

## Module 18: Postgraduate Supervision – Case Dilemma Cards

Dr Odile Ayodele and Dr Candice Moore • 30 July 2026 • Plenary activity

### DILEMMA 1 — “Am I supervising myself?”

*You are Thandi, a second-year PhD candidate. Read this as her — not as the supervisor.*

Your supervisor, Prof M., is brilliant, kind — and almost entirely unavailable. He took you on the year he became Deputy Dean. Meetings happen perhaps once a quarter, usually rescheduled twice first. When you submit a chapter, feedback arrives two to three months later, often a paragraph long: “Good progress. Tighten the argument in section 2.”

You signed a supervision agreement in first year promising monthly meetings and a four-week feedback turnaround. When you once pointed gently to it, Prof M. laughed warmly and said, “Ah, yes, we must do better” — and nothing changed. You do not want to escalate: he is powerful in the faculty, genuinely supportive when present, and will write your references.

So you have quietly built your own system. You use a generative AI tool as your daily supervisor: it critiques your drafts, challenges your methodology, suggests literature, and responds in minutes rather than months. Honestly, it has taught you more this year than Prof M. has.

But your university’s new AI policy requires “disclosure of all substantive AI assistance”, and you have no idea what counts as substantive — or how to raise any of this without it sounding like an accusation that your supervisor is not doing his job. Your progress report is due in three weeks. It asks you to describe “the support received from your supervisor.”

**Your task:** Post **ONE** recommendation in the chat for what Thandi should do next, applying a supervision agreement or mentorship tool. Start your message with **D1**.

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### DILEMMA 2 — Contested authorship

*You advise from the outside on this one. Both parties have a case.*

Kwame, a final-year candidate, wrote a data chapter that his supervisor, Prof A., considers publishable. Prof A. reworked it into a journal article, substantially restructuring the argument and adding a theoretical framing — then circulated a draft listing herself as first author, and adding a co-supervisor who commented on one early version.

Kwame believes the data, the fieldwork and the core analysis are his, and that first authorship should be too. But he needs Prof A.'s examiner nominations and a postdoctoral reference within four months.

The supervision agreement they signed in first year is silent on authorship. When Kwame raised the issue carefully, Prof A. said this is “how it works” and that her framing is what will get the paper into a good journal — which may well be true.

There is a genuine power asymmetry, a real intellectual contribution on both sides, and an agreement that failed by omission.

**Your task:** Post **ONE** recommendation in the chat, applying a supervision agreement or mentorship tool. Start your message with **D2**.