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## Boundary-Work in Doctoral Examination Committees

The doctorate serves as the cornerstone for academic careers but has also gained importance in other societal sectors. Therefore, the gate-keeping function executed by examination committees is pivotal for the future of academia, as well as the development of the knowledge society. In a recently published study<sup>1</sup>, we have delved into how the assessment practices of examination committees can be understood.

While there are national and disciplinary differences most academics are likely to conceive of the examination for a doctoral degree as a means of ensuring comparable qualifications. This is due to the long tradition of the degree, its importance for academia, and the process of global convergence that began already in medieval times and has been further reinforced by modern-day transnational academic mobility and the increasing exchange of examiners in doctoral education. To understand these processes of convergence, as well as important cultural differences, evaluation practices must be studied in their national, disciplinary, and historical contexts. We have chosen to gain insights from six focus group interviews with seasoned committee members from three prominent research-focused universities in Sweden. The focus lies on how the evaluation object takes shape, the nature of boundary-setting activities, and the varying examination practices influenced by the changing research and doctoral education landscapes.

Our findings reveal a gradual evolution of the evaluation object, unfolding through the interpretation of the thesis and defence.

This process enriches the evaluation, culminating in a multifaceted assessment of the candidate's research contribution, educational achievement, and academic competence. Additionally, boundary-setting activities extend beyond the evaluation object to encompass supervision and the local doctoral education and research context. This broader scope of boundary work serves to uphold and potentially alter norms within research fields, educational settings, and academia as a whole.

The intensity of this extended boundary work heightens when issues or inconsistencies arise during the evaluation process, further underscored by the ceremonial nature of the proceedings. Despite the evolving landscape of doctoral education, with impact from external funding agencies and policy statements, our findings underscore the pivotal role of evaluation committees and their disciplinary communities in shaping and negotiating norms within academia.

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1) Elmgren, M., Lindberg-Sand, Å., & Sonesson, A. (2024). Evaluation Practices of Doctoral Examination Committees: Boundary-Work Under Pressure. *Minerva*, 1-30.