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# Learning from doctoral supervisors' and candidates' reflections on a supervisory model

Julia Everitt 

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## ABSTRACT

Professional development for doctoral supervisors differs between higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe from non-existent support to one off workshops, to mandatory programmes. Communities of practice programmes encourage supervisors to reflect on case studies and conceptual models but there is limited research which explores the learning from supervisors' and candidates' reflections. Using interviews with supervisors and candidates from one HEI in England, this paper explores their reflections on a model of supervisor roles and tasks. The model aided the reflections of supervisors and candidates in terms of their own preferences, but also how they responded to candidate needs or when working in supervision teams. There is complexity and fluidity in terms of the roles offered in a single meeting and a suggestion that more pastoral roles need to be added. The model could be used for discussions between supervisors and candidates or within professional development programmes.

## KEYWORDS

Doctoral supervision;  
professional development;  
reflective practice;  
relationships; expectations

## Introduction

Global differences are reported in the professional development of doctoral supervisors between HEIs, which can be non-existent or consist of only one workshop. In some universities, professional development includes communities of practice with multiple sessions to mandatory programmes for senior academics (Hill & Vaughan, 2018; Motshoane & McKenna, 2021; Wichmann-Hansen et al., 2020). There are also differences in content, as programmes for doctoral supervisors can range from the discussion of regulations to pedagogical support, with the latter drawing on concepts, theories and case studies (Hill & Vaughan, 2018; Jara, 2021).

Supervisor training or development programmes will often include the clarification of expectations and roles and responsibilities (Kiley, 2011) which are perceived as performative aspects (Huet & Casanova, 2022). However, the consideration of roles is important, as adopting a specific role for the duration of the supervisor-candidate relationship can have implications for the candidate (Wisker et al., 2003). Clarifying expectations and outlining roles could be addressed in supervisor professional development through the sharing of

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models such as Lee (2010). In fact, Lee's (2010) model, does feature as a resource in a community of practice programme (Birmingham City University (BCU) Facilitator Handbook, 2020).

These models of supervisor roles, styles and conceptions were developed from the 1980s to help supervisors to align their practice to candidate needs following the increased number of candidates but lower student satisfaction levels (Brown & Atkins, 1988; Gatfield, 2005; Gurr, 2001). Lee (2018) suggests that these models could be included in supervisor professional development programmes and allowing space for supervisors to reflect on their role is encouraged (Huet & Casanova, 2022). However, there is limited research that explores the value of the reflection on these models particularly for professional development or through the voice of candidates.

This paper explores what can be learned from interviews with nine supervisors and nine candidates from one HEI in England, drawing on their reflections on a supervisory model called 'The roles of a supervisor' by (Brown & Atkins, 1988, p. 120). These interviews were undertaken as part of a study which explored how expectations are clarified between supervisors and candidates during doctoral supervision. This study had a broader focus as outlined in the methodology. This paper will summarise the existing literature relevant to the topic of this paper. The methodology will discuss the methods, the sample and ethical considerations. The findings and discussion will detail the results of the research and offers reflections on the findings in relation to the aims of the study. The conclusion will explore the contributions to knowledge and practice, implications for practice and considerations for future research. Finally, will be the limitations of this study.

## Literature review

### *Supervisor development*

International research warns that some senior academics believe that supervision is an extension of research rather than teaching, meaning that being awarded a doctoral degree is perceived as sufficient preparation for supervisory practice, resulting in a lack of supervisor professional development (Motshoane & McKenna, 2021). This professional development for supervisors requires consideration particularly as the doctoral supervisor, mentor or advisor is deemed as the most important to the prediction of candidate completion (German et al., 2019). Newer supervisors will often draw on their own experience of being supervised, resulting in them replicating or rectifying the practices they experienced. Furthermore, adopting a singular supervisory approach is insufficient for the diversity of candidates now undertaking doctorates (Guerin et al., 2015). Therefore, supporting supervisors to recognise the range of doctoral supervisory approaches is important (Taylor et al., 2018).

Creating a space for supervisors to reflect on their personal experiences and to re-conceptualise in terms of wider alternatives is seen as useful to assist supervisors to expand their approach (McAlpine, 2013). This space is being created during professional development programmes such as communities of practice, where supervisors are reflecting on practice using case studies (Jara, 2021) or through guided conversations with catalyst questions, preparatory resources including journal articles (e.g. Lee, 2010) and then stories, practice and reflection (Hill & Vaughan, 2018). For Jara (2021) an unexpected

outcome was the benefit of supervisors discussing case studies and interacting with peers and senior supervisors, which led to some changes in perspectives and practices. This suggests that supervisor development during communities of practice is important in terms of pedagogical support but what is missing is an exploration of what can be learned from showing models to supervisors and candidates, which this paper aims to explore.

### ***Supervision models and rationale for their development***

Concerns regarding the time taken by doctoral candidates, the rates of completion in some subjects and candidate satisfaction levels led to the development of models depicting supervisor roles, styles, or conceptions (Brown & Atkins, 1988; Lee, 2010). These models are useful to assist supervisors to align their approach with candidate needs (Taylor et al., 2018) but this article is interested in what can be learned from supervisor and candidate reflections on one model. A brief history of role, style and conceptions will be given and definitions, although there is overlap in the usage of these terms.

Models of supervisor roles, styles and conceptions emanated from 1960s counselling models and the 1980s clinical and management education (Gatfield, 2005; Gurr, 2001). In the USA, Ellis and Dell (1986) developed nine roles (e.g. *Teacher-Process*), whilst in the UK, Brown and Atkins (1988, p. 120) depicted the eleven *Roles of a supervisor* including a *Director* who will be *determining the topic and method and friend which extends interest and concern to non-academic interests of a student's life* (Brown & Atkins, 1988). Orellana et al. (2016) suggests this model depicts the roles, functions and tasks involved in the supervisory process. Ädel et al. (2023) warn that the Brown and Atkins (1988) model was not the result of their own empirical research. Further models of supervisor roles include Vilkinas (2002) and there is a genealogy between these models (Gatfield, 2005; Gurr, 2001).

With regard to style, Brown and Atkins (1988) depicted an axis of styles with dimensions of *structured direction* (structured to free) and then *friendliness* (cold to warm). In Australia, Anderson (1988) created four styles and Grant (1999) outlined supervision as the Rackety Bridge which Gurr (2001) used to create the *Supervisor/Student Alignment Model*. This model has dimensions of student's status with supervisor's recent style (*hand on to hands off*) and Gurr (2001) wanted to highlight the complexities in supervisory practice beyond institutional guidelines. Then Gatfield (2005) proposed a supervisory management grid with two dimensions – *structure and support* drawing on Anderson (1988) and Gurr (2001) to create pastoral, directoral, contractual and laissez-faire styles. Gatfield (2005) and Gurr (2001) tested their models with supervisors. Earlier literature has highlighted differences in supervisor perceptions around offering pastoral support (Hockey, 1995). Taylor et al. (2018) emphasise that no one style is preferred as they each contain assumptions about supervisor behaviour and candidate needs. Further models include Wright et al. (2007) from Australia who explored what it means to supervise doctoral students and how this meaning or conceptualisation influences practice. This identified five goals and associated roles such as *supportive guide*, and again no one single defined role or approach is advocated.

Finally, Lee (2010) developed five *conceptions* which are the approaches that supervisors can take in different situations, based on what supervisors believe they are

enacting. The *conceptions* signify a difference to roles and style; but are not mutually exclusive and include *functional* or the endless tasks and functions to be undertaken which links to roles. The other four concepts include *enculturation*, *critical thinking*, *emancipation* and *relationship development*. These concepts appear to overlap those by Wright et al. (2007) but Orellana et al. (2016) suggest that Lee was influenced by Brew (2001). Whilst called concepts there is clear overlap between roles, styles and conceptions. Deuchar (2008) explores styles, but focuses on a facilitator, director or critical friend which appear more about roles than styles.

### *The roles of a supervisor*

Brown and Atkins (1988) warn of the genuine divergences in perception of the nature and purpose of supervision which can exist between supervisors in the same area, between subject areas or between the supervisor and candidate. They warn that the chosen role(s) can influence practice, proposing the consideration of professional and personal skills from the supervisor and the candidate in addition to problems and tasks. To support supervisors, Brown and Atkins (1988, p. 120) outline 'The roles of the supervisor' which includes 11 different roles a supervisor can undertake including *Director*, *Facilitator*, *Advisor*, *Freedom Giver* or *Friend* and the associated tasks (see Figure 1).

The model has been used in earlier studies about doctoral, masters and undergraduate supervision experiences. For instance, in Spain, Orellana et al. (2016) investigate the prevalent styles and important skills and attitudes in doctoral supervision. During interviews with tandem supervisors and candidates, they ranked the top five important roles using ten of the 11 roles from the Brown and Atkins (1988) model to determine the skills and attitudes of supervisors and used Gurr's (2001) model to explore styles. The examiner role was removed as this is not relevant in the Spanish context. The ranking of the top five roles suggests the model is complete and a belief in more static roles. Differences in perceptions were prevalent with students selecting *facilitator* and *teacher*, whereas supervisors were selecting *critic* and *freedom giver*. Supervisors ranked friend in bottom place, where students put this fifth. The perceptions around the important roles differed from both supervisor and candidate expectations. Orellana et al. (2016) suggest that concentrating on the supervisory style and roles should not be key a focus, as candidate needs should be considered.

In Finland, Filippou et al. (2021) explored the pedagogical approaches of Masters supervision using the 'Roles of a supervisor' by Brown and Atkins (1988). Supervisors were asked how they supervised, and their main roles and the responses were compared to the 11 roles of Brown and Atkins (1988). The findings highlight the evolution through the roles from *Manager*, *Director* to *Facilitator*, with a combination of roles in the middle and then a shift to an *Evaluator* at the end rather than *Critic*. *Friend* and *Teacher* were absent from the data with a suggestion that some supervisors might not undertake these aspects. Their study illuminates the need for supervisors to reflect on their practices, in addition to raising awareness around different supervisory pedagogies and a suggestion these reflections can be useful for newer supervisors.

A study that explored Bachelor thesis supervision by Ädel et al. (2023) warns how existing inventories of supervisor roles such as Brown and Atkins (1988) and Rowley and Slack (2004) may not be based on empirical data. Orellana et al. (2016) agree, warning that

- Director (determining topic and method, providing ideas)
- Facilitator (providing access to resources or expertise, arranging field-work)
- Adviser (helping to resolve technical problems, suggesting alternatives)
- Teacher (of research techniques)
- Guide (suggesting timetable for writing up, giving feedback on progress, identifying critical path for data collection).
- Critic (of design of enquiry, of draft chapters, of interpretations of data).
- Freedom giver (authorises student to make decision and supports student decisions)
- Supporter (gives encouragement, shows interest, discusses student's life)
- Manager (checks progress regularly, monitors study, gives systematic feedback, plans work)
- Examiner (e.g. internal examiner, mock vivas, interim progress, reports, supervisory board member)

**Figure 1.** The roles of a supervisor (Brown & Atkins, 1988).

they only focus on supervisor roles. In response, Ädel et al. (2023) undertook supervisor focus groups to elicit thoughts on roles and responsibilities and then a questionnaire with students. The paper combined the Brown and Atkins (1988) and the Rowley and Slack (2004) models to create a new inventory which ranged from *professional* (transactional) roles to *personal* (interactional) roles. The focus group data and the questionnaire open text responses were combined and then applied to the inventory. A student role inventory was created, which ranged from *project manager* (independent) to *supporter* (dependent). They suggest the roles could be plotted on a scale, but supervisors and students may have different preferences and needs indicating conflicting role choices. They emphasise dynamic roles, rather than static as suggested in some literature, together with the influence of time, local practices or the other person's role; the latter also being highlighted by Wisker et al. (2003). Ädel et al. (2023) suggest they are adding an empirical inventory, but they were unclear on role selection and changes over time. Their study explored what roles are preferable rather than what is enacted, and they suggest that studies around what is enacted would be useful. Furthermore, there is a need for supervisor and candidate discussions of roles and expectations and that their roles and quotations could be used. These ideas build on our earlier paper which suggests using elements from the literature to clarify expectations (Everitt & Blackburn, 2023).

## Methodology

This paper aims to address this research question: What can be learned by asking supervisors and candidates to reflect on a doctoral supervision model?

## Ethical approval and processes

This article arises from an internally funded research project undertaken at a post-92 HEI in England, with full ethical approval. Doctoral supervisors and candidates were

approached through a blanket email distributed through in two faculties including education and health and art and media. The inclusion criteria stated that supervisors and candidates needed to have been involved in a supervisory relationship for a least a year to allow sufficient experience. Information sheets and consent forms were produced using BERA (2018) which outlined the research aims and objectives, to reassure participants such as the right to withdraw and gain their consent. Pseudonyms will be used in this paper.

### **Sample**

Nine supervisors and nine candidates agreed to take part, but dyads were not used. The prior experience of supervisors and candidates ranged from 1–10 years. Six of the nine supervisors had more than six years' experience and four of the nine candidates had been in a supervisory relationship for more than five years. The academic roles include lecturers and research fellows up to professors; whilst the candidates were both external candidates and HEI staff.

### **Methods**

The supervisors and candidates took part in an online semi-structured interview using an interview guide with stimulus material collated from candidate and supervisor published handbooks. The stimulus material was identified during a literature review including text boxes and models, which are more neutral and allow the participants to talk about their experiences of the topic and identify and position themselves in what is described (Stacey & Vincent, 2011). The supervisors and candidates were shown the same eight items of stimulus material, across the five topic guide areas. Further detail about the process is discussed in our earlier article (Everitt & Blackburn, 2023).

### **Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to explore themes through the frequency of words or categories in the transcribed recordings (Cohen et al., 2018). This included moving back and forth between the data, research questions and literature, as the units of analysis emerged (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Codes were subsumed to assist with creating open and flexible coding categories (Mason, 2002). The themes from the analysis will now be discussed.

### **Findings**

#### ***Agreements and disagreements with roles***

Five of the nine supervisors including Yiona, June, Serena, Isabella and Claire, went through the roles and tasks and indicated which roles they agreed with or disagreed in their supervisory practice. These reflections included roles the supervisors felt were contentious (e.g. Director, Manager or Friend) as suggested by Yiona:

The ones I kind of don't agree with are mainly *director* and definitely aspects of *manager* and aspects of *friend*.

The roles of *friend*, *manager* and *director* had the most disagreements. Yiona, Serena and June felt that a supervisor should not be a friend. Serena suggested that for friends it requires boundaries, and they would not follow candidates on social media. Claire and Isabella talked about adopting the friend role for a specific candidate such as friend for an international candidate, but boundaries were still important:

Probably the least one would be Friends. I do have an interest particularly some of my students at the moment I've got these four European grant students have all moved from their home countries to do their research and they're suddenly isolated by Covid. So, I probably got to know them better on a slightly more personal level, but I do have a boundary, that I don't step over in terms of being friends with doctoral students, unless they are pre-existing friends.

Ian suggests that they would not be friends, but that a critical friend was more apt. Yiona agrees that they would not be a friend, but it was about supporting candidates with non-academic aspects:

I don't think that the supervisor should be a friend, but I think that some of the aspects of support does need to extend to non-academic aspects. So, for example, my student had various like personal issues going on through the first year of his PhD and I think it's very important that as a supervisor you are aware of the context outside of the PhD.

This was very much an initial reflection from the supervisors on their individual approach to supervisory practice. The Facilitator role was selected by all of the supervisors, but Yiona and June stated they would not arrange fieldwork. Both Yiona and June indicated they would perform the part of some roles in terms of the associated tasks; so, these are good examples, but not relevant to all supervisors. In contrast supervisors such as Olga and Claire suggested they had played all 11 roles, whilst Isabella and Lester suggested that their approach would cover all 11 roles.

The candidates were shown the Brown and Atkins (1988) model and asked how it reflected their work with their supervisors. Ant reveals how he could see a difference between their supervisors with one supervisor acting as an *advisor* and *guide*, whilst the other supervisor is more of a *guide* and a *friend* and they follow each other on social media, indicating differences in how roles are individually adopted:

My one supervisor is very much looking at these words in front of me, very much directive and very much more of a facilitator. Whereas the other [supervisor] is far more advisory and more of a guide and she's more of a friend.

Similarly, Polly revealed that how one supervisor was more concerned with the non-academic aspects, but not as a *friend*, whilst the other supervisor was stricter in how they marked the work or the quality of writing.

### ***Influence of timepoint and supervision team***

Five supervisors (Olga, Lester, Claire, Una and Yiona) and one Candidate (Letitia) all mentioned that the timepoint in the candidate's journey had a bearing on the role(s)



undertaken. However, two supervisors (June and Olga) indicate that the roles adopted would also be influenced by the co-supervisors. Whilst Olga would enact all 11 roles these are influenced by the team, the candidate and the timepoint, indicating complexity:

Gosh yes, it's all of those, isn't it? And I think it depends on the team, the supervisory team, and the student and the point at which the student is in their doctorate. Which one sort of comes forward, and which ones perhaps fall more to the background. I think they're all important . . . you might be two of three of those things in one supervision.

What is interesting here is how Olga suggests that a supervisor may enact two or three of these roles in one supervision meeting, indicating fluidity. Ant agreed that roles are fluid and what is adopted by the supervisor will depend on the agenda that Ant has set, the task they are on and their current mood, indicating different influences:

The main thing that's jumping out at me is the fact that these are quite fluid, and they are quite fluid based on the agenda I have set, the stage I am at and by stage, I mean how far I am completing the current task that I'm on; perhaps in the middle of or the deadline that that I've set with them or sometimes like what my mood is.

Olga revealed that their roles in the supervision team was influenced by the expertise of the other co-supervisors. In one team they were less of the 'expert', whereas in the other they felt they had more input:

Not trying to take over if somebody is sort of more knowledgeable than you and they are the absolute experts around pedagogy . . . in another team where, I'm the DOS with the other PhD supervisor, then I'm much more kind of not directive, but I've got a lot more input about the kind of content and what he's going to write about, what he's going to research.

Six of the nine candidates mentioned the team when talking about their response. Asha stated that there was no difference in the roles in the team, but difference in experience and expertise as individuals. As one supervisor was more empathetic and one more of a teacher, but between them they covered all the roles:

I don't think there's any difference in terms of the role of the supervisor within the team, but I think there's lots of difference in terms of experience and expertise. Just the differences in individuals. What I'd found was that some people or some members of the supervision team would be more empathetic at certain times others were more of the Teacher in terms of, you know, in terms of their expertise . . . that's the beauty of having a team . . . I'd say that they've taken on each one of those at different points.

### *Purposely enacting roles*

June reveals that with a co-supervisor they might use different roles purposely within the team as good cop and bad cop, indicating that supervisors can recognise these roles and purposely enact them with a particular candidate in mind:

Sometimes as a team, we also do a little bit of good cop, bad cop . . . that's a little bit too binary a way of expressing it, but I think sometimes, particularly if we're at a tricky situation with the student or the work they've done hasn't explored the areas that we'd anticipated and we kind of feel that they might be a little bit vulnerable. We will consciously say, OK, you spend the first bit of the time talking about the problems here. And I'll pick up on that, but I'll also talk in a slightly more supportive kind of manner to get that balance right.

Isabella similarly revealed how they enacted different approaches or styles for candidates, based on their own experience of being supervised, almost selecting styles from a toolbox:

A strong influence with my own supervision experience. So, I had one supervisor who suited my style beautifully and another one who I could see her value but didn't work as well for me. But then, having said that, I've drawn on both styles too because all students need slightly different things.

### *Missing roles*

Two supervisors suggested that the Brown and Atkins (1988) model is missing some roles. For instance, Ian suggests that supporting mental health and being an advocate are missing, whilst Lester suggests that the role of mentor or counsellor is missing:

We do not have mentor, so that is not, that is not really there and that would cover actually quite a lot of those kind of things. I know it says supporter and friend, but there is that you are also a kind of counsellor sometimes. Where you are very conscious of the fact that a student and people in general don't have an opportunity to sit down and talk one to one with anyone who will actually listen to them, and that gives people and students an opportunity to talk like that, and quite often you can be inadvertently pulled into being a counsellor as well.

### *Unmet needs*

Letitia also reflected that whilst the supervisors had enacted all these roles, their needs, as a candidate, were only partially met:

On different levels that they had taken on the other roles sometimes. Not as much as I'd like them to take on the various roles for argument's sake.

Similarly, Ellie talked about both supervisors as they went through the roles and outlined what roles were undertaken, some of which was not in line with Ellie's needs. They stated there was no distinction between the two supervisors, in terms of roles, the main difference was between the supervisors' availability:

The Director of Studies is more engaged and is more available. Again, I don't know if that's because they're Director of Studies or that's just a feature of their work commitments.

Charlie also indicated a difference between the two supervisors and that one supervisor was better at fulfilling the different roles as the primary supervisor took more of a hands-off approach:

One of my supervisors is more adept at fulfilling these roles, than the other one. My primary supervisor takes a really big hands off approach to things. I suppose he does give me a lot of freedom to come up with things and he does give encouragement ... The other, my secondary supervisor, you know, is probably somebody that I would be more comfortable emailing on the fly.

Indeed, Isabella and Una commented that the balance with one student, would be different to the balance with another but Una highlighted that this is dependent on

their interpretation of the candidate needs, suggesting there is a need to discuss roles and expectations:

If I was to apply this to one student that I've got at the moment, the balance of which of these I'd be doing predominantly would be quite different to the balance of them, with another student. And I was going to say the student's needs, but I guess I'm saying my perception of their needs.

Ian a supervisor, suggests that the model is a useful as a conversation starter:

I think they're useful as a provocation and as a you know, the beginning of a conversation.

## Discussion

The findings highlight how there were divergences of opinion around a supervisor's role which is in line with Brown and Atkins (1988) from when the model was created. The study adds to existing studies such as Filippou et al. (2021) by revealing how some supervisors had strong opinions about not enacting particular roles including Director, Manager or Friend. Supervisors in the study by Orellana et al. (2016), ranked friend in the bottom place. These reflections highlight the individual approach that a supervisor might take, based on their own views on the role of a supervisor. However, it was suggested that some supervisors would adapt to undertake roles, such as a friend in some instances, to align with candidate needs as suggested by Taylor et al. (2018).

In some instances, a supervisor might be comfortable offering all 11 roles which is interesting as some existing studies asked candidates to rank their top five roles (Orellana et al., 2016) proposing candidate preference, whereas some supervisors see their practice as across all roles. Selecting the top five roles, indicates a belief around static roles, Supervisors such as Olga may enact three roles in one supervision meeting, indicating fluidity, and complexity rather than a straight evolution through roles as indicated by Filippou et al. (2021). A candidate, Letitia, suggested that their two supervisors offered all roles, on different levels, but not as much as they would have liked, which was also emphasised by Ellie who suggested that there was no distinction between the two supervisors, it was more around their availability, which again did not meet their needs. Charlie also suggested there was a difference between supervisors and also what was offered was different to their expectations. This suggests a model focusing on roles and tasks is useful for candidate to reflect on their needs. The model could be used by supervisors with candidates to discuss expectations and reflect in a similar manner to suggestions in earlier studies (Ädel et al., 2023; Everitt & Blackburn, 2023). This is therefore a way of taking candidate needs into account, through a model which focuses on supervisor roles, despite the warning by Orellana et al. (2016). This suggests ways in which supervisors are able to reflect on their practice, which Filippou et al. (2021) indicate is important; but as part of a professional development programme. Whilst Asha also stated there was no difference in the roles enacted, it was to do with the experience and expertise. However, they suggested it depended on the supervisors as individuals and if they were emphatic. They recognised there was a benefit of having a team, to have access to different approaches and styles.

What this study adds to existing knowledge about co-supervision, team or panel supervision such as the recent study by Kalman et al. (2022) is the influence of working in supervision teams on the roles of a supervisor. Whilst acknowledging the complexity of influences including the candidate's needs, the timepoint in the journey, there is also the influence of the team members on the roles adopted. Research by Filippou et al. (2021) with Masters supervisors suggested an evolution through the process; the findings of this paper highlight much more fluidity and complexity around supervisors enacting the 11 roles. The complexity is influenced by the knowledge or expertise of the team and the level of input the supervisor felt they could have which impacts on the role that the supervisor could enact. All supervisors bring differences to the team, there was the idea of adapting, which in some respects appeared to influence the roles that were being played. Ädel et al. (2023) in their research with undergraduate supervisors and students, did suggest that roles were more dynamic than static as suggested in some of the literature and that there are influences on this such as timepoint and this study builds on those ideas.

June and Isabella highlights how dynamic the roles of a supervisor can be, when they revealed how specific roles or styles were enacted through an agreement amongst the team or individually. This builds on the existing research around the Brown and Atkins (1988) model and highlights how it can be used in a team supervision setting, which was not explored in the earlier research and again highlights complexity.

## Conclusions

This paper has discussed the learning from doctoral supervisor and candidates' reflections on the Brown and Atkins (1988) 'The roles of a supervisor'. This is important as preparation for doctoral candidates for supervision can be limited, leading to differences in expectations. It was apparent that whilst some supervisors were selecting roles to meet candidate needs, there were some unmet needs. Sharing the model with the candidates was useful to identify these gaps and supervisors could use the model as a discussion point with other supervisors and candidates. Whilst a supervisor may enact all 11 roles and candidates may expect a supervisor to play any roles, a discussion needs to take place around expectations and what a supervisor will and will not offer and where needs can be met by drawing on wider support (Bastalich & McCulloch, 2022; Everitt & Blackburn, 2023).

Ädel et al. (2023) suggest there is a need to discuss roles and expectations and that their roles and quotations could be a useful starting place for discussions. This study highlights how asking supervisors and candidates to reflect on 'The roles of a supervisor' was fruitful and could also be used as a starting point for discussions between supervisors and candidates and revisited throughout the relationship as part of a working alliance (Everitt & Blackburn, 2023). The 'roles of a supervisor' could also be used as part of professional development programmes for supervisors or workshops for candidates.

Professional development for doctoral supervisors differs between universities and can range from the discussion of regulations to pedagogical support (Jara, 2021). The preparation for doctoral candidates for the supervisory relationship can be limited, leading to differences in expectations. Programmes for doctoral supervisors include the sharing of case studies or resources such as supervisory models during a community of practice (Hill & Vaughan, 2018). This paper builds on these ideas, by highlighting how sharing a model of supervisory practice with supervisors and candidates was useful as a provocation for reflection on practice, but

also highlighted the complexity in enacting these roles. These models are created to respond to rates of completion and satisfaction levels and enable supervisors to align their approach with candidate needs. The study highlights how supervisors do have preferences around roles, which is already known; but there is complexity and fluidity in terms of team members, timepoint in journey, candidate agenda, candidate moods, supervision team knowledge and expertise which causes complexity. So, whilst these models are useful to support practice and professional development this paper highlights how supervision is more complicated than institutional guidelines (Gurr, 2001). Enacting these roles is still less than straightforward, but these models are a way to discuss these tensions.

## Limitations

The limitations of the study are that it only used a small sample from one post-92 university in the Midlands. The sample included candidates who were staff members, and it might be expected that staff candidates would have a different perception of supervisory roles. This is an acknowledgement that there are differences across countries and disciplines in terms of the policies and practice around research supervision, for instance some countries do not use supervision teams (Taylor et al., 2018).

## Disclosure statement

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## Notes on contributor

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