



When things go wrong - Ombudssystems in research and graduate education

moderated by Dr. Jeanne Rubner,
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The program continues informally over
a barbecue dinner on the terrace



For information and registration see
www.lifescience-munich.de

When things go wrong: Ombudssystem for Graduate Research

What is an Ombudsperson for Graduate Students: The ombudspersons for graduate students are nominated by the graduate students and are elected for a term of two years. They are designated impartial individuals who mediate in cases of conflict between graduate students and their advisers. All conversations are strictly confidential. (www.helmholtz-helena.de)

When things go wrong - Different levels

1. Formal level:

Accreditation of degrees, contract issues, PhD application at university, founding a thesis committee

→ ask your graduate student office for support

2. Informal level:

expectations supervisor ↔ graduate student, personality of the boss (you can't change your boss!), team (mobbing)

→ ask your graduate ombudsperson for advice

3. Scientific level:

Scientific supervision, scientific mentoring (conferences, papers)

→ ask your graduate ombudsperson for advice

Scientific misconduct and fraud

→ ask your research ombudsperson for support

Recommendations of the DFG

“Recommendation 4: Supervision of Young Scientists”

The education and development of young scientists and scholars need special attention. Universities and research institutes shall develop standards for mentorship and make them binding for the heads of the individual scientific working units. “

“Leading a group therefore includes the responsibility of ensuring that every younger member of the group – graduate students in particular, but also advanced undergraduates and younger postdocs – receives adequate supervision. **Each one must have a senior partner primarily responsible for his or her progress (7).**”

- “Leading a group includes the responsibility to guarantee such conditions (*i.e. healthy communication within a group and high quality supervision*) at all times.”
- “supervised by two additional experienced scientists who are available for advice” (**Thesis Advisory Committee, TAC**)
- “**A supervision concept** is recommended for doctoral researchers”

Recommendations of the DFG

“Recommendation 5: Impartial Counselor (Ombudsman)”

“Universities and research institutes shall appoint independent mediators (ombudspersons) to whom their members may turn with questions concerning good scientific practice and in cases of suspected scientific misconduct. Universities and research institutions shall ensure that the identities of the independent mediators (ombudspersons) are known throughout the institution.”

(Taken from the DFG „Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis“ Neuaufage 2013)

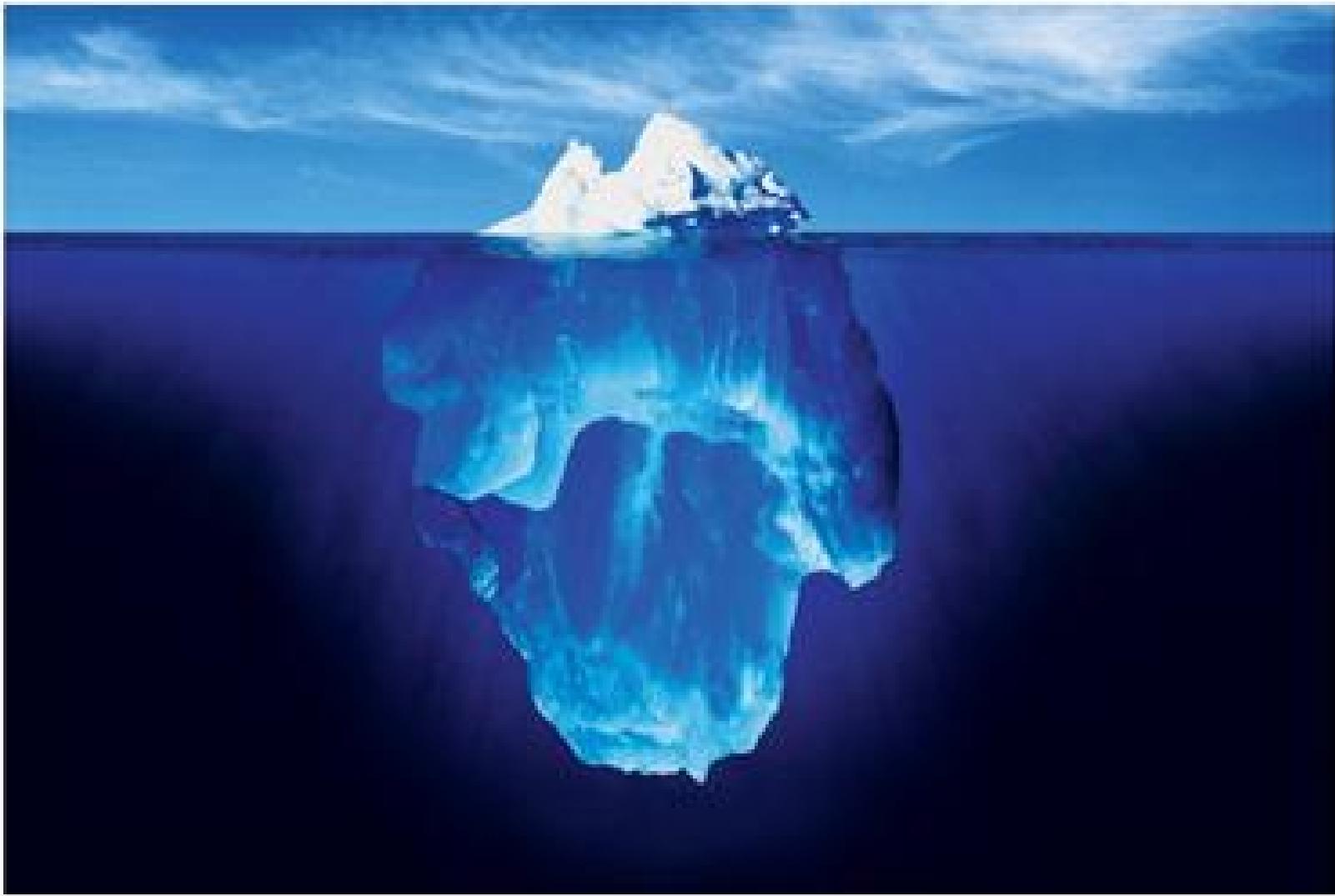
There is no such thing as the perfect supervisor!

Supervisor's personality and leadership style ↔ doctoral student's personality and expectations

Recommendations to ensure a smooth dissertation:

- Exchange on your mutual expectations regarding the doctoral research project when you start: **Main problem is the mismatched expectations about the nature of the supervisor relationship!**
- put together a supervision concept, clarify responsibilities /duties /credits /contributions
- Thesis committee: external (independent) advisors, regular (annual) feedback on research project
- Possibly midterm evaluation of project

Communication is difficult...



What can we do for you...

Ompudspersons have a **mediatory role on behalf of doctoral students** beyond the context of strictly regulation-related matters, for example when you have a complaint regarding the way in which you are being **coached and guided** in your research efforts or regarding the facilities available to you to conduct your research.

→ **resolve conflicts at the earliest stages - before relationships become more strained or difficult! Come and see us!**

→ **sort out the problem first, find possible solutions for you, offer mediation between student and supervisor**

→ **no executive power!**

Examples and FAQs

- No supervision at all: e.g. clinical supervisor has money for a PhD project but neither a real concept, knowledge of the subject and time to supervise the project
- Supervision is too close: no room for independent thinking, experimental planning, supervisor is inherently sceptical and distrustful
- Supervisor wants you to do other projects than your thesis project
- Never-ending story: supervisor wants you to do other projects/papers instead of finalising your thesis
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