
Editorial: the constructive and supportive PhD examiner

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I was recently guest editor for a special issue of *Journal of Property Investment & Finance (JPiF)* for Early Career Researchers. In each case, it was their first published paper. Great outcome and indicative of *JPiF* supporting the next generation of property researchers. After doing this, I was thinking about the role we play as examiners in the PhD process in shaping the style of the next generation of property academics/researchers.

How many times have you heard horror stories of aggressive PhD examiner reports where candidates are basically attacked and aspects such as their methodology deeply questioned. . . too many times for me. To me, there is clear difference between constructive valid criticism and aggressive comments (often disguised as rigor).

No one is questioning the validity of your role as examiner in raising important concerns with the PhD thesis; this is the purpose of the PhD examination process. No PhD is perfect. But it needs to be done in a constructive and supportive manner. The same message can be conveyed by more appropriate language in the PhD examiner's report.

This is often the case with those examining a PhD for the first time, where the only benchmark they have is the tough time they were given by their PhD examiner. I consider a supportive style as the best style; sure, raise the important issues that need to be addressed, but do it in a constructive manner.

Being a PhD examiner is a learning experience and a privilege. Over time, you develop a PhD examiner style that works for you and the candidate. And in your report, go beyond just challenging the methodology and the odd reference (often by you) that is omitted. Make sure the candidate understands what the analysis means in practical property terms; this is the "so what?" aspect of the PhD story. Too often, this aspect is ignored and the thesis becomes a mass of regression coefficients and too many regression models.

I have examined many PhDs over the years. This supportive style works for me. In many cases, I get emails years later or meet them at conferences where the candidate tells me about their career and family, where their PhD was the first step in their academic career.

So the choice is yours; be a constructive and supportive PhD examiner, where the PhD candidate will remember you forever as assisting them in finishing a strong PhD and helping them establish their career or be remembered as the PhD examiner from hell who will be forever cursed.

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