

PhD Researcher:

- Riku Reunamäki, Doctoral researcher, Department of Management Studies, Graduated 2023.
- Dr Tomi Koljonen, Department of Management Studies, Organization and Management, Aalto University, Graduated 2022, Lecturer in Organization Theory at the University of Liverpool.

Supervisor:

- Professor Rebecca Piekkari, Department of Management Studies, Head of International Business Unit, Aalto University, School of Business (Riku Reunamäki Supervisor).
- The supervisor of Tomi was Professor Nina Granqvist which was in holiday during the time that interview take place.
- Interviewer: Marzieh Soleimani, Department of management studies, International Business Unit

The benefits of pursuing a PhD are multifaceted. Every day brings the opportunity to learn something new, making the academic journey both enriching and intellectually stimulating. The diverse community of intelligent and insightful top scholars and researchers offers the chance to meet people from all over the world, each with unique backgrounds and a wealth of experiences to share, which fosters a collaborative and supportive environment. Another benefit of studying at Aalto is the fact supervisors are open regarding choosing research topic and even changing the topic in the second or third year. Riku changed his research topic after two years and Tomi also changed it in year three. PhD program is a perfect place for those people who are passionate about reading, as it requires a substantial amount of time dedicated to this activity. If you are a kind of a person who enjoy reading, boosting you critical thinking, and see the big picture of various topics, a PhD program could be the most suitable option for you. This program will teach you how to learn how to address problem independently and how to develop the skill of being an independent researcher. Both of them recommended that try to enjoy what you do as a PhD researcher and try to set things on your own pace without feeling pressured to select a research topic quickly or complete my degree within four years. They emphasized that the process of writing a PhD thesis is already challenging, and it becomes even more difficult if you lack passion and enthusiasm for your chosen topic.

The PhD researchers categorized the challenges in three different phases. At the beginning, one of the key challenges is time management especially in the field of business, where strict deadlines are common. Also lack of precise instructions on how to proceed the program would be problematic. Although there are many people that can help you during your program including your supervisor and other professors from your university or other universities and other top scholars, it's still having to figure it out on your own setting. There are sometimes that you feel you are lost and working unstructured manners. Furthermore, selecting a research topic that is both enjoyable and feasible in terms of data collection and finding suitable companies for research is crucial. This careful selection helps mitigate the risk of having to restart the research process. For example, Riku had a research topic about empowerment and subsidiaries of Finnish companies in China, but unfortunately, he couldn't find enough Finnish companies that move towards more empowerment in their Chinese subsidiaries, then he broaden his research sample to Nordic companies in China, but still couldn't find suitable companies. He felt that it's a dead end and decide to change his topic completely and start over again which was quite difficult to do.

During second and third years of PhD program, it can be challenging to see progress, as this phase primarily involves dedicating time to reading, coursework and assignments, as well as formulating a research plan. This stage does not yield tangible outcomes, which can make it difficult for researchers to feel a sense of advancement and forward momentum.

On the third and fourth year, the most important challenges would be maintaining enthusiasm and passion for the work. If PhD researcher feel that it is like a regular and boring job, then it would be increasingly difficult to continue and stay motivated. At this stage, researchers may also experience feelings of isolation, as they may not feel as connected to colleagues and peers in comparison with first year, which can sometimes lead to depression, making it difficult to continue at a steady pace. Finally, the challenge of finding a position in academia which can be quite competitive and unpredictable.

Establishing and maintaining relationships with supervisors can be a challenging aspect of a PhD program, and the dynamics of these relationships may evolve over time. Tomi shared his experiences of working with multiple advisors, including shifts in the primary supervisory role. He emphasizes the importance of having a diverse network of advisors and mentors, such as co-advisors and "shadow advisors" who provided insights into academic life beyond their formal research collaboration. They also suggest that cultivating relationships with supervisors and collaborators is vital for motivation and support throughout the research journey. It is crucial for PhD student to be proactive, engaging with academic communities, conferences, and workshops, be open to experiences, explore different avenues, and not be afraid to reach out and collaborate with others in their academic journey.

From the supervisor point of view, it's essential for PhD researchers to be proactive not only in research and connecting with the supervisor, but also in community and informal discussion outside formal meetings to not feel secluded. Since professors are supervising 4 or 5 students at a time, and they are in different stages and progress at different pace, if PhD researcher go out of sight and out of mind as well that can lead to isolation then. So, the PhD student needs to have a good communication and be able to receive critical feedback. Rebecca emphasizes that over time, she has realized the importance of developing the ability to work with feedback, as it is a crucial skill for a successful academic. While learning this skill early on is beneficial, it's essential to recognize that criticism can sometimes be painful and may not always be communicated in a constructive manner. The key is to process that feedback in a way that supports your growth rather than hinders it. At the end she declares that this is a long journey during which you may change the topic, the supervisor, or even the methodology, and many other things might happen, making these years quite transformative in many ways. PhD research is like a mountain climbing, what is your research topic? Why summit this one not that one? ,which paths have been well trodden? What are the novel ways? what is known and unknown? What is the plan? What skills do you need? Not always linear path.

