student has already passed their Masters' degree, and has adequate research skills to proceed with minimal supervision. I am grateful however, that my doctoral candidates trust me to guide them accordingly to ensure their academic success and the fulfilment of my own performance goals. Experience is, and has been, one of the greatest teachers on this journey.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the afore-stated literature, and narration of my own personal experience, many issues arise pertaining to institutional stances, positions and practices on postgraduate supervision. The new crop of young academics in South Africa, is eager and very energetic. However, those characteristics alone are insufficient to prepare them for the role of being PhD supervisors, and the responsibilities thereof. In order to maintain high academic standards of South African PhDs, which will be able to withstand international scrutiny, it is recommended that:

- a) Universities should develop mandatory PhD supervisor programmes that expose future supervisors to the various supervision models, PhD types (e.g. by article publication, traditional thesis, amongst others), research ethics, thesis examination, institutional policies on various aspects related to PhDs such as ethics, quality assurance, feedback, and funding. This can be in-built as a general unit within the University, and workshops or information sessions offered on a regular basis. In line with this, Richards and Fletcher (2019) are of the view of applying the “carrot-and-stick” incentive method, wherein academic staff are rewarded for attending, and completing the mandatory supervision courses within a minimum stipulated period.
- b) The more senior and experienced Professors be mandated to mentor the junior staff members as part of their performance management agreements. With the increasing calls for transformation and skills transfer within the higher education sector in South Africa, such an initiative would ensure that by the time these more senior staff members resign or retire, skills will have been transferred, and the junior staff will have honed some basic supervision skills and experience by then.
- c) Higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa should implement continuing professional development (CPD) for doctoral supervisors to equip them, as well as keep them attuned with the most current global supervision practices that will cater for the growing and diverse doctoral candidate population.
- d) Supervisors themselves need to establish and grow their own research communities through making critical contacts at conferences, and actively participating in professional bodies. Such networks are deemed advantageous, not only to the development of the doctoral supervisor, but can be used to gain access to other resources such as grants for students as well.
- e) In order to improve on their supervision skills, academics need to periodically reflect on their doctoral supervision experiences, identifying challenges, shortcomings and strengths. This can be done, not only through the eventual feedback in the form of examiners' reports at the end of students journeys, but also through annual anonymous peer reviews by students and colleagues within the institution, as part of the quality assurance process.
- f) Universities should encourage their doctoral supervisors to engage in scholarly research and publish articles on issues related to doctoral student supervision in their respective fields. Currently, this practice is left to those in the Faculty of Education, yet greater experiences and knowledge can be shared by academics who are not necessarily trained as educators, and do not study the various pedagogies to the same extent.

I subscribe to the notion of lifelong learning, hence with the ever-evolving practices in doctoral supervision, institutions and supervisors alike need to keep abreast with changes. In this era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), there is a greater shift to the use of technology in carrying out much of the teaching within universities; doctoral supervision will not be spared. Supervisors will be expected to shift gears and embrace the use of technology in undertaking doctoral supervision. An example would be to have monthly webinars with your portfolio of doctoral candidates to give them a platform to engage not only with the supervisor, but their peer candidates as well. This can potentially also give the supervisor an opportunity to collectively address challenges that the students encounter, such as not understanding the difference between a theoretical and conceptual framework, and the various research philosophies; thus saving all parties time.

## 6. Conclusion

My reflection on the role of a PhD, the role of a supervisor, and my own personal experience is contained herein. I do not subscribe to the notion that there is a right or wrong way to supervise. I believe that as individuals, we are free to follow whichever supervision model we resonate with. Supervision is a dynamic journey, hence if one finds that something is not working for them, they should be flexible enough to adjust it. In as much as there are many roles of a supervisor – there is also no need to stretch oneself thin by playing them all. Students need to understand that supervisors are human, just like them, and we have limitations too. However, we strive to give them the best service through guiding our students on their PhD academic journey ensuring that they write academically sound thesis chapters, receive timely and constructive feedback, adhere to ethical processes, and that their mental and emotional wellbeing is not compromised during the process.

In conclusion, Duke and Denicolo (2017) affirmed that supervisors have the onus to introspect and identify those areas which need further personal development. They further implored on supervisors to take advantage of support systems offered by their respective universities and build their own professional skills so as to be able to be a well-rounded academic and researcher (Duke & Denicolo, 2017). It is for this reason too that Alfermann *et al.* (2021) implored universities to include communication, conflict resolution, motivation, and leadership skills training as part of the continuous professional development for prospective doctoral supervisors, as supervision goes beyond just being about content. Akala (2021) also called for universities to be cognisant of the multiple hats worn by doctoral supervisors. In addition to being PhD supervisors, many academics are also involved in administrative tasks such as being heads of departments, Deans and hold other managerial posts within their respective faculties, and are involved in the facilitation of teaching and learning (lecturing) of taught modules. The current workload model adopted by HEIs in South Africa, and many other developing countries is unsustainable as it overloads the same cohort of professorial and academic staff who are entrusted to produce quality doctoral graduates. Unfortunately, the situation is as is because there are inadequate doctoral supervisors, and most universities face financial constraints and are unable to employ more supervisors to alleviate the situation.

The reality is that, there are as many approaches to supervision, as there are supervision models. Institutions of higher learning cannot necessarily prescribe how students should be supervised, but can facilitate the process of ensuring that the newly appointed doctoral supervisors are equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge to undertake the supervision responsibility and produce quality doctoral graduates, and that the institutional policies take cognizance of ongoing global trends in order for the universities' doctoral and research outputs to remain relevant locally, and internationally.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the facilitators at the Stellenbosch University (South Africa) in respect of the DIES/CREST Training Course for Supervisors of Doctoral Candidates at African Universities, for their comments and feedback on my final capstone assignment from which this article is derived.

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