



# Strategising PhD supervision in Ukrainian higher education

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## Abstract

This article explores the implications of the national, organisational and individual cultural dimensions for the strategies of PhD supervisors. The intended outcome of PhD supervision is considered to be a doctoral graduate with advanced research skills as well as an original contribution to knowledge production. Data emanate from the interviews with 12 doctoral supervisors from several disciplines affiliated with one of the leading Ukrainian universities. The PhD supervisors were interviewed in April–June 2018. The study findings indicate that, firstly, institutional and cultural complexities which refer to the lack of favourable conditions for doctoral supervision hinder PhD supervisors from achieving the intended outcome. Secondly, the strategic goals and adopted courses of action of PhD supervisors also depend on their values, beliefs, knowledge and skills and if they are unrelated to the intended outcome of PhD supervision it hinders the PhD candidates from acquiring advanced research skills as well as making an original contribution to knowledge production.

**Keywords** Mean–ends decoupling · Institutional complexity · Cultural complexity · PhD supervision · Ukraine

## Introduction

The intended outcome of PhD supervision is a doctoral graduate with advanced research skills applicable not only in academia but also in “professional sectors beyond frontier research and education” (Bogle, 2010, p.3) as well as an original contribution to knowledge production (Åkerlind & McAlpine, 2017). However, the means and ends of individuals in academia, which refers also to doctoral supervisors, are conditioned by individual, disciplinary, professional, organisational and national cultural dimensions (Välilmaa, 1998). The national dimension is determined by the prevailing institutional logics (Thornton &

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Ocasio, 2008; Greenwood et al., 2011), while the organisational dimension refers to the organisational culture (Hatch and Schulz 1997; Deshpande & Webster, 1989; Tierney, 1988; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). These dimensions are supposed to provide PhD supervisors with favourable conditions e.g. salaries and working conditions. Individual dimension refers to knowledge, values, beliefs and practices of PhD supervisors (Donald et al., 1995; Nulty et al., 2009; Jung, 2018; Feather & McDermott, 2014). In the case of PhD supervisors, these dimensions determine the strategies for supervising. Strategy refers to the determination of basic long-term goals and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals (Chandler, 1962).

Thus, this study aims to explore the implications of the national, organisational and individual cultural dimensions for the strategies for PhD supervising. Data emanate from the interviews with 12 doctoral supervisors from several disciplines affiliated with one of the leading Ukrainian universities.

## Theoretical framework: Means–ends decoupling

As was mentioned the means and ends of individuals in academia, which refers also to doctoral supervisors, are conditioned by individual, disciplinary, professional, organisational and national cultural dimensions (Välilmaa, 1998). The national dimension is determined by the prevailing institutional logics (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Greenwood et al., 2011). Each of the institutional orders is associated with a particular institutional logic. Institutional logics are “socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals ... provide meaning to their socially constructed reality” (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). The means and ends of organisational and individual actors are embedded within prevailing institutional logics (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Moreover, individuals and organisations can confront incompatible prescriptions either from the same or different institutional orders (Meyer & Höllerer, 2016; Greenwood et al., 2011) which refers to institutional complexity. Institutional complexity can be caused by means-end decoupling at the state level when the practices of the state are compartmentalised from its core goals (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Means–ends decoupling at the state level implies that the practices of the state policies do not contribute to its core goal of creating public welfare. Means–ends decoupling, which refers to a gap between practices and outcomes, can be sustained at different levels: state, organisation, individual.

As the means and ends of organisational and individual actors are embedded within prevailing institutional logics (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008), institutional complexity constraining actors’ means and ends triggers means–ends decoupling at the organisational and individual levels (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Means–ends decoupling at the organisational level entails cultural complexity – pluralistic and contradictory cultures within the organisation (Browaays & Baets, 2003). Similar to institutional complexity, cultural complexity also results in means–ends decoupling at the individual level.

Means–ends decoupling generates an efficiency gap (Dick, 2015) and the diversion of critical resources (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Means–ends decoupling ‘can be difficult to sustain unless the logic of confidence in the policy/practice is maintained, i.e. actors believe that it is useful, relevant and important’ (Dick, 2015, p. 897). If actors gain awareness of the

incompatibility between their practices and outcomes, they experience cognitive dissonance (Dick, 2015; Hladchenko & Benninghoff, 2020).

## Doctoral education in Ukraine: means–ends decoupling at the state level

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1991 Ukraine was established as an independent state, which entailed also the transition to a market economy. However, governmental institutions were captured by the old Soviet elite and the actors from the Soviet shadow economy managed to become established as a post-Soviet oligarchy due to inappropriately conducted privatisation (Yurchenko, 2018). Ukrainian state became converted from the intended outcomes – the representation of public interests – to other ends, in particular to exploitation by business and political oligarchies, e.g. the protection of monopolies and economic subsidies (Åslund, 2000; Yurchenko, 2018). Drawing on the theoretical framework, in Ukrainian case, means–ends decoupling was sustained at the state level, as policies and practices of the state were disconnected from its core goal of creating public welfare. This resulted in inconsistencies within the institutional logic of the state and in a high degree of institutional complexity confronted by all organisations and individuals who did not belong to the privileged rent receivers. Public disappointment over the exploitation of state institutions by powerful actors was the main factor behind the Revolution of Dignity in 2014. However, even after the revolution, the state to some extent remained a source of financial gains for business and political oligarchies (Matsiyevsky, 2019).

As regards higher education, the changes after 1991 led to massification and marketisation (Shevchenko, 2019; Rumyantseva & Logvynenko, 2017), though many elements of the Soviet system of higher education were preserved (Oleksiyenko, 2016) including the division for the primarily teaching-oriented higher education institutions and research institutes of the academies of sciences (Hladchenko & Westerheijden, 2021).

Though Ukraine joined the Bologna process in 2005, the two-level system of scientific degrees (Candidate of Sciences and Doctor of Sciences) inherited from the Soviet model remained unchanged. Kushnir (2019) points out that Ukrainian higher education system has not three but five study cycles. In 2014 the Soviet degree of Candidate of Sciences was renamed the Doctor of Philosophy. As to the PhD thesis defence procedure, it was also inherited unchanged from the Soviet model. Till 2020 PhD theses were defended in permanent doctoral boards, which consisted of 15–25 academics. However, one-time doctoral boards have been gathered since 2020. As doctoral research is not funded as separate projects, it is driven primarily by the curiosity of researchers rather than by the needs of the economy or society (Hladchenko & Westerheijden, 2019). Until 2013, PhD candidates were required to publish the results of doctoral research only in Ukrainian professional journals. Since 2013, in addition to four articles in Ukrainian journals, PhD candidates have been obliged to publish one article in an international journal or Ukrainian journal indexed in Scopus or WoS (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Youth and Sport of Ukraine, 2012). However, firstly, the criteria for international journals are not defined which invites PhD

students to publish in low-quality journals or mainly in national Scopus and WoS-indexed journals (Nazarovets et al., 2019; Nazarovets, 2020, 2022; Hladchenko & Westerheijden, 2019).

Secondly, publications in Ukrainian journals are compulsory for PhD candidates but as the average length of articles in Ukrainian journals is 2500 words, this does not provide sufficient space for solid theoretical and empirical work. Moreover, many of Ukrainian journals charge a fee for publication and do not conduct reviews.

## Research design: case selection and methodology

Empirical data are taken from interviews with 12 PhD supervisors affiliated with one of the leading Ukrainian universities located in Kyiv. The interviewees are drawn from the disciplines of forestry, environmental sciences, veterinary medicine, business studies, information technology, psychology and educational studies. The interviewees differ in how long they are involved in doctoral supervision: from almost 50 years to only a few years. The aim of this selection of interviewees is to achieve a high degree of variety in types of doctoral supervisors and thus variety in potential perspectives on the research question. The PhD supervisors were interviewed in April-June 2018. The interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews with much room to digress from the interview guide and pursue subjects and themes which the respondents deemed meaningful to keep the process as open as possible. This allows depth and variety in answering options concerning the interview questions and the views on doctorate supervision aspects. The PhD supervisors were interviewed about their motivation to engage in supervision, the selection of PhD candidates, the strategy of supervision, hurdles which they face during the supervision and their attitude to the PhD thesis requirements. Depending on the preferences of PhD supervisors, the interviews were either audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim or recorded by detailed written notes made during the interview.

Though the sample size is insufficient for generalisation, the study findings lay the foundation for further research on PhD supervision in Ukraine with a larger number of universities and participants.

## Findings: strategising PhD supervision

Based on what the interviewees indicated to be their strategic goals and courses of action for carrying out these goals, the respondents were categorised into four groups presented below.

### Ensuring employability for PhD candidates

This type of doctoral supervisor is represented only by one academic in forestry (environmental sciences) who is in his mid-30s and has a second-level doctoral degree. He has publications in journals indexed in Scopus and international mobility experience. In particular, he publishes jointly with Ukrainian academic, who emigrated to Austria in

1988 and currently holds a professorial position at an Austrian university. The interviewee explains that he started supervising PhD candidates because he required assistance while doing his second-level doctoral research. After the defence of the second-level doctoral thesis, the supervision of PhD candidates allows him to actively engage in research. As a supervisor of PhD candidates, he strives for them to acquire skills and competencies which will secure their employment with a salary sufficient for sustainable living, irrespective of whether they will be employed in or beyond academia. However, achieving this outcome through doctoral research requires a beneficial environment that primarily depends on sufficient funding for research facilities and competitive remuneration for PhD candidates to attract the best master's graduates to doctoral programmes. Being faced with the lack of beneficial conditions for PhD candidates, the interviewee tries to fill this gap on his own. Firstly, he looks for different opportunities to provide his PhD candidates with research facilities:

When a PhD candidate comes to the department no funding is allocated for him doing doctoral research. There are no reagents, no research facilities but a PhD candidate is supposed to conduct unique research which requires technical equipment, reagents and literature. I apply for international grants and projects funded by the education ministry to get funding for technical equipment and reagents. More recently the university has started to provide access to international databases and it is a significant achievement (forestry).

Secondly, taking into account the small size of PhD candidates' remuneration, the interviewee tries to provide them with additional sources of income:

A PhD candidate receives 4000 hryvnias [around 129 euros] and apart from living expenses, this should cover also the costs of attending conferences in Ukraine and publishing articles in Ukrainian journals. If in addition to the position of a PhD candidate, one also takes a half-time teaching position, it gives him an extra income of about 2000 hryvnias. However, at the nearby supermarket, the salary of a cashier is 6-8000 hryvnias. This shows that PhD candidates must be highly motivated intrinsically to spend four years of their life on personal and professional development (forestry).

Considering the lack of favourable conditions for young researchers in Ukraine and taking responsibility for the future of PhD candidates, this supervisor does not mind if they switch from doing PhD research to another career. He also strives for his PhD candidates to develop advanced research skills required for postdoctoral positions in EU universities. In his opinion, these advanced research skills will allow PhD candidates to compete for international research funding.

In his opinion, the competitiveness of doctoral graduates in a labour market depends on them having publications in international peer-reviewed journals as well as the topic of the thesis. He argues that the topic of the thesis is crucial as it should help a PhD candidate to become an expert in a certain research area which must be in demand in the future. As such, in addition to professional skills and competencies which PhD candidates obtain, also the topic of the dissertation has an influence on their future prospects and employability. The respondent indicates that the thesis topics of his PhD candidates are related to the international projects done at the department. On the one hand, it ensures the research relevance, while, on the other hand, it allows PhD candidates to publish jointly with foreign colleagues. However, the interviewee argues that lack of technical equipment hinders them from conducting high-quality research with results that can be published in international peer-reviewed journals with high impact factor.

In addition to the above-mentioned hurdles related to financial issues, the interviewee states that he lacks time for supervision because of a high teaching load and points out that he devotes all weekends to work-related issues. He critically evaluates the publication requirements for a PhD because, firstly, they do not prioritise publications in reputable international peer-reviewed journals. Secondly, the requirement of five published articles results in the splitting of empirical findings which leads to the deterioration in the quality of publications. He also denotes that Ukrainian academic community lacks the culture of academic discussion, either at the department level, at conferences and at doctoral thesis defences. Finally, it does not appeal to him that the university managers show distrust to academics, for example, obliging them for a fee to check for plagiarism all monographs.

To summarise, the interviewee takes a lot of effort to compensate for the means that are lacking both at the national and organisational levels as well as to make his means and ends meet.

### **Between the researcher and the thesis**

For this group of supervisors, the professional development of a PhD candidate can be considered as a rather wishful outcome. The first interviewee in this group is from veterinary medicine. He started to supervise in 2016 after he was awarded the second-level doctoral degree. The interviewee explains his motivation for engaging in supervision in the following way:

On the one hand, I conducted my own research and participated in research projects funded by the education ministry. On the other hand, there were talented students interested in doing a PhD. My PhD candidates are my former master's students. Both of them have a high proficiency in English, especially one with whom we have jointly written an article for a journal indexed in Scopus. I do not need to spend a lot of time on teaching them academic writing as I have already done it while supervising their master's theses (veterinary medicine).

The interviewee points out that he treats the PhD candidates as equals. He defines his intended outcome of supervision in the following way:

On the one hand, I need to achieve the result of a well-defended thesis and the project to be done. On the other hand, a PhD candidate must become a self-sufficient researcher by accomplishing doctoral research. I'm interested only in those PhD students who are highly motivated towards a PhD (veterinary medicine).

As a practising veterinarian, this supervisor suggests his PhD candidates the topics aimed to tackle practical problems of veterinary medicine. In comparison with the first interviewee, this respondent has less international experience, however, he managed to establish collaboration with Polish colleagues:

I approached Polish colleagues to publish jointly. It was they who paid a publication fee. They agreed to collaborate because I had good empirical data. Submitting to a journal indexed in Scopus I was interested to check whether I am competitive at the international level. It was a new experience for me because my supervisor did not publish in international journals and did not teach me publishing internationally. Collaborating with Polish colleagues I do not exclude the possibility to be involved in teaching both in Ukraine and in Poland (veterinary medicine).

As regards hurdles to supervision, firstly, the interviewee denotes that the small size of PhD candidates' remuneration forces them to look for an extra job which distracts from doing their research. Secondly, he points out that due to a rather large teaching workload of 600 h per year he is unable to devote PhD candidates as much time as he would like.

This category of PhD supervisors also includes two academics in the environmental sciences. One started supervising in the late 1970s and the other in 1980 while both were employed at the academy of sciences. These academics have a high proficiency in English and have published internationally since Soviet times. Both supervisors are interested in their PhD candidates to become self-sufficient researchers. However, they argue that PhD candidates not always are talented and motivated enough to do a PhD. One of them claims that he always helped the talented doctoral graduates to get employed. Moreover, he points out that he has always been interested to supervise only those PhD candidates who are strongly motivated to accomplish a PhD. However, because in Ukraine over the last decades an academic career has lost its prestige and does not ensure a sufficient income-level, it is rather difficult to recruit highly motivated PhD candidates that demonstrate sufficient competencies. He clarifies:

The dean says that as we have positions for PhD candidates funded by the state, we need to fill these positions with those who are willing to do a PhD irrespective of whether they have or do not have the necessary skills and knowledge (environmental sciences).

Another interviewee also mentions constraints that complicate research in general and supervision in particular. Firstly, he states a gap between the organisation of research at the state level and the needs of Ukrainian society and economy. A transparent mechanism of output-oriented competitive state funding for research appears to be missing while publicly funded research projects are strictly regulated by the education ministry, with a focus on the research process rather than the outcomes. As such, there is no control over the results of research projects funded by the education ministry. Secondly, the interviewee states that the senior managers of university do not provide the support to handle the administrative issues related to research:

I'm responsible for a NATO project which entails funding for research equipment and travel costs. However, as this project does not include 'real' money to be transferred to the university, the senior management of the university is not interested in this project and I do not get support when I need to resolve administrative issues related to the project. Though most costs are covered, this type of research is not appreciated at the university (environmental sciences).

Thirdly, he also stresses that the remnants of Soviet heritage, in particular, the persistence of the academies of sciences creates barriers to research being done at universities:

The quality of research has decreased significantly over the last decades. In my opinion, research should be done at universities and the academies of sciences should be transformed into social clubs. I'm a member of such type of academy – the New York academy of sciences' (environmental sciences).

Fourthly, in his opinion, Ukrainian research community lacks the culture of academic discussion, i.e. 'seminars in which young academics can discuss their research, expressing

critical views' which is a necessary condition for the development of research community in general (environmental sciences).

Similar to the academic from forestry, the interviewees from the environmental sciences argue that priority of the number of publications over their quality negatively affects the quality of publications of Ukrainian academics in general and PhD candidates in particular. Furthermore, they stress that research in the environmental sciences usually implies the involvement of several researchers. Thus, it is a problem for a doctoral researcher to publish without co-authors as it is required by the state regulation on doctoral research. Moreover, one of the interviewees notes that the requirements for a PhD are decoupled from Ukrainian reality:

All PhD candidates have different abilities. Not all of them can publish internationally and not all of them will do research after being awarded a doctorate. The same refers to researchers in general: some are good at generating ideas, others at implementing these ideas and others are just good academic managers. Nevertheless, the state expects all of them to publish internationally (environmental sciences).

To summarise, these supervisors state multiple factors related to the national and organisational dimensions which constrain their means and ends.

### **Shifting the focus primarily onto the thesis**

To this group belong three academics from business studies and two academics from educational studies. Two interviewees of older age from business studies highlight that doctoral education lost its prestige over the last decades which entails negative consequences, as one of them clarifies:

There was a time when we selected the best master's graduates for a PhD. However, after the transition to a market economy, the situation has changed. Nowadays, it is a luxury for those master's graduates who are smart and talented to spend four years on a PhD. It is possible only if parents can fund PhD candidates and in such a way to prolong their childhood. The salary of a PhD candidate is only 4000 hryvnias, but money is necessary not only for a living but also for publications and conferences. As a rule, the PhD candidates are young females who need a PhD to keep a job at the university. Though one of my current PhD candidates officially holds a full-time PhD position, she is also employed full-time outside the university, as she needs to earn a living. My three other PhD candidates are on maternity leave (management).

Moreover, the interviewee argues that he even does not try to persuade master's graduates to enrol on a doctoral programme as he does not see the prospects for them after the defence:

I do not want them to curse me for having wasted four years if they do not find a job after the defence. Four years is a rather long period and if a graduate wastes this time, then he is uncompetitive in the labour market (marketing).

Another academic in business studies also stresses that PhD candidates lack motivation because a PhD does not lead to a well-paid job either in or outside academia:

Current PhD candidates, as a rule, are females. Moreover, they do not have work experience which I view as a shortcoming. In the past, I had several doctoral graduates who got a good job in the private sector. However, nowadays, people who work in business are not interested in doctoral education (management).



Further, this interviewee expresses disturbance with a gap between doctoral research and the needs of the state and business. In his opinion, neither the state nor business is interested in the findings of doctoral research. As to the intended outcome of supervision, the interviewee argues that it depends on the goals of a PhD candidate. However, the interviewee admits that currently he does not have a secretary in the department because of a low salary for this position. Thus, he is looking for somebody who is interested in a state funded PhD position and can simultaneously be employed as a secretary in the department. However, such an attitude towards a prospective PhD candidate, to some extent reflects a case of means–ends decoupling because in this case the primary goal of supervision is just the fulfilment of the department secretary position. It is clear that being employed as a secretary the PhD candidate will have no time for doing research.

Regarding teaching PhD candidates to publish internationally, these interviewees are (erroneously) convinced that all journals indexed in Scopus charge a fee for publication which hinders them and their doctoral candidates from publishing internationally.

As to the PhD thesis defence procedure, one interviewee who has been a member of a permanent doctoral board for many years denotes that he is very often involved in the assessment of theses that are unrelated to his area of expertise. This demonstrates that the use of permanent doctoral boards as a quality control mechanism for PhD dissertations has its limitations.

A third supervisor from this group who is also an academic in business studies is much younger than his two above-mentioned colleagues. Similar to other supervisors he also admits that his PhD candidates generally lack sufficient knowledge and skills, though he has one candidate who has good knowledge of the research subject and a high level of proficiency in English which allowed them to write a joint paper for a journal indexed in Scopus. Nevertheless, he expresses a negative attitude towards publications in journals indexed in Scopus:

I do not understand why I should pay for publishing in journals indexed in Scopus as one such publication costs 300 euros. The education ministry, instead of forcing academics to publish in journals indexed in Scopus, should have defined 15–20 high-quality Ukrainian journals publications in which can be eligible for promotion to professor. I published in Scopus for money only to be promoted to professor (marketing).

Further, the interviewee points out that the efforts he puts in supervision are not adequately rewarded according to the university remuneration system.

The university has the ranking system of academics and for each activity a certain number of hours [scores] is awarded. For the basic salary, it is required to get 1548 h and among them teaching brings 600 h. The double salary implies 3096 h per year. The supervision of a PhD candidate brings only 50 h per year. My PhD candidates, however, pay to the university 24 000 hryvnias per year and expect me to allocate them the time which matches this amount of money (marketing).

Regarding the publication requirements for a PhD, similar to the views expressed by his colleagues above, the interviewee argues that the number of articles is preferably to decrease to 2–3, as the greater number entails quality deterioration.

As it was mentioned above, this group also includes two academics in the educational sciences. Both of them stress that supervision allows them to engage in research. The first one argues that his PhD candidates can be divided into two categories: those who have work experience and require a doctoral degree for career advancement and those who entered a

doctoral programme for reasons unrelated to a PhD, such as living in the university dormitory that charges a less rent than the average rent in Kyiv or to receive a postponement from military service. This causes the interviewee to experience dissonance. His colleague also claims that many of his PhD candidates lack motivation and research competencies. They are doing a PhD because nowadays a doctoral degree is regarded as a formal qualification for teaching at university. Both interviewees argue that it is difficult for PhD candidates to publish internationally, though they also are only trying to publish internationally.

### **Focusing only on the thesis**

This last group of interviewees consists of three academics who consider a defended doctoral thesis as the only purpose of supervision. The first one has a PhD in the environmental sciences. She claims to have a good knowledge of English, publishes internationally and is involved in international research projects. She needs PhD candidates to assist her in these projects as well as to be promoted to professor:

I'm not willing to defend a second-level doctoral thesis because there is only one doctoral degree in many countries, while the title of professor is appreciated worldwide. However, according to Ukrainian regulations, an academic with a PhD can be promoted to professor if one supervised three candidates who defended their PhD successfully (environmental sciences).

Meanwhile, the interviewee points out that her two PhD candidates do not have sufficient knowledge and skills necessary to do a PhD. Thus, she is obliged to spend a lot of time revising their articles and theses. However, opposite to her colleagues, she does not consider PhD candidate remuneration being insufficient for a living, as she notes that 'it is sufficient for them as they do nothing'. As to the procedure of defence, the interviewee argues that in order a PhD candidate to defend successfully the thesis at the permanent doctoral board, the supervisor must have good relationships with all the members of the board. This implies the supervisor has to be careful not to be critical towards the PhD candidates of the doctoral board members.

The next academic of this group has a degree in psychology but supervises PhD candidates in education. This undermines his intrinsic interest in supervision. Moreover, the academic does not select his PhD candidates by himself as the dean appoints them to him which further reduces his intrinsic motivation for supervision. The interviewee claims that he started supervising PhD candidates because 50 h per year allocated for the supervision of one PhD candidate allows him to reduce the teaching workload. As this academic has a doctoral degree in psychology he argues that he would prefer to supervise PhD candidates in psychology, not education. However, the institution is not licenced for a doctoral programme in psychology. Further, the interviewee stresses that he lacks a laboratory and assistant staff which he needs to supervise PhD candidates.

The last academic in this cohort has a PhD in economic cybernetics. Currently, she supervises her first PhD candidate who works for an international IT company and started doing a PhD only because of the competition with a friend who also enrolled for a doctoral programme. The interviewee clarifies that she engaged in supervision for two reasons. Firstly, having a defended PhD candidate will strengthen her position on the faculty. Secondly, she claims that supervision will improve her practical knowledge and skills. In particular, the doctoral thesis is being written by both the PhD candidate and the supervisor: the student

writes the sections related to the empirical research, while the supervisor writes the sections related to theoretical issues. In the same way they write articles. The supervisor seems to be more interested in the defended thesis than the PhD candidate is. As this PhD supervisor does not have articles in reputable peer-reviewed journals, she views the requirement for a PhD candidate to publish internationally rather troublesome but achievable as it is possible to publish in journals which charge a fee. Regarding the procedure of the defence, the interviewee claims that as she has good relationships with members of the permanent doctoral boards in her research area, it will not be a problem for her PhD candidate to defend a PhD thesis.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the implications of the national, organisational and individual cultural dimensions for the strategies for PhD supervising. The study findings reveal that the state sustains means–ends decoupling which entails institutional complexity for PhD supervisors. Institutional complexity refers to the lack of research facilities and competitive remuneration for PhD candidates in order for the talented graduates to enrol for doctoral programmes. As regards the remuneration, the findings from Ukraine are not exceptional as worldwide the academic profession is considered not to be as highly paid as other professions, especially this concerns the early-career researchers. Not only in Ukraine academics need to look for additional income. The findings on the academic profession worldwide indicated that more than one-third of the academics surveyed had some income beyond the remuneration from their own university (Teichler et al., 2013). In Ukrainian case, supervision is also not remunerated adequately in terms of the efforts and time to be spent by supervisors. Similar findings reveals Kwiek (2020) about PhD supervision in Poland. Ukrainian supervisors are obliged to admit PhD candidates who lack research competencies to fill the state-funded PhD positions. This to some extent resonates with the findings on doctoral education in Kazakhstan (Yelibay et al., 2022; Kuzhabekova, 2020) and Tajikistan (Kataeva & De Young, 2018), other post-Soviet countries.

Publication requirements for a PhD also refer to the national cultural dimension. In Ukrainian case, they constrain the supervisors in their choice of means and ends. Firstly, publication requirements do not provide freedom in the selection of the journals that supervisors consider impactful in their discipline because it is compulsory for PhD candidates to have publications in Ukrainian journals. Secondly, publication requirements do not take into account the distinctions in doctoral research related to the disciplinary culture. Distinctions in publication patterns related to disciplinary culture are stressed in multiple studies (Laudel & Gläser, 2006; Hammarfelt, 2016). Moreover, nowadays research implies collaboration among researchers and as a result fewer people work and write alone (Greene, 2007). The study findings also highlight this tendency. The interviewees state that research in the environmental sciences as a rule implies the involvement of several researchers. Thus, it is a problem for a PhD candidate to publish without co-authors, though it is demanded by publication requirements. Thirdly, several interviewees stress that the publication requirements put quantity before quality obliging PhD candidates to have five publications. In Western countries, a PhD thesis can either consist of four or five articles or be written as a monograph and in the case of monograph, PhD candidates are not required

to have publications. Fourthly, though international publications are compulsory for PhD candidates, there are no specific requirements for international journals which can incite PhD candidates to publish in low-quality journals which exploit an open-access model to obtain financial gains (Grancay et al., 2017; Schneider et al., 2016). In Kazakhstan, another post-Soviet country, obtaining a PhD degree is possible without the defence of a dissertation, if a doctoral student has at least one peer-reviewed paper and two articles in WoS-indexed journals (Yelibay et al., 2022). Thus, in Ukrainian case, publication requirements for a PhD embed means–ends decoupling as they restrict PhD candidates in their choice of journals and do not encourage them to publish in high-quality reputable and impactful peer-reviewed journals.

Regarding the organisational level, the findings indicate that the university also sustains means–ends decoupling which results in cultural complexity for PhD supervisors. Cultural complexity occurs due to the lack of research facilities and the support from the senior managers of the university.

Institutional and cultural complexities confronted by PhD supervisors constrain their means and ends and hinder them from achieving the intended outcome of supervision. Consequently, the strategic goals of PhD supervisors differ from the intended outcome of supervision. The PhD supervisors sustain means–ends decoupling at the individual level and as they are aware of this, it causes them to experience cognitive dissonance. The interviewees would like to have PhD candidates who are motivated to develop professionally and make an original contribution to science. Thus the study findings support the literature which emphasises the necessity of favourable supervisory conditions at the institutional and university levels which contributes to the achievement of the intended outcome of supervision (Nulty et al., 2009; Bastalich, 2017).

According to the theoretical framework of the present study, apart from the institutional and organisational cultural dimensions, the means and ends of an individual are also determined by the individual cultural dimension (Välilmaa, 1998). Individuals' responses to the demands imposed on them are conditioned by their interests and knowledge (Lok, 2010; Binder, 2007; Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2014) as well as institutional biographies (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Lawrence et al., 2011). The study findings indicate that distinctions in the supervisors' values, competencies and interests also affect their strategic goals and courses of action. As such, it results in them sustaining a varying degree of means–ends decoupling. For example, the supervisors who lack skills and experience in publishing internationally are unable to ensure that their doctoral students engage in this practice, whereas those who have skills and experience in publishing internationally prefer their PhD candidates also to focus on this practice. In this way, the study results resonate with the literature which points out the importance of knowledge of supervisors (Donald et al., 1995; Halse, 2011). However, the example of the supervisor in the environmental sciences from the last group shows that only a high level of research competencies is insufficient for efficient supervision. The interpersonal relationship between the supervisor and doctoral candidate is important for the success of PhD research (Lee, 2008; Pyhältö et al., 2015; Sambrook et al., 2008; Mainhard et al., 2009). The findings highlight that the awareness of PhD supervisors about them sustaining means–ends decoupling at the individual level varies depending on their values, practices and interests. The more interviewees are oriented towards the achievement of the intended outcome of the supervision, the higher degree of dissonance they experience.

Due to the disciplinary differences in required research facilities and particularities of research, the supervisors from different disciplines confront varying degrees of institutional and cultural complexities. However, despite the fact that academics from the environmental sciences experience greater constraints regarding the research facilities than their colleagues from business and educational studies, they sustain a lower degree of means–ends decoupling. It reflects the discrepancy in the quality of research in these disciplines in Ukraine in general.

To summarise, means–ends decoupling at the state and organisational levels as well as values and practices of supervisors detached from the intended outcome of PhD supervision result in means–ends decoupling at the individual level. As such, the supervision becomes diverted from the intended outcome. All in all, this results in doctoral graduates lacking advanced research skills, while PhD research does not contribute to knowledge production.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The author claims absence of the conflict of interest.

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