

PhD in Management Sciences

Topic: Transformational Leadership & Innovation in UK Manufacturing SMEs

Week 1: Thesis Breakdown & Argument Clarity

Objective: Ensure the candidate could clearly articulate the core argument without hesitation.

What We Did:

- Conducted a full thesis audit (chapter-by-chapter breakdown)
- Refined the 1-minute, 3-minute, and 10-minute thesis summaries
- Clarified the central research gap and contribution
- Identified potential examiner attack points

Key Deliverables:

- Condensed thesis argument sheet (2 pages)
- Clear contribution statement (theoretical + practical)
- 25 predicted general viva questions

Focus Outcome:

By the end of Week 1, the candidate could confidently explain:

- Why the topic matters
- What gap it fills
- What the thesis proves

Week 2: Methodology Defense Mastery

Objective: Prepare strong defenses for mixed-methods design decisions.

What We Did:

- Deep-dive session on research philosophy (positivism + pragmatism justification)
- Justified mixed-methods integration strategy
- Stress-tested sample size, power analysis, and thematic saturation
- Prepared answers for validity, reliability, and bias concerns

Advanced Drill:

We simulated tough examiner challenges like:

“Why didn’t you adopt a longitudinal design?”

“How do you defend self-reported innovation measures?”

Key Deliverables:

- Methodology defense script

- Statistical justification notes
- Bias mitigation explanation framework

Focus Outcome: Candidate developed calm, structured responses to technical criticism.

Week 3: Full Mock Questioning Session (Round 1)

Objective: Simulate real viva pressure.

Format:

- 90-minute live mock viva
- General → Theory → Methods → Contribution
- Interruptions to mimic real examiner dynamics

Feedback Areas:

- Overly long answers
- Minor defensiveness in critical questions
- Need for sharper theoretical positioning

Improvement Plan Created:

- Answer structuring template (PREP model: Point → Reason → Example → Positioning)
- Confidence pacing adjustments

Focus Outcome: Candidate learned to control answer length and maintain composure.

Week 4: Weakness Drilling & Critical Reflection

Objective: Turn vulnerabilities into strengths.

Identified Weak Areas:

- Cross-sectional design limitation
- Generalisability beyond UK manufacturing SMEs
- Conceptual overlap criticism of transformational leadership

What We Did:

- Reframed limitations as research opportunities
- Developed “intellectual maturity” responses
- Prepared advanced rebuttals with supporting literature

Special Training:

“How to respond when you don’t know the answer.”

Framework provided:

1. Acknowledge

2. Reflect
3. Position logically
4. Offer future research direction

Focus Outcome: Candidate shifted from defensive to reflective tone.

Week 5: Defense Presentation & Communication Training

Objective: Refine the candidate's opening presentation and delivery style.

What We Improved:

- Reduced 45-slide draft to a sharp 18-slide academic defense deck
- Simplified theoretical model diagram
- Improved data visualisation clarity
- Strengthened contribution slide

Communication Coaching:

- Body language guidance
- Eye contact strategy (for panel setting)
- Tone modulation training
- Handling interruptions professionally

Mock Presentation Round 2 Conducted

Focus Outcome: Clear, authoritative, and structured delivery.

Week 6: Final Confidence & Examiner Psychology Session

Objective: Build psychological readiness.

What We Covered:

- Understanding examiner intent (they test depth, not destroy confidence)
- Managing stress responses
- Answer structuring under pressure
- Final rapid-fire question round (40 quick questions)

Final Simulation: 2-hour full viva simulation under strict timing conditions.

Closing Strategy Prepared:

How to end the viva confidently if asked:

“Is there anything you would like to add?”