

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Is it all Academic?
A Review of the Utility of Management Research
and the Quest for Economic and Social Impact

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by

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Abstract

This study was prompted by recent changes in higher education funding policies that have been introduced to encourage greater economic and social impact from investments in academic research. Historically certain elements of the social sciences, particularly business and management, have been criticised for their lack of practical utility outside the realm of the university system (See, for example; Beyer, 1982; Starkey and Tempest, 2009; Mintzberg, 2004).

The research is based upon the premise that the current attempts to reverse this trend with modifications to the UK's 'Research Excellence Framework' (REF) may be using too blunt an instrument to change the habits of a community long established in an environment that is not geared to the needs of a practitioner audience.

The study draws on literature to identify the components of 'impactful' research and considers the extent to which they exist, or otherwise, within a sample of three UK business schools. The purpose of the investigation was to determine the effect of existing policy and practice on academics' actions with respect to research style, practitioner engagement and dissemination choices. In doing so it sought to identify if current strategies enable impact or pose an operational and motivational constraint.

The study finds that business schools are unlikely to deliver their part in the government's ambitions for economic growth from the impact agenda so long as academics are so heavily incentivised to produce the theoretical and conceptual research preferred by the leading journals in their field.

The report concludes that these aspirations require fundamental change and offers a number of strategic options for this purpose. These include modifications to the funding mechanisms of academic research, changes to the REF and a re-evaluation of the criteria that define 'high quality' research. The report also raises questions over the role of business and management studies within the university system.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Context

Academic - Pronunciation: /akə'demɪk/

Adjective:

Not of practical relevance; of only theoretical interest: *the debate has been largely academic*

Oxford Dictionary Online

The study described in this thesis is prompted by recent changes in higher education funding policies that have been introduced to encourage greater economic and social returns from investments in academic research. Historically, certain elements of this research, particularly in the social sciences, have been criticised for their lack of practical utility outside the realm of the university system (See, for example; Beyer, 1982; Starkey and Tempest, 2009; Minzberg, 2004). Starkey and Tiratsoo (2007) accredit this dearth of tangible impacts to a longstanding culture within the social sciences that has seen pragmatic investigation discouraged in favour of a more theoretical approach.

The quality of academic researched in the UK is determined, and subsequently rewarded, by the Higher Education Funding Councils through an assessment process which takes place approximately every five years. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) was introduced in 1986 and continued until 2008, assessing research outputs against the criteria of 'originality', 'significance' and 'rigour'. In June 2007 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) issued a circular letter announcing that a new framework would replace the RAE following the 2008 assessment exercise (Eastwood, 2007). The resulting Research Excellence Framework (REF) first took place in 2012, introducing additional criteria requiring institutions to demonstrate economic and social 'impact' in their research.

This study is based upon the premise that such attempts to introduce economic impact by modifying the REF's assessment criteria may be using too blunt an instrument to change the habits of an academic community long established in an environment that is not geared to the needs of a practitioner audience. The author submits that, while the partial re-allocation of such funds can provide a strategic steer in the desired direction, it is unlikely to address the operational and cultural constraints that must be overcome if impactful outcomes are to become a reality. I suggest that the heavy reliance on institutional reward mechanisms masks a more salient need to comprehend the underlying characteristics that drive the research process in an attempt to ascertain which of these are responsible for enhancing and which for detracting from the objective of "*having an effect on, change or benefit to*

the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia” (REF2014, 2011, p48).

This document describes a project that seeks to identify the components of ‘impactful’ research and consider the extent to which they exist, or otherwise, within the business and management schools in a sample of UK Higher Education Institutions. Business schools are somewhat unique in the social sciences in that their primary focus is the institutions that have the greatest potential to influence economic growth.

The investigation will attempt to determine the operational constraints that stand in the way of delivering these constituents and seek to identify means to overcome them. Specifically, it will examine the implications of existing policy and practice within UK the schools on the content, style and dissemination choices of their research staff. This will be achieved through a consideration of the views of those who publish in this area and the thoughts of a number of research active academics in a sample of three universities. The purpose of the investigation is to identify opportunities to improve the adoption of management research in the practitioner community and thus achieve greater effectiveness from the outputs of our management schools.

1.2 Background

A consideration of the political columns of the national press in many of the developed economies around the globe provides a flavour of the enthusiasm with which 'efficiency savings' are hailed as the solution to what Goddard describes as *“the growing problem of financing escalating public expenditure”* (2002, p.673). Driven by political expediency to avoid mention of cuts to public services, governments often saddle themselves with the burden of delivering on promises to rebalance national books through a process of eliminating unnecessary waste. (Cameron, 2010; Obama, 2012). As a result, the world has seen a host of reforms to public services, all implemented with the objective of getting more for less.

Historically universities in the United Kingdom have been spared from the worst consequences of these reforms. Indeed, figures published for 2016-17 show a total spend of £4.7 Billion, excluding capital expenditure (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2016). While the recommendations of both the Jarratt Report (1985) and the Dearing Report (1997) called upon UK Universities to achieve improved efficiencies through better management practice, publicly funded research appears to have escaped relatively unscathed from the pursuit of the redundant and the superfluous in our society. Perhaps this is not entirely surprising given the good press that fruitful research activities deservedly

receive. This positive perception is compounded by the public relations efforts of corporations from pharmaceutical manufacturers to oil and gas conglomerates, who, via the power of the mass media, take great pleasure in exhorting the achievements of their own research and development activities. Hence, think of the word 'research' and one might conjure up images of a process that culminates in the discovery of new drugs capable of ridding the world of fatal illness or technologies that will ultimately provide us with clean and sustainable energy supplies; not a picture typically associated with adjectives such as unnecessary or wasteful. This perception may well explain why universities, hitherto unquestionably regarded as bastions of such priceless research (Delpy, 2011), have avoided the intense scrutiny that other publicly funded services have endured in recent years; at least until now that is.

Enter 'Research Impact', and everything looks set to change. Broadly based on Pettigrew's double hurdles notion of academic rigour and practice relevance (Pettigrew, 1997), the term has been adopted by public funding bodies across the HE sector worldwide to describe a new demand for more tangible outcomes from the research activities of our universities. An indication of the sincerity of such calls for change can be gleaned from a headline in a 2010 edition of the Times newspaper that advises HEIs to: *"Prove the benefits of research or lose funds"* (Hurst and Henderson, 2010, p30).

To provide an illustration of how enthusiasts of this change see it panning out, it is useful to call upon Pfeffer's vision, as described in the Academy of Management Journal's Editors' Forum. In this publication the author describes his dream for the future of management research that encompasses:

- *"More effect on the actual practice of management in organisations in both the private and public sectors".*
- *"Being as connected to, as engaged with, and as relevant to our profession – Management – as our sister professional schools such as Education, Engineering and Medicine".*

(Pfeffer, 2007, p.1334).

The strategies of those nations who have moved to encourage more impactful outputs from their HE institutions appear to have been guided by Drucker's old adage: *'What gets measured; gets done'* (Drucker, 1954); or perhaps, more accurately; *'What gets measured; gets done - and then gets rewarded'*. Such end of pipe strategies rely on the assumption that changes in performance criteria and reward systems will result in upstream changes in practice capable of delivering the desired objectives. The result is a proliferation of new, or at least modified, funding mechanisms such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework, introduced to drive the behaviour of HE institutions towards a more applied research agenda through a process of identifying and rewarding social and economic impact (Smith et al, 2011).

In the UK, the research impact agenda can be traced back to 1965 when the 'Science and Technology Act' established the various research councils as entities incorporated by royal charter. These charters established a clear link between publicly funded research and the national economy; describing the councils' role as:-

- Funding of High Quality Research
- Advancement of knowledge and technology to meet the needs of users
- Contributing to UK economic competitiveness.

(Payne-Gifford, 2014)

The Councils' responsibility towards economic growth was further defined in 2004 when the 'Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004-2014' set out to make publicly funded research more responsive to the needs of the economy and public services. The framework comprised a series of metrics by which the performance of the research councils could be monitored over a ten year period against this objective.

The notion that academic research might be more productive if researchers worked more collaboratively with the practitioner community was raised by the 2006 Warry Report entitled '*Increasing the Economic Impact of Research Councils*'. The report's findings included a recommendation that HEI's "*Increase[ing] their engagement with user organisations*" (p2) as well as a suggestion that impact be taken into account in the allocation of research funding (Warry, 2006).

In 2012 the UK Government set out to tackle what they believed to be an additional impediment to their vision of greater research utility. The final report of the UK government commissioned 'Working Group on Expanding Access to Public Research Findings' described the lack of public and corporate access to state funded research findings as both an obstacle to research dissemination and a socially '*unacceptable*' state of affairs (Finch, 2012, p.5). As a result, on 16 July 2012, the Government announced that it had accepted the panel's recommendations for a new publishing system that would provide open access to all research outputs funded from the public purse. In the words of its sponsor:

"Removing paywalls that surround taxpayer funded research will have real economic and social benefits. It will allow academics and businesses to develop and commercialise their research more easily and herald a new era of academic discovery".

The Rt. Hon. David Willets MP (2012)

If all this were not enough, in October 2013 Sir Andrew Witty's 'Review of Universities and Growth' described UK economic growth as every University's third objective. The final report further highlights the need to bring universities and the business community closer together to achieve this objective and makes various proposals to improve interaction between these parties. The report also suggests that the contribution of the research impact score be increased from 20% to 25% in the 2019 REF assessment. (Witty, 2013)

The recommendations of the Witty report provide noble aspirations for the creation of an integrated community of academics and practitioners working together towards congruent economic outcomes. However, the report fails to recognise the size of the chasm between current research practice and the requirements necessary to attract the business world to the labours of our academic population. Research conducted by Hughes et al. (2011) indicates that many academics lack the experience and, in many instances, the desire to produce the type of research deemed relevant to industry and commerce. Huff (2000) argues that this position is compounded by the view that existing university policies and practices provide little incentive to researchers to move in this direction. Bauerlein et al (2010) suggest that both academics and their employers still seem to be of the view that their own best interests are served by maximising the output of the theoretical papers preferred by the so called 'leading journals'. The Witty report offers little guidance on how these hurdles might be overcome to facilitate the operationalization of its proposals.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

This thesis argues that the demands for greater social and economic impact have been applied to a sector which, for historic and cultural reasons, is simply not geared up to deliver what is considered by some as a paradigmatic shift in the traditional *raison d'être* of the management research community (Van der ven and Johnson, 2006). For this reason the study sets out to better understand both the magnitude and the requirements of the change process necessary within UK Management Schools to facilitate the government's objectives. To this end, the research will seek to:-

- 1) Through a review of current literature, critically analyse the constituents of academic management research that are believed to influence the degree to which the outcomes of that research are acted upon by practitioners and/or policy makers. Both:-
 - i) Positively
 - ii) Negatively.

- 2) Evaluate researchers' personal perspectives on research impact. Including:-
 - i) Their understanding of the objectives and how these might be achieved
 - ii) Their opinions on whether impactful research is something different to conceptual research
 - iii) Their interpretations of the legitimacy and desirability of it as a requirement of academic research
 - iv) The degree to which they have adopted impact as an objective in their research in terms of:-
 - (a) The type/style of research they conduct
 - (b) The publications choices they make
 - (c) The audience they cater for
 - (d) The efforts they make to engage with the practitioner community
 - (e) The degree to which they use jargon in their writing

- 3) Identify how well the constituents described in objective 1 above are embedded (or otherwise) in the research policies of business schools and the practices of academics. That is:-
 - i) Identify the enablers inherent in existing research policy and practice that encourage the realisation of such characteristics
 - ii) Identify the constraints inherent in existing research policy and practice that impede the realisation of such characteristics

- 4) Investigate the magnitude of the changes necessary to move to a more impactful research strategy in terms of academic' willingness and/or ability to adopt such a strategy going forward.

- 5) Provide recommendations to better achieve the objectives of the impact agenda. That is:-
 - i) Evaluate the success of existing policy and practice in facilitating research impact
 - ii) Identify the factors that would make academic researchers more attracted to impactful research practices.
 - iii) Evaluate strategic options to better accommodate the demands for economic and social impact.

1.4 Personal Perspective and Potential Bias

The author entered academia after an earlier career as a professional engineer, an applications consultant with a global IT provider and, more latterly, the owner/manager of a small laboratory offering instrument metrology services. For some, the lack of previous academic research experience might place into question his ability to provide a credible critique of such activities. Indeed, because this investigation seeks to challenge existing research policy and practice, one might predict a certain degree

of hostility from colleagues towards a relatively 'new kid on the block' who seeks to cast doubt upon the foundations of their life's work. In reality this could not have been further from the truth. Responses from those who have discussed this proposal have ranged from encouragement to offers of assistance. Almost without exception, senior colleagues who have commented on the objectives of this research seem to both recognise and empathise with the problem that it seeks to address. There is some evidence to suggest that many academics share the view that 'relevance' is indeed 'relevant' (Easton, 2000). A study of academic researchers in the field of business to business marketing found that 82% of those polled considered 'the potential value of research to managers' to be 'important' or 'very important' (Brennan and Turnbull, 2000). A paper by Ankers and Brennan (2002) cites three separate studies; in the UK (Baker and Erdogan, 2000), in France (Hetzl, 2000) and in the USA (Polonsky and Mankelov, 2000); all confirming 'integration of theory with practice' to be amongst the top three most important issues for academics; the UK study identifying it as the single most important issue.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that an engineering background has not led the author to favour clearly defined pragmatic solutions to problems over those that are more theoretical and conceptual. It is also worth noting that at least part of the motivation for choosing this topic comes from a degree of frustration that so much management research seems to be conducted in the absence of any demand from the practitioner community that it seeks to serve. Whilst such practice provides academics with the investigative freedom that many defend vigorously (Chandler, 2014), critics see this position as somewhat frivolous in a period when the public purse is stretched to meet the needs of what they perceive as more deserving causes. Sceptics such as Winterman (2009) have no shortage of case material to expose the bizarre, often ludicrous, fringe of academic research in defence of their argument that much of this 'curiosity driven' investigation (Macilwain, 2009) is of little value to the tax payers who foot the bill.

"Is there anything to be learned from academic research on how to make the perfect slice of toast and whether monkeys can write Shakespeare? "

"If you sit monkeys at a computer, will they type the works of the Bard? No, they will partially destroy the machine, use it as a lavatory and mostly type the letter "s". It took university researchers one month and £2,000 of Arts Council England money to find this out".

Denise Winterman

BBC News Magazine - 24 Sept 2000

While this tactic may be open to criticism for its unrepresentative portrayal of the true nature of the majority of academic research, the author must confess to a degree of sympathy with the broader message behind the headline and the legitimacy of governments to demand more bang for their research funding buck. The UK's 'Association of Business Schools' cites 117 members on its official web site (associationofbusinessschools.org). Driven by the lure of a share of the funding that exist to reward 'Research Excellence', these institutions spend large sums of money financing staff to produce innumerable research papers in the hope of satisfying HEFCE's REF assessment criteria. Apart from a relatively small amount of work commissioned by the private sector and cross-subsidies from student fees, this research is funded entirely from the public purse.

The need for change is by no means accepted universally in academia. Were this investigation attempting to enter this argument in some way, it might be reasonable to express apprehension regarding a potential prejudice in the author's perspective. However, as we shall see from what follows, despite the lingering protestations of many commentators, this debate is effectively over. National governments in North America, Australia, Europe and large parts of Asia have all indicated their determination to favour applied academic research in their funding allocations (Grant, 2009).

In the UK, for example, funding for academic research is the responsibility of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and is managed jointly by the Higher Education Funding Councils (for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) and Research Councils UK (RCUK) through the discipline-based research councils. The following is an extract from a HEFCE/RCUK/UUK joint statement describing their ambitions towards a move back to a more pragmatic agenda and a demonstrable return on investment:-

"The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Research Councils UK (RCUK) and Universities UK (UUK) have a shared commitment to support [...] a culture in which excellent research departments consistently engage with business, the public sector and civil society organisations, and are committed to carrying new ideas through to beneficial outcomes,..."

Joint statement on Impact by HEFCE, RCUK and UUK (HEFCE, 2011)

What remains then is to make these ambitions work by delivering research that is both relevant to those in a position to implement it and in a format that is likely to appeal to them. This is the underlying motivation of the author and the research proposed here.

1.5 Potential Impact

It would be remiss of me to provide a critique of the effectiveness of current impact policy without some indication of the impact of the study itself. The purpose of this investigation is to inform policy makers of the performance of their strategies that seek to provide greater economic and social impact from academic research, in particular, within the area of business and management. As we shall see from the report, one of the essential but most challenging requirements of this objective is the ability to reach the target audience. In pursuit of this requirement I have attempted to take the research to the audience by registering on the government's programme, 'Taking Parliament outside Westminster'. The purpose of this programme is to increase the level of research heard in the UK parliament with a view to facilitating more informed decision making. The sessions use 'Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology' research into the 2014 REF case studies to demonstrate how academics have influenced policy makers in the past and give practical advice and information about how to get involved in the government's decision-making processes. It is hoped that these sessions will inform the dissemination choices of any papers that result from the work.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction – The approach Taken Towards the Literature

The literature Reviewed in this chapter will seek to cover the following issues.

The debate over the nature of the perceived problem that impact seeks to address.

This section will consider the arguments of those who both support and reject the rectitude of the move towards pragmatism. It is helpful to consider these positions since they illustrate the views of those most affected. In doing so it will offer a glimpse into the research culture that exists in our business schools, highlight some conflicting opinions on the purpose of academic research and provide an indication of the potential hurdles that may need to be addressed.

The components of impactful research

Here the content will seek to meet the first objective of the thesis by drawing from literature to provide a critique of the components of research practice that are believed to influence the likelihood of its adoption by practitioners. The section draws on the conceptual approach provided by Carol Weiss which attempts to describe the conduits through which research passes on its journey towards application. The content goes on to consider the type of research practice (independent variables) which are believed to deliver the prerequisites (dependent variables) in Weiss' model.

Existing policies and practices and their effect on the quest for impact

In this section the literature examines the policies and practices that exist in our business schools and the extent to which they encourage or discourage those factors, discussed in the previous section, that are felt to affect the likelihood of research being adopted.

The process of change - Barriers and other implementation issues

Finally, having considered the requirements of impactful research the literature turns to the potential problems of implementation. Here I have attempted to provide some indication of the gap to be bridged if a shift from conceptual to applied research is to be realised.

2.2 The Perceived Problem that Impact Seeks to Address.

The debate over the need for research impact could not be more topical or widespread. The ubiquitous nature of the attention it receives can be gleaned from a consideration of the final report of the 'Impact

of Research Task Force', commissioned by the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International). The report has the following to say on the matter:

"The widespread interest is not surprising; questions about research weigh heavily on the minds of business school deans. Biting criticisms have been lodged about the relevance and value of research coming out of business schools and, in a recent AACSB survey of deans, one in four deans cited the value proposition of research among their top three long term concerns" (AACSB, 2007, pp.4-5, op.cit.).

Deliberations concerning the degree to which management research should, or should not, be made more relevant to the business community can be traced back to the post war period when business education tended to be delivered by practitioners who provided what Bennis and O'Toole describe as "war stories" to their audiences (2005). This focus on application was challenged in the late 1950's when two influential US institutions issued damning reports on what they believed to be the woeful state of business research and theory emerging from these institutions (2005. ibid.). The Ford Foundation's 'Higher Education for Business' report (Gordon and Howell 1959) and the Carnegie Foundation's 'The Education of American Businessmen: A Study of University College Programmes in Business Administration' (Pierson 1959) both called for a more scientific approach to the research underpinning business education. Backing up their arguments for change with grant funding, these institutions were instrumental in moving the emphasis of management research from the pragmatic end of the conceptual - applied continuum to a more theoretical and analytical focus. (Anon, 2012).

The question of whether the pendulum has swung too far from the needs of the practitioner community is a discussion that has continued ever since (See, for example, Porter & McKibbin, 1988; Mintzberg, 2004, op.cit.; Ghoshal, 2005). The debate, which is often framed in terms of 'academic rigour' versus 'practice relevance', is often played out between proponents with entrenched views, calling into question the very purpose of academic research.

What follows is an exploration of the argument that posits that much of the business and management research produced today disregards the needs of policy makers and practitioners alike, both in terms of the issues that it chooses to explore and the manner in which its outcomes are communicated; a phenomenon eloquently described by Shapero et al. as "*Lost before Translation*" and "*Lost in Translation*" (2007, p.249).

2.2.1 The Case for Change

“Sublime and aristocratic... though not active and directed towards goals, not consciously serving something greater or profounder than itself. Rather, it tends somewhat towards smugness and self-praise, towards the cultivation and elaboration of intellectual specialism.”

The Glass Bead Game - Herman Hesse, 1943

Nobel Laureate Herman Hesse's novel 'Glass Bead Game' (1943) describes a society in which the acquisition of knowledge exists for no other purpose than as a mechanism for personal progression through the hierarchies of the establishment in the fictional province of Castalia. While Hesse locates this fraternity of extraneous intellectuals in some future century, authors such as Hambrick (1994) and Vermeulen (2005) allude to parallels in academia that are much closer to home, suggesting that by ignoring practitioners and policy makers as an audience, much of the research currently undertaken in our university business schools is akin to the unproductive endeavours in Hesse's vision.

The discussion appears to have touched a raw nerve in some quarters of the academic community, unleashing strong views held by some commentators. In defence of change, Gaddis (2000), for example, cites the writing of Richard R West, who, as Dean of New York University's Graduate School of Business, applied such terms as 'fuzzy', 'irrelevant', and 'pretentious' to the research coming out of the modern business school. Pfeffer describes a proliferation of theoretically grounded but irrelevant research (2007, op.cit.) often driven by what Starbuck has argued to be a personal agenda rather than one that serves the public good.

“Organisational researchers have exceptional capabilities, many years of training and the freedom to choose how to spend their time. Yet only 5 to 10 percent of them are trying to benefit someone or something other than themselves”. (Starbuck, 2007 p.24)

Others authors choose to place the blame for this lack of efficacy on the expansion of academic publishing and the demands of the system within which academics work. Critics such as MacDonald and Kam (2007) argue that a 'publish or perish' culture within universities in general has led to a deterioration in the quality of their publications and, in business schools in particular, has resulted in an explosion of what some authors have labelled 'theoretically grounded but irrelevant research' (Mintzberg, 2004, op.cit.; Pfeffer, 2007, op.cit.). In an article entitled 'We Must Stop the Avalanche of Low-Quality Research', Bauerlein et al. (2010, op.cit.) suggests that an emphasis on the output quantity of university publications has led to an escalation of "*redundant, inconsequential and outright poor research*" (p1). The authors describe a proliferation of ignored research, published by a growing number

of researchers in an expanding academic press; an academic press which, according to Michael Mabe's analysis of Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, doubles in size about every 20 years (Mabe, 2003). It is this quantity that is at the heart of many of the criticisms of the current system. Bauerlein's criticism that many of the articles in this self-sustaining merry-go-round contain little useful information is compounded by Campbell's assertion that, whilst consuming years of field and library research, this low value research simply clogs up the peer review system beyond the refereeing capacity of leading practitioners (Campbell et al., 1999) at a time when academics have little incentive to referee at all (Humphrey et al, 1995). In doing so, it runs the risk of damaging both the real and the perceived value of academic research and adds fuel to the fire of those who would prefer to see deeper cuts in the budgets that fund business school research.

To place this volume into perspective it is worth considering the AACSB's approximation of the magnitude of management research output. The association estimate that more than 20,000 business and management articles are published each year in the English language alone (AACSB, 2007, p.9, op.cit.). When one considers that 'The Journal of Management Studies' are said to reject nearly 90 percent of submissions (Clarke et al., 2006), 'The Journal of Management', 92 percent (Feldman, 2005) and 'The Harvard Business Review', almost 99 percent (Podaskoff et al., 2005), it is possible to get a picture of the sheer volume of the work that falls under the banner of academic research within the business school community.

The suggestion that practitioners are voting with their feet in response to this dilution of quality is proposed by Daft and Lewin in an article published in the inaugural issue of '*Organisational Science*' (1990). In the paper the authors ask "*Is the field of organisational studies irrelevant?*" (p1); contesting that "*the body of knowledge published in academic journals has practically no audience in business or government*" (p1).

So, if it is not policy makers or the business community who are reading the labours of our academic institutions, then who is? Other academics maybe? Not according to Jacs'o whose 2009 study suggests that up to 60% of articles published in the top science and social science journals between 2000 and 2006 failed to receive a single citation in the first five years after publication. (Jacs'o, 2009).

The effect of the academic publishing system on the quest for research impact is explored in section 2.2 of this chapter.

2.2.2 Arguments Against Change

There are of course those who see no contradiction in the pursuit of basic theory. Commentators who refute the need for change are best considered under three different, but not unconnected threads.

Firstly, there are those who argue that, so called, “*basic research*” (AACSB, 2007, p.13, op.cit.) has more to offer than would be the case were research efforts directed by the short term demands of practitioners. Amongst this group are authors such as Stanford University's James March and Citigroup's John Reed who contest demands for instantaneous results on the basis that the most valuable contributions to business practice have evolved through the advancement of basic knowledge rather than the pursuit of immediate relevance (March and Reed, 1999). Protagonists of this durability viewpoint argue that academic research is, and should remain, a cumulative process that builds upon existing knowledge to help us continuously improve our understanding of general management concepts. Gabriel, for example, proposes that this knowledge is utilised by the business community “*in a creative, opportunistic and individualistic way. ... like cooking recipes and cookery books, which different users employ or experiment with in widely differing ways*” (2002, p.134).

A more considered viewpoint, that suggests that there may be room for both theory and practice to co-exist in a mutually beneficial relationship, is posited by the psychologist Alexander J. Rothman (2004). Rothman draws upon Kurt Lewin's famous quote “*there is nothing more practical than a good theory?*” to support his argument that practice evolves from theory and ultimately informs and refines such theory in a closed loop system.

An additional argument warns of the endangerment of ‘blue sky’ research in the quest for immediacy and away from curiosity driven research (O’Gorman, 2009). Those who endorse the value of this ‘undirected’ enquiry tend to support their case with examples of outputs that were not anticipated as part of the original research objectives as well as cases where the value of the research was not realised until many years after the findings were published. It may be worth noting that many of the examples cited in such instances appear to come from the natural sciences, including innovations such as penicillin, teflon and sticky notes. Illustrations from the social sciences tend to be less prevalent. A recent move towards stronger governance and public accountability agendas in higher education (Chandler, 2014, op.cit.) as well as demands for greater transparency in the use of HE resources through the introduction of TRAC returns (Transparent Approach to Costing) (HEFCE, 2009) adds fuel to the fire of those who link impact with the ongoing erosion of academic freedom.

As well as its inherent knowledge creation value, it is argued that basic research serves an important educational purpose that must not be overlooked in this debate. Demski and Zimmerman (2000) point out that an understanding of this form of research process creates a disciplined way of thinking that is of value regardless of the types of problems and issues faced by managers. Those who point to the value of the student perspective in this debate note that there are numerous studies (Neumann, 1994; Jenkins et al., 1998; Becker et al., 2003) that link an institution's traditional research performance indicators to its attractiveness to students. On the matter of the educational value of research, even the pro-impact AACSB concede that *"it is likely that research has its greatest impact on management behaviours and organisations through education rather than through publication"* (AACSB, 2007, p.17, op.cit.).

A second cohort refutes the premise that theoretical research fails to influence practice. Advocates of this position tend to cite instances of current policies and practices that have such research to thank for their existence. In a report entitled 'The Impact of Academic Accounting Research on Professional Practice' (Stephen, 2009), the 'American Accounting Association' endorse this position by providing examples of contributions to practice in areas such as financial accounting, auditing, tax, regulation, managerial accounting and information systems. This position supports the notion that the impact agenda is little more than a bureaucratic formalisation of the role that academic researchers have always held, that being, *"to conduct research that is not trivial and has results of some consequence"* (Denlco, 2014).

Finally, there is a view that reward mechanisms such as the UK's REF simply will not work. Dissenters argue that whilst there may well be a spectrum of realisable value within academic research, the task of quantifying and rewarding impactful research, as if it were a commodity, does not take account of the fact that it is impossible to predict exactly which research is likely to yield such worth (Ashley, 2011). Authors such as O'Gorman (2009, op. Cit.) question the ability of the subjective judgements of 'expert' panels to quantify both the present and, perhaps more contentiously, the future value of such research impacts.

Although the 2014 REF utilised such panels to reward institutions on the impact of their research outputs, there are many who have questioned the legitimacy of their decisions. These strategies remain relatively untested in terms of their ability to recognise and appropriately compensate research institutions whose work results in measurable economic and/or social impacts. Until they are, critics will continue to argue against the logic of proportioning research funding on the basis of what they perceive as rather loosely defined performance targets. In the words of one blogger *"...no one can define in*

conceptual terms how impact functions, and by implication, what is good, and hence better, impact" (Benniworth, 2012, p.1).

Not least amongst these critics are the 13,500 or so who signed the UK's 'University and College Union' petition against the inclusion of impact into the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (Corbyn, 2011). Critics range from those who believe the REF unfairly penalises researchers who take maternity/paternity leave (Haour, 2011), to those who feel the assessment criteria still rewards academics who craft their research around the publication criteria of a small set of preferred journals (Thomas and Wilson, 2009).

One such critic is Dr Peter Wells of Cardiff Business School. Wells is an ardent supporter of the need for a more pragmatic approach to research but contests the effectiveness of the REF in delivering this outcome. In an article published under the banner of the 'Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society', the author argues that the REF is not only divisive, but that it also fails to measure true impact (Wells, 2011). Perhaps Well's most poignant observation is that the REF does not recognise academics who publish impactful outputs in media other than A-listed journals. To demonstrate this point he provides a short biography of his own accomplishments that is reproduced verbatim and in full below for reasons which will become clear upon reaching the end.

Dr Peter Wells is a Reader at Cardiff Business School and a member of the ESRC funded BRASS Centre and of the Centre for Automotive Industry Research. Since the last RAE (end of 2007) he has published one authored book, seven academic journal papers, three contributions to edited works, six management reports in the public domain, 51 professional journal articles, seven academic conference papers, eight industry conference papers, chaired three webinars, and had 12 internet publications. He has also contributed to a research project for Greenpeace International on carbon emissions from cars in Europe. He has acted as a reviewer for the ESRC, many academic journals and the International Energy Agency 2009 forecast. He has been quoted as an expert on the automotive industry by many newspapers and magazines including The New York Times, International Herald Tribune, Economist, Berliner Zeitung, Wall Street Journal (and Asian edition) and even the Journal da Comarca, Palmital, Brazil. He has similarly made many media appearances for television and radio, in the UK and beyond. He is unlikely to be considered research active in the next REF.

Again, the AACSB appear to accept the legitimacy of this argument. Commenting on feedback received following the draft report of its "Research on Impact Task Force", that proposed to incorporate an evaluation of the impact of intellectual contributions into its membership accreditation criteria, the association stated: "*Though few have questioned its logic, many readers believe that it may be too difficult, if not impossible to implement*" (AACSB, 2007, p.5. op.cit.). This said, it is worth noting that whilst the association go on to acknowledge that "*schools might have difficulty collecting the required*

documentation or coming up with suitable measures of impact” (ibid, P5), these criticisms were not sufficient to change the recommendations in the final report that were subsequently adopted by the Institution.

2.2.3 Summary

Whatever one’s position in this debate, in an age of government spending reviews, public sector accountability (Hood, 1995) and demands for greater value for money (UK Government; Treasury Select Committee, 2009), events suggest that public policy no longer favours those who seek to defend the status-quo. As a result, national governments across the globe are turning up the heat on universities to deliver more utilitarian and measurable output from their research activities.

2.3 The Characteristics of Impactful Research

Before embarking on a discussion on the attributes of impactful research it is worth noting that any attempt to isolate discrete factors that result in high levels of research adoption can be fraught with difficulty. The variety and complexity surrounding social science enquiry renders any measurement of its interruptive functionality inherently problematic (Biesta, 2007; Nutley et. al., 2007). This is no more evident than when considering the various conduits through which research outputs can potentially flow before influencing the end user community. Hemsley-Brown (2004) warns of the inadequacies of conceiving the relationship between research and practice as linear, preferring a model based upon the findings of the Australian Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, who present it as "*a multi-layered, unpredictable interacting process of engagement*" (DETYA, 2000, p10).

Although there is little by way of clear models to describe how knowledge passes between academics and practitioners in the field of business and management (Starkey and Madan 2001), it is possible to draw on research from other social science disciplines to gain an insight into these channels. Based upon a review of pertinent literature in education studies, Carol Weiss (2007) offers the following six mechanisms for consideration.

<p><i>The Knowledge-Driven Model</i></p>	<p><i>Typical in the natural sciences, this model assumes the following linear series of events:-</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Basic Research ➤ Applied Research ➤ Development ➤ Application.</i></p> <p><i>The author suggests that few examples can be found in the social sciences although the validity of the mechanism in this field is often cited in the arguments of those who attempt to defend the value of basic research.</i></p>
<p><i>The Problem-Solving Model</i></p>	<p><i>Here research is either sought out or commissioned to provide end users with answers to specific questions. This mechanism has a high level of impact potential since the need for the research and the research itself are closely aligned.</i></p>

<i>The Interactive Model</i>	<i>This model assumes the engagement of the end user in the research process in some form. Again, the probability of adoption is high due to the interest demonstrated and potential “buy-in” from those who are in a position to act upon the findings.</i>
<i>The Political Model</i>	<i>Here research is utilised to support a particular viewpoint which may well have been formed for other reasons. Whilst this reactive process might not be considered as genuinely impactful, the author contends that research used to support a predetermined position is indeed being utilised appropriately and only distortion or misinterpretation of the findings could be considered illegitimate.</i>
<i>The Tactical Model</i>	<i>This mechanism has less to do with the outcomes of the research than the fact that the research is being done. The process is often used to deflect political criticism or introduce delays in decision making.</i>
<i>The Enlightenment Model</i>	<i>This model describes a more subtle path to research utilisation that assumes a gradual percolation of the general concepts and theoretical perspectives that social science engenders through various communication media and into the minds of the practitioners and policy makers. Whilst the author suggests that this model is likely to describe the route by which most social science research enters the practitioner arena, the model does not easily lend itself to any form of measurement since, by definition, there is no single point at which end users are swayed by any particular study.</i>

Models of research adoption – Adapted from Weiss (2007)

Weiss suggests that any attempt to define the effectiveness of the various tactics aimed at promoting adoption must take into account the full range of this diversity in the channels through which research is transmitted. For example, strategies that result in greater research dissemination might be considered less valuable than, say, the focus of the inquiry, where research was commissioned to address a particular problem. However, dissemination is all important when it comes to adoption via Weiss’s enlightenment model.

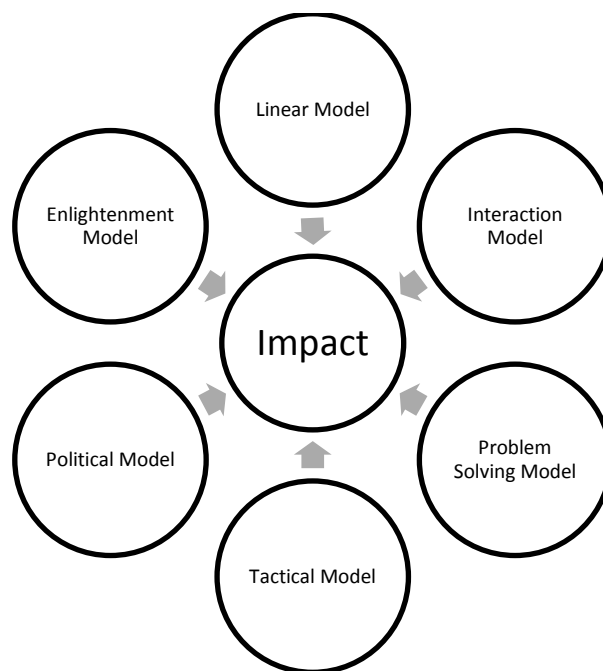


Fig1 Routes to Impact Adoption - Adapted from Weiss (2007)

To accommodate this complexity, past studies that have sought to investigate the determinants of effective research adoption, particularly via Weiss’s enlightenment route, have often considered independent variables to exist on a spectrum of value. These range from activities that simply encourage the transmission of research findings to those that result in the adoption of new practices or changes in the way phenomena are understood and acted upon (Cherney and McGee, 2011). Whilst no single conceptual model has been universally adopted (Belkhodja et. al., 2007; Lester, 1993), several studies have made use of ‘research utilisation scales’ (see Knot and Wildavsky, 1980; Landry et al., 2001) like the one described below, adapted from Cherney et al. (2012, op.cit.).

<i>Transmission</i>	<i>The degree to which research outputs have been successful in reaching end users</i>
<i>Cognition</i>	<i>The degree to which the research has been read and understood by end-users</i>
<i>Reference</i>	<i>The degree to which the research has been cited in reports and strategies by end-users</i>
<i>Effort</i>	<i>The efforts that were made to adopt the results of the research by end-users</i>
<i>Influence</i>	<i>The degree to which the results have influenced the choices and decisions of end-users</i>
<i>Application</i>	<i>The degree to which the research has been applied by end-users</i>

Research Utilisation Scale (Dependent Variables) – Adapted from Cherney et al (2012)

Investigations that have adopted this methodology have attempted to correlate research practice (independent variables) with desired consequences (dependent variables). The outcomes of such studies often exhibit a number of recurring themes that researchers have tended to use to categorise the factors that are found to positively influence research utilisation. These include supply and demand-side factors, interaction variables and dissemination variables (Cherney et al., 2011).

Supply side factors relate to the decisions made in the choice of research topic to be studied as well as the research methodology and the motivations involved in conducting it. (See Bogenschneider and Corbett, 2010; Cherney et al, 2011. op.cit.). These include individual researcher preferences as well as institutional drivers and research funding priorities that might have influenced such decisions. Also included in this category is the degree to which researchers are encouraged to work in collaboration with external partners. The premise here being that research that is applicable and currently of interest to practitioners is more likely to be adopted and acted upon than that which is driven by academic curiosity alone (See “*Interaction variables*” below).

Demand pull factors are concerned with the degree to which practitioners and/or policy makers are likely to believe academic research is pertinent to their needs as well as the credibility they afford its authors. The idea that utilisation is impeded because academics and practitioners are seen to belong to very different worlds with different values and cultures is a highly pervasive theme in the literature (see, Dunnette and Brown, 1968; Glazer and Taylor, 1973; Duncan, 1974; Caplan, 1977; Rothman, 1980).

Interaction variables focus on the relationships that exist between the producers and consumers of academic research. Here the research suggests that the more academics engage with managers and policy makers, the more they are likely to understand their needs (Huberman, 1990; Lomas, 2000; Landry et al., 2001, op.cit.). Studies into research adoption repeatedly report that practitioners who participate in the research process are more disposed to implementing its findings (Mann and Likert, 1952; Flanagan, 1961; Glaser and Taylor, 1973, op.cit.; Alkin, Daillack and White, 1979; Rothman, 1980, op.cit.). This viewpoint was reiterated by the 2003 Lambert Report commissioned by the UK Treasury to look at ways to improve collaboration between business and universities. The report argues that “*the most effective forms of knowledge transfer involve human interaction*” and proposes “*a number of ways to bring together people from businesses and universities*” (2003, p.2).

Finally, *Dissemination variables* relate to the efforts made by researchers to communicate their findings in a format that will be both appealing and accessible to practitioners. This includes the language used in output reports and the degree to which outputs can be operationalised (Cherney & McGee, 2012, op. cit.). Also included in this category are the publication choices made by researchers; the assumption being that the more research is accessible to, and targeted at, end users, the more likely it is to be discovered and acted upon.

Interaction and dissemination are themes that also recur frequently in the literature. Assudani (2003) suggests that they align with two epistemological perspectives: An ‘epistemology of action/process’ describes knowledge as dynamic and context specific. Proponents of this conviction (See Lave, 1996) promote the need for what has been described as a ‘mode 2’ approach to research (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998) involving greater participation and interaction between those who conduct and those who apply academic research. An ‘epistemology of possession’, advocates that knowledge is a resource that can be generated, possessed, and hence shared. Authors who subscribe to this view argue that research uptake will be best served by focussing on the effective transfer of academic knowledge (Tranfield et al., 2003).

It is worth noting that these perspectives are far from mutually exclusive. Shapiro’s survey of members of the Academy of Management (2007, op.cit.) concluded that this constituency were of the view that both improved closer working relationships and effective dissemination were of equal importance in the quest for greater implementation of management research.

2.4 Existing Policies and Practices

2.4.1 Supply Side Factors

2.4.1.1. Academic Incentives and Quality Journals

According to Starkey and Tiratsoo, when it comes to recruitment and promotion of faculty "*the basic fact is that [...] it is research and not teaching that has become the real fulcrum of [the] business school*" (2007, op. cit., p.115). However, it is worth noting that not any type of research will do. Academics who aspire to rise through the ranks are required to produce the type of papers that are publishable in the so called 'quality journals' (Humphrey et al., 1995, op.cit.; Piercy, 2000). A number of critics (Hopwood, 2002; Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992) argue that recruitment, promotion and (in the US at least) tenure decisions, are ostensibly made on the basis of the number of articles published in a select group of peer reviewed journals; resulting in what is described as the "publish or perish" culture (Caplow and McGee, 1958).

Critics such as DeRond and Millar (2005) argue that this culture places too much emphasis on productivity rather than innovation and often results in the pursuit of bland and inoffensive projects. Astley and Zammuto (1992) argue that such content is often perceived by the practitioner community as esoteric and irrelevant, resulting in what has been described by Harley and Lee as "*a number of respected journals that exhibit a deadening uniformity in their field of endeavour*" (1997, p1434). Authors such as Whitley (1986), McCutchen (1991) and Wray (1994) describe the content preferred by many of these publications as that which conforms to the consensus of opinion on the topic of the research. Tellis et.al. (1999) go even further suggesting that in some cases the peer review process can become little more than a mechanism for detecting and filtering out deviance from the dominant view.

Yet, despite such shortcomings, the preferences of these journals have continued to exhibit a dominance on the research agenda of academic intuitions. According to McDonald and Kam (2017, op.cit.) publication rates in these 'quality journals' continue to dictate our business school's ability to generate research income as well as impacting upon their perceived reputation and associated capacity to recruit staff and students alike. The authors suggest that, historically at least, the funding councils have regularly used publication in these high ranking journals as surrogate indicators of esteemed research in lieu of their ability to read the sheer volume of articles submitted for assessment in the REA. In the 2001 assessment they calculate that this volume resulted in a requirement for each of the 14 business and management panel members to read an average of 18 academic papers per day in every one of 40 days allocated for the task. (2007, op.cit.).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that such has been the pressure to deliver rigorously defended theoretical outputs, the system has actually dissuaded early-years researchers, who might once have contemplated making more of a utilitarian impact through their work, from following these instincts. Vermeulen notes that many of those who aspire to become business school academics via PhD programmes start out *“with the intention of developing truly relevant knowledge that might change the world of organisations”* (2005, p.980, op.cit). However, others (see Deci, 1971; Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999) have noted that by the time these people exit their doctoral programmes this intrinsic motivation has often disappeared, only to be replaced with what Anthony Hopwood, the retiring dean of Oxford's Said Management School, has described as careerist and institutionally orientated research (2005). This conditioning effect is clearly nothing new. In the words of another well-regarded author:-

"Academic persons, when they carry on study, not only in youth as a part of education, but as the pursuit of their maturer years, most of them become decidedly queer, not to say rotten; and that those who may be considered the best of them are made useless to the world by the very study which [they] extol"

Plato. *Republic* - Cited in Conford, F.M. (1908)

2.4.1.2 Financial Research Drivers

The predilection of business schools to frequent the theoretical end of the research spectrum is hardly surprising given that, prior to the relatively recent demands for greater pragmatism, funding for academic research has been aimed almost exclusively at this end of the market (MacDonald and Kam, 2007, op.cit.). Since its inception in 1986 the UK's foremost indicator of institutional research prowess, the RAE, has been rewarding university departments for such theoretical outputs. This 'quality-related' (QR) funding accounts for around 40% of all university research income provided by the state.

Awards are made in the form of block grants on the basis that this mechanism provides a secure and reliable source of support for academic research within universities (Langlands, 2009). However, unlike their more targeted project funding counterparts, once conferred, QR awards come with few strings attached with respect to the direction of the research they finance (Macilwain, 2009. op.cit.). According to Bauerlein et al (2010. op.cit.) much of the resulting curiosity driven research is of poor quality and lacks any form of empirical work to support it. Many of the articles financed by QR funding are published in lower grade academic journals and often exhibit material that is opinionated and entirely conjectural, resulting in what Starkey and Tiratsoo describe as a *“torrent of verbiage that for the most part is quite inconsequential”* (2007, p.119. op.cit.). This unsupported prescription is seen by both academics and practitioners alike as being unhelpful, even counterproductive, as it is in danger of being accepted by managers at face value. (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002). The notion that such conjecture can

metamorphose into accepted theory is perhaps best illustrated through a consideration of Tom Peter's proposition of eight key attributes that make for a successful organisation, as described in his 1982 bestselling and much cited book "In Search of Excellence". Some years after the publication of this text, Robert Birnbaum, one of the researchers on the book, revealed that the characteristics came not from any analytical study, but straight off the top of the author's head when pushed for time to prepare a talk on the subject. (Birnbaum, 2001).

2.4.2 Demand Pull Factors

In its attempt to investigate the reasons why business school research has had such a modest influence on the end user community, the Lambert Report concluded that "*the biggest single challenge [...] is in boosting the demand for research from non-academic communities*" (2003, p10, op.cit.). If one was to draw upon accepted academic theory for guidance on how this objective could best be achieved, marketing theory might be considered as an appropriate source. Such theory advocates that demand is engendered when organisations accurately address the wants and needs of their target markets (See, for example, Baines, Fill & Page. 2010; Jobber. 2012; Saunders, Armstrong, Kotler & Wong. 2010). Acclaimed marketing and organisational strategy author Philip Kotler proposes the following approach.

"There is only one winning strategy. It is to carefully define the needs of their target market and direct a superior offering to that target market"

Kotler (2010, p124)

In academia, a consequence of the freedom afforded to business and management researchers to choose the direction of their enquiries is that very little of this work tends to be driven by any form of demand or geared towards solving the type of problems acknowledged by the business community themselves (Leavitt, 1986; Porter and McKibbin, 1998. op.cit.). While many deans cling to the rhetoric that places the practitioner at the forefront of academic research (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007. op.cit.), the recognition that the majority of business school research is aimed not at the end user but at other academics is a highly pervasive theme in the literature (AACSB, 2007, op.cit.). This practice is captured concisely by the words of Donald Hambrick in his 1993 presidential address to the Academy of Management, entitled "What if academy actually mattered".

"We read each other's papers in our journals and write our own papers so that we may, in turn, have an audience....: an incestuous closed loop"

(Hambrick, 1994 p.13. op.cit.).

To any business person who has responsibility for innovation and product development, this failure to be guided by the market is likely to seem a ludicrous state of affairs and may explain what Ankers and Brennan describe as their sheer indifference to academic research outputs (2002).

2.4.3 Interaction Variables

"This year's academy of Management conference in Seattle was crawling with management teachers. They came from the University of Oregon, the Stockholm School of Economics, the Auckland University of Technology and hundreds of schools in between. They presented papers on everything from the role of the compensation committees to the influence of gender on career success. But what was striking about this international festival of management was the almost complete absence of managers".

Michael Skapinker - Financial Times November 2003

Many of those who defend 'mode 1' research justify the separation of academia and practice on the basis of their conviction that that the role of the university should be the creation of new understanding rather than its immediate application (March and Reed, 1999, op. cit.). Others argue that, even if we were to accept this argument, interaction with practitioners is essential to provide the dialogue and debate necessary for effective knowledge creation (Rynes, 2007; van de Ven & Johnson, 2006 op. cit.). Authors such as Huff (2000, op.cit.) suggest that the danger of recruitment and incentive strategies that promote theoretical research is the effect they may have on the academic's motivation and capability to develop working relationships with end users. Cummins focusses on the impact such strategies may have on the credibility and respect afforded by this audience. In his Presidential address to the Academy of Management, the author describes the need for such interaction as follows:

"The future vitality and success of our profession depends on [...] forging closer links between research and practice [...]. Unless we become much better at it we risk being seen as moral hypocrites [...] a bunch of monastic fuddy-duddies who pass sacred wisdom among ourselves while holding a tenuous grip on what goes on around us". (Cummings, 2007, p.357)

Research conducted by Hughes et. al. (2011, op. cit.) indicates that many business and management faculty have neither the skills nor the credibility to engage with the practitioner community. Unsurprisingly, the study identifies a group of academics who have no desire to involve themselves in collaborative activities. The authors suggest the root cause of this apathy is a problem that is circular and self-sustaining; postulating; *"if there is little exchange going on between the academic and the practitioner communities, how are academics meant to keep in touch with the reality of business practice?"* (p.54). Starkey and Madan (2001, op. cit.) posit that if engagement with practice is to become a reality, universities must be encouraged to move away from unidirectional mode 1 research

practices towards a two way interactive approach that takes into account the research needs of practitioners and policy makers and provides value to both academia and the business community.

2.4.3.1 Research Dissemination

The difficulties associated with raising awareness of academic research outcomes are not new and neither are they restricted to the field of business and management. Mosteller (1981) asserts that it took a period of nearly 200 years for a proven cure for scurvy to find its way into practice in the British Navy. According to Weiss (2007, op. cit.), whether or not the best and most relevant research reaches the person with the problem depends primarily upon the efficiency of the communication links. The author suggests that the best prescription for improving the adoption of academic research is to improve the means by which it is communicated. This message has been reiterated in several studies that have attempted to capture the views of practitioners on this matter. (See, for example, Schweitzer, 1985; Shapiro et.al., 2007, op. cit.; Antelman, 2004).

Literature that attempts to discuss the shortfalls in communication channels tends to focus on both the limited access to research findings outside academic circles and the writing styles adopted in the output reports.

As things stand, most academic research is published in journals and conference proceedings which are relatively inaccessible to most institutions other than universities and a small number organisations who can afford the prohibitive fees charged by the large publishing companies. The growth and rising cost of access to these publications is such that even the wealthiest of academic institutions are experiencing problems keeping up with subscription rates. According to Guardian correspondent Ian Sample (2012), a memo from Harvard's 'Faculty Advisory Council' expresses the view that the major scientific publishers are making scholarly communication 'fiscally unsustainable' and 'academically restrictive'. The same article cites a group of some 10,000 academics who have already joined a boycott of Elsevier, the Dutch publishing house, as well as several calls from leading Universities to encourage their staff to follow suit. In 2013 the UK Government set up the 'Research Sector Transparency Board' (RSTB), chaired by The Rt. Hon. David Willetts MP, to advise on how publically funded research might be made more accessible. Following the publication of the Finch Report in 2015 this committee was tasked with implementing the recommendations that included a requirement for all universities to provide open access to their research.

Although open access publishing is relatively new, initial studies seem to indicate that research published via this medium has a greater readership both in academia, as measured by citation metrics in the ISI Web of Science database, and with the practitioner community (Antelman, 2004, op.cit.). One

variation on this theme of open publishing, growing in popularity with some academics, is the use of blogs and other social media platforms. According to Dunleavy and Gibson (2011) such outlets overcome the cost and access constraints of traditional publishing media as well as providing the brevity and instant feedback preferred by the practitioner community. The flip side of these on-line channels is that, save for the comments in their discussion forums, these publications are not peer reviewed and, as such, are unlikely to attract the funding bestowed on their A list journal counterparts. Hence, despite the benefits of such communication media, there is little incentive for institutions or individuals to move away from the more traditional publishing outlets.

2.4.3.2 *Academic Jargon and Writing Conventions*

"Generally, when people use jargon not to communicate but to impress their audiences with their importance ... or use it to announce membership in a group, communication suffers and the jargon can quickly degenerate into something close to the twittering of birds."

W. Lutz, "Jargon." *Oxford Companion to the English Language*, 1992

While opening up access to academic publications may assist in shifting research findings closer to the practitioners who might benefit from them, convincing this constituency to read and act upon such material is more about providing content that they consider appealing (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1997; Knorr-Cetina, 1981; McCloskey, 1994). For some authors, this appeal comes from the focus of the research and the degree to which end users believe it to be pertinent to their needs (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998, op cit; Hodgkinson, 2001). Others suggest that the style in which the research is presented can be equally as important (Kelemen and Bansal, 2002; McCloskey, 1994, op. cit.). There is certainly evidence that academic writing styles have the potential to alienate the practitioner community. A study of marketing managers conducted by Belenger concluded that researchers too often couched their reports in jargon and were overly technical in their commentaries (1979). Starkey and Tiratsoo cite one enquiry conducted by the advisory group to the UK's 'Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership in Business Schools' who were advised by a number of business leaders that academic research was "*published in academic journals in an inaccessible language*" (p. 127, op.cit). While the highly codified and institutionalised style often adopted in research reports (Kelemen and Bansal, 2002, op.cit.) is defended by those who believe that academia is the legitimate audience for such transcripts, others (see Thomas, 2009.) hold a view that the reasons for, and outcomes of, academic jargon are closer to Lutz's' elucidation of such behaviour.

The journals into which researchers are expected to publish also encourage authors to present their work as belonging to an established philosophical lineage. Billig suggests that abiding by established

conventions presents the work as though it comes with the backing of “*powerful friends*”, carrying the “*patronage of an impressive and unique terminology*” (2013. p53. op.cit). Whilst adhering to such positions may increase the chance of having ones work accepted by the academic journals, the truly ambitious researcher must go one better and develop a ‘new approach’. This is often achieved by simply adding adjectival lexis to existing approaches to achieve neologisms that may or may not be innovative, but which certainly add to the burgeoning phraseology associated with social research. The resulting expansion of such terminologies within academic institutions has led some authors to describe universities as places of ‘multiple academic literacies’. (See for example, Lea and Street, 1998; English, 2002).

The adherence to esoteric terminologies so fraught with opportunities for misinterpretation has resulted in a number of journalists questioning the motives of those who adopt them. (See, for example, Wheen, 2004; Murray, 2008 and Dutton, 1999). Dutton, writing in the Wall Street Journal, suggests that the “*inept philosophy*” that is so pervasive in academic writing has become the “*emperor’s clothing of choice*” within the profession (p.2,). Such critics have no problem identifying numerous examples of impenetrable material within the academic journals with which to demonstrate their point. In doing so, they portray the entire sector as, at best, elitist and arrogant, and at worst, a community seeking to avoid clarity in an effort to “*conceal a lack of anything [of value] to say*” (Andreski 1971 p.216). These authors are not the first to criticise academic cant. As early as 1899 William James was warning student teachers to beware of being overawed by such jargon that he attributed to “*pompous [...] professors attempting to appear professional in front of the impressionable*” (1899. pp. 156-157)

2.5 Barriers to Change and Implementation Issues

Starkey and Tiratsoo (2007, op.cit.) contend that management school academics’ addiction to rigour rather than relevance is the outcome of a complex interplay between a combination of discrete factors. In particular they describe a culture that has evolved in response to the increasing pressure exerted by external accreditation regimes fixated on metrics such as publication volumes, journal quality hierarchies and citation indices; as well as a more subtle, yet deeply seated, ‘inferiority complex’ brought about by the overt criticisms of other faculties commenting on the legitimacy of their very existence as an academic faculty.

The former, it is claimed by some authors (Willmott, 1995; Holub et al., 1991, op.cit.), has resulted in a trickle-down effect that sees academics rewarded for focussing on the indicators of the research rather than the research itself. According to MacDonald and Kam (2007, op.cit.) these practices have led to a

process of gamesmanship amongst some academics and their employers, encouraged in some institutions by a policy of 'payment per article'. This view is supported by the AACSB, who place the blame for this obsession with quantity squarely in the court of "*existing policies and systems which place too much emphasis on counting journal articles and favouring basic research over other forms of scholarship, including contributions to practice*" (AACSB, 2007, p.4, op.cit.).

Benis and O'Toole's chronology of the emergence of the modern business school (2005, op.cit.) goes some way to explaining why these institutions feel the need to continuously reinforce their credibility with other departments, describing how their forerunners, the emerging Institutes of Technology, came under increasing pressure from both established faculty and from within their own ranks to move towards a more rigorous and theoretically underpinned research agenda. The notion that "*business schools had seriously underrated the importance of research*" (Pierson, 1959, p.311, op.cit.) is claimed to have resulted in an intellectual atmosphere in which they were deemed to compare "*unfavourably with those in other schools and colleges on the same campus*" (Gordon and Howells, 1959, p.356, op.cit.). A flavour of this historical baggage can be gleaned from Thompson's 1956 paper published in the inaugural issue of "*Administrative Science Quarterly*" in which he contends "*Research must go beyond description and must be reflected against theory. It must study the obvious as well as the unknown. The pressure for immediately applicable results must be reduced*" (1956, p.102)

Bailey and Ford (1996) contend that yet another stumbling block is likely to be met in attempting to convince the high quality journals to change their practice that sees them prioritising articles that exhibit 'theoretical and methodological sophistication' over those demonstrating 'application and relevance'. This requirement is predicated on the notion that much academic research mirrors the publication criteria of these so-called A-listed journals (Laurance, 2003; Alder and Harzing, 2009). Such practices are claimed to discourage faculty from embarking on projects of an applied nature as they have less likelihood of being published in these "*leading journals*" (AACSB, 2007, p.20 op.cit.).

A more philosophical, if slightly depressing, obstacle to change is offered by Kieser and Leiner (2009) who suggest that the 'rigour-relevance gap' is fundamentally unbridgeable because of the "*separate social systems*" that exist between the researcher and the researched (p.519). Reed (2009) elaborates on this explanation, suggesting that it is the "*competing belief systems and methodological rationales*" (p.685) at the core of the ideological legitimacy of its components that renders this gap incapable of being bridged; describing these differences as follows:

“Research is driven by the search for understanding and explanation through the systematic application of theoretical reasoning and empirical investigation. Practice, on the other hand, is grounded in modes of deliberative reflection and judgement that are anchored in direct experience of, and engagement with, context specific issues and problems rather than generalising abstraction and ratiocination”. (p.685)

In the same article Reed articulates a more personal and emotional barrier to the move towards a more relevant research agenda that is linked to existing anxiety about the future of the sector. He describes the pressure to change as *“a lightning rod which attracts many of the concerns about the current condition of and future prospects for business schools in an increasingly competitive and threatening environment”* (p.686). This sense of apprehension within the academic research community is seized upon by Hodgkinson and Rousseau (2009) who, commenting on Kieser and Leiner, suggest that any hurdles to bridging the gap between theory and practice have less to do with social systems and more in common with a principle borrowed from prospect theory that applies to the common response to change; that being; 'losses are more painful than gains are good' (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). The pair argue that it is natural for people who enjoy the current state of affairs to be uncomfortable when change occurs and, anticipating further change, to express belief that change is impossible and should be resisted.

This potential for academic intransigence is described by Oviatt and Miller (1989) as an issue that has been tolerated by academia for some time. The pair suggest that despite a desire on the part of some universities to embrace the needs of the practitioner community, academics have steadfastly refused to play ball. They postulate three reasons why the demands of practically minded HE executives go unheeded: *“1) the munificent nature of the collegiate business education and research industry, 2) the tradition of academic freedom in the university culture and 3) the reward system for business professors”* (p.304). To make matters worse, this reticence to work with the business community may well have provoked an equal and opposite response which is likewise in need of some repair if academic relevance is to become a reality. Parellada and Sanroma's (2000) study of industrialists' views on the relative merits of universities and consulting firms suggest that while universities are considered to have an orderly theoretical approach, they were seen to have clumsy, unresponsive management structures. Whereas consulting firms were perceived to adopt a practical approach and have responsive structures. Amongst the obstacles to effective cooperation identified by Valentin's (2000) study were delays in publishing results, communications problems and cultural differences.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has tested the views of those learned authors who have gone into print to discuss the desirability, or otherwise, of a shift in the direction of business school research towards one which is aimed less at the development of generic management theory and more towards the needs of the practitioner. Authors such as Gibbons et.al. (1994) and Rynes et. al. (2001) who welcome this change, do so on the premise that publicly funded research should be capable of demonstrating at least some form of societal benefit in return for the investment placed in it by that society. Opponents like Kieser and Leiner (op.cit. 2009) suggest that any move towards a more relevant research agenda cannot be achieved without a corresponding concession in the rigour of such investigation. For many in the HE sector, this rigour constitutes the holy grail of academic research and the 'unique selling point (USP)' that separates it from the endeavours of management consultants and the 1,600 or so corporate universities which, according to Mahoney & Sanchez, have sprung up around the globe as the business community take matters into their own hands (2004).

Whilst the onset of this debate predated the recent global financial crisis, the resultant further tightening of national purse strings is likely to place even more pressure on the funding of academic research as it competes with other public services such as health and education for a share of a dwindling pot. As suggested earlier in this paper, to some extent developments have moved on to a point where they have rendered the debate over the attractiveness of research impact to a somewhat 'academic' status. The question has shifted from one of whether such a move is desirable, to one of how it might best be achieved.

Chapter 3. The Author's Critique of the Literature and the Development of Two Conceptual Models

In the previous chapter we saw Weiss' model of research adoption that proposes six potential mechanisms through which research might transmute into some form of impactful outcome*. These routes and their relationship to research practice are conceptualised in the two models presented in this chapter. These models are discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

** For the purpose of this discussion the political and tactical models will not be considered on the basis that they tend to draw on less scholarly forms of research that are not prevalent in business schools.*

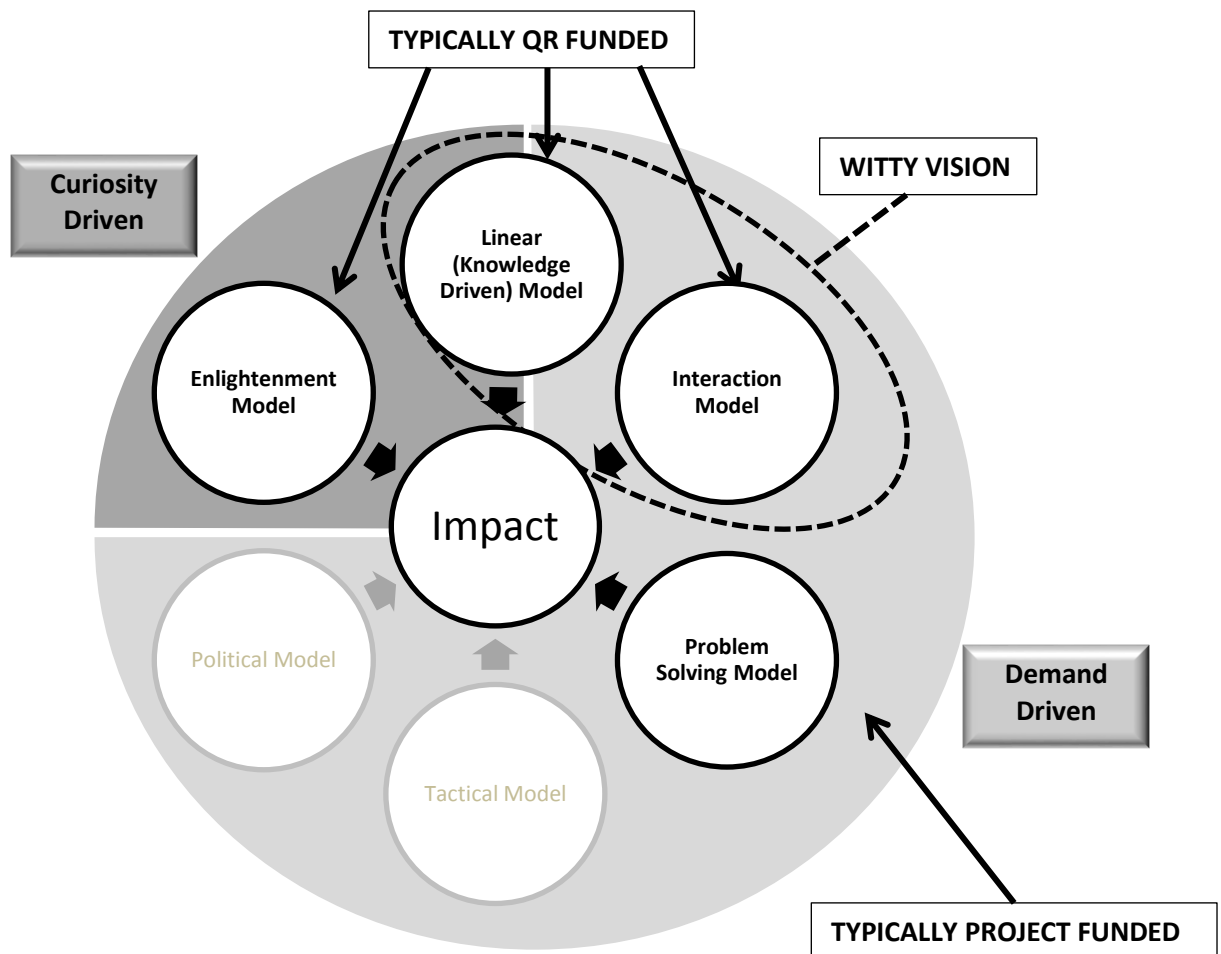


Figure 2. Conceptual Model – Conduits to Impact

3.1 The Linear (Knowledge Driven) Model

Weiss (2007, op.cit.) describes the linear route to research adoption as one that sees the outcomes of basic research finding their way into value laden applications through a process of development and

testing. This model is typical of the manner in which much of the research conducted in the physical sciences evolves into practical exploitations of such efforts. Manufacturing organisations will recognise this channel as one that resembles the new product development process through which many innovations have travelled on their way to market. The model in figure 2 shows the underpinning research that feeds this process to be capable of emerging from both curiosity-driven and demand-driven origins. This is an important point which I believe separates the physical and social sciences. In the physical sciences there are sufficiently numerous instances of successful 'blue sky' research utilisation to justify the value of continued public investment in fundamental research projects for which an immediate application has yet to be identified. However, in the literature consulted in producing this thesis, I have come across few examples of such rewards from social science research and found little evidence to validate a causal relationship between curiosity-driven research and its subsequent application. Indeed, it is the REF's requirement for verification of this tenuous relationship via impact case studies that many undirected research projects in business schools struggle to realise. In such cases the literature, and, as we shall see from this study, the views of a majority of academics interviewed, suggest that projects which fail to be guided by basic marketing concepts that direct researchers to address the wants and needs of end users, are less likely to yield positive and demonstrable results in terms of adoption and utilisation. We have seen from a number of government sponsored reports considered in the previous chapter, that this route to impact is the one favoured by policy makers to achieve the objective of economic growth driven by academic innovation.

3.2 The Interaction Model

This model supports the arguments made in the previous section but adds the notion that research is more likely to achieve impactful outcomes if those who are capable of utilising such research are involved in the process. The need for greater interaction between researchers and the business community is supported in several of the government sponsored reports considered within this thesis. The Witty report (2013, op. cit.), in particular, calls for an integration of the academic and business communities to create greater economic wealth by utilising a combination of Weiss' linear and interaction models. Whilst the literature reviewed in Chapter Two indicates that there are many who support the logic in this position (See Mann and Likert, 1952, op.cit.; Flanagan, 1961, op.cit.; Glaser and Taylor, 1973, op.cit.; Alkin, Daillack and White, 1979, op.cit.; Rothman, 1980, op.cit), several commentators that have described how such cooperation is unlikely to materialise without some relatively fundamental changes to the existing academic research model. We have read how Hambrick (1994, op.cit.) and Porter and McKibbin (1998, op.cit.) believe that one such change must be the 'focus' of business and management research, contesting that much of the research currently emerging from

our business schools is targeted not at the practitioner constituency but at other academics. Hughes et al. (2011, op.cit.) has suggested that this is likely to remain the case until academics acquire the skills, competence and the desire necessary to engage with this audience and Huff (2000, op.cit.) has argued that this, in turn, will require a change to the incentive systems within management schools in terms of their recruitment and promotion criteria. We have, of course, seen views within the literature that contest this need to engage. March and Reed (1999, op.cit.), for example, have argued that the true value of management research is realised over the longer term from the creation of new concepts. Those who hold this view often posit that the provision of solutions to the short-term concerns of the business community should not be the focus of academic research, arguing that this activity should be left in the hands of the management consultancy sector. There is some logic in this argument; nevertheless, recent events suggest that future HE research policy is unlikely to be swayed by it. An independent review of the 2014 REF assessment exercise by Lord Nicholas Stern (2016) has recently commended the value of the impact requirements within the framework, confirming the views expressed in the earlier Witty Report (2013, op.cit.) that recommend that the weighting of this element of assessment be increased from twenty percent to twenty-five percent in the next REF.

3.3 The Enlightenment Model

The enlightenment model describes a route to adoption believed by Weiss to be taken by a large proportion of non-commissioned social science research (2007, op.cit.). Unlike the more direct approaches described above, research adoption is said to result from the gradual convergence of multiple studies resulting in the emergence of accepted theories. Transmission is considered to take place via numerous independent channels that are thought to influence end users in a subtle manner over an extended period rather than as the result of an instantaneous epiphany. The conceptualisation at figure 1 places this type of research in the curiosity driven segment since topics often originate from the researcher's personal interests or views on what might be of value to others. The impact value of this style of research has been described by some authors as inherently difficult to quantify (Biesta, 2007, op. cit.; Nutley et al 2007, op.cit.) due to the complexity of the manner in that concepts are adopted by end users (Hemsley-Brown, 2004, op.cit.). Historically this type of research has fared well in research assessments exercises, attracting quality related (QR) funding from the, now discontinued, Research Assessment Exercise. It remains to be seen how this will change if, as recommended by Witty, impact becomes a larger influence on the Research Councils' definition of research excellence.

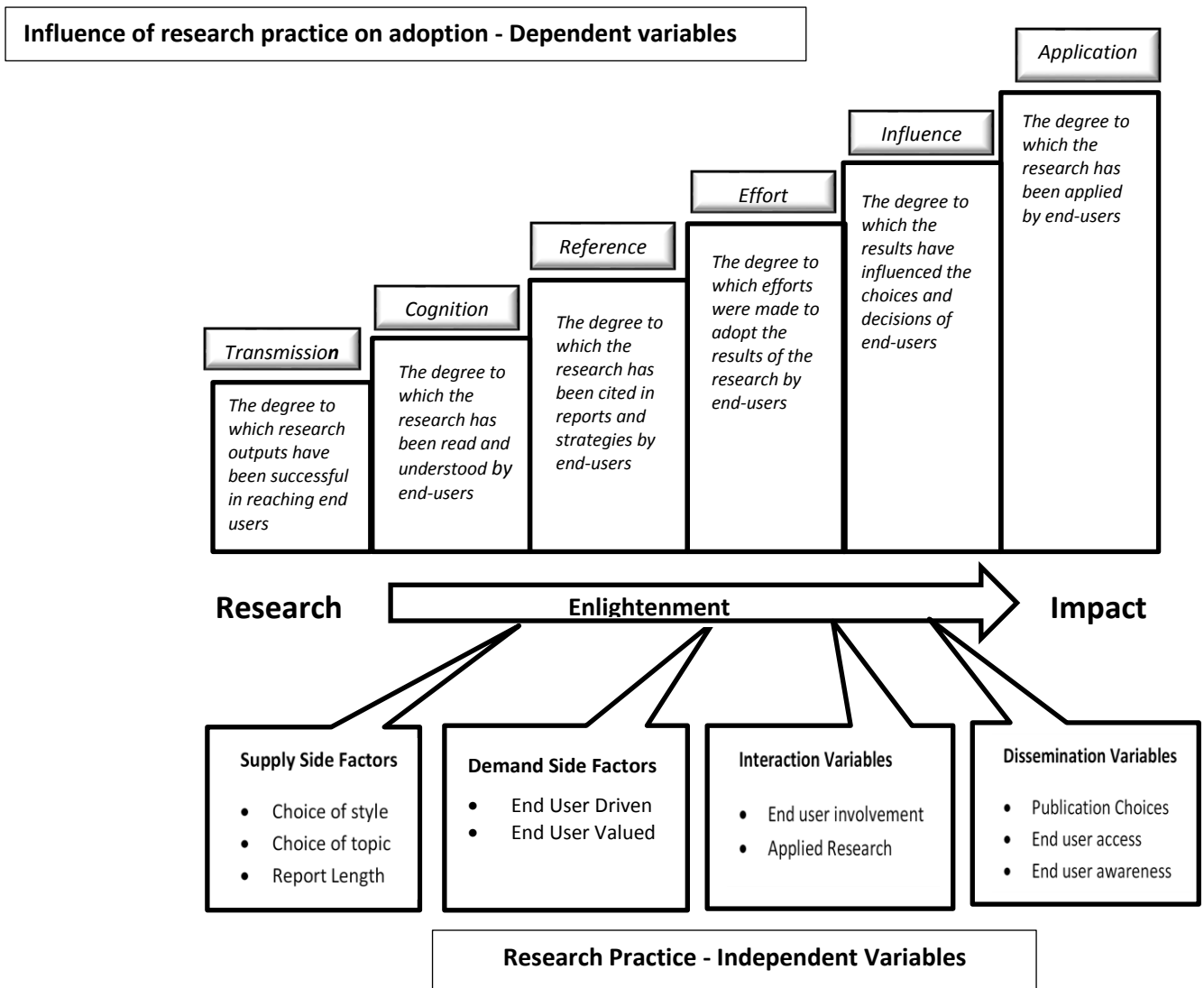


Figure 3. Conceptual Model – Research Practice and Impact Outcome

Figure 3 attempts to conceptualise the relationship between research practice and Cherney et al's (2012) taxonomy of research outcomes. The latter are alleged to facilitate, with varying degrees of influence, Weis' depiction of the journey from basic research to subsequent utilisation. As well as confirming the requirements for practitioner demand and involvement, the model proposes additional factors that are cited in the literature as affecting the likelihood of research uptake. These comprise the academic's choices with respect to the style of the research undertaken and the publication options adopted to disseminate the outcomes. Here again we find a dichotomy in the literature that arises because of a mismatch between the constituents of management research that are believed to engender impactful outcomes and the policies and practices of the academic institutions. As was the case with the requirement for academics to elect to place practitioner need at the centre of the research process, once again the literature indicates that the researcher's decisions on style and

dissemination media are heavily influenced by the incentives inherent in the current practices within our business schools.

Several commentators have suggested that pressure to publish the type of theoretical/conceptual research preferred by a majority of the top-rated journals has discouraged academics from adopting a more applied style of research that is considered more appropriate when addressing practitioner needs. Proponents argue that such preferences are encouraged, one might say enforced, by recruitment and promotion practices that see panel members counting the number of publications in these journals (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992, *op.cit.*; Dye, 2001, *op.cit.* and Hopwood, 2005, *op.cit.*). Until recent changes providing open access to all UK government funded research following the recommendations of the Finch report, publications in these top-rated journals were generally beyond the reach of most institutions outside academia (Sample, 2012, *op.cit.*). Even with these developments, non-academic consumers must still take steps to make themselves aware of appropriate publications, seek access rights and retrieve them from the complex archiving systems where they reside. Again, I would argue that simple marketing theory dictates that practitioners would be better informed of the latest research, from which they and society at large might benefit, if it were placed in the type of publications preferred and regularly consulted by this audience. Yet we have seen in the literature how the existing policies and practices of our academic institutions continue to offer very little incentive to disseminate research via this media.

3.4 The Problem Solving Model

The problem solving route is intuitively the most direct and efficient channel between research and impact since investigations are generally instigated by particular need and employ methodologies that are geared towards a solution that satisfies that need. Universities generally receive finance for this type of research from the funding councils on a project by project basis following a successful bidding process.

At first sight this model appears to offer a panacea to those who seek research impact and begs the question as to why all funding is not allocated in this manner. However, there are several arguments that seek to defend the position that this should not be the case. Some of these arguments have been put forward by those who wish to defend the need, as well as the funding, for basic, undirected research. The case for funding blue sky inquiry is made on the premise that it offers the possibility of far greater rewards than that that might arise from investigations constrained by the boundaries of pre-

existing applications. The weakness in this argument when applied to business and management research is the shortage of evidence of such rewards.

A second argument questions the validity of the demand behind this type of project. Since the research councils who originate them are in fact acting as intermediaries between the researchers and those who stand to benefit from the research, it follows that demands are based, not upon the needs of end users, but on the council's interpretations of such needs. Whether the research councils understand these needs any more accurately than academics motivated by curiosity remains to be seen.

Finally, there is a more practical argument for retaining the quality related (QR) funding provided by the HEFCE. It is argued that the academic institution's ability to plan and finance research would be severely affected by the resulting volatility in both their research income and their requirements to acquire and release staff, who would invariably follow the money, were all funding awarded on a project basis.

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This investigation seeks to uncover new insights (Robson 2002) into the academic research process in an attempt to determine the effectiveness of the strategies that have been applied in UK business schools to steer them towards more impactful research outcomes. To achieve this objective the investigation endeavours to make sense of these drivers from the perspective of the scholars themselves and discover how they are interpreted, internalised and ultimately acted upon.

Many authors have reminded us that the study of human emotions and behaviour is fraught with opportunities for the misrepresentation of reality (see, for example Kozulin, 1986; Cole, 1996; Engeström 1999; Lave and Wenger, 1999 and Holland *et al*, 2008). According to Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008) many of the factors that dictate the validity of a study are a consequence of the methodological decisions made during the research design phase. Hence it is imperative that such decisions are both clarified and justified to enable the reader to understand the author's perspective on the research and have confidence in the outcome. Therefore, from the abstract philosophical position of the author to the specifics of sampling and data collection, the remainder of this chapter will attempt to describe the methodological options available and defend the choices made in conducting this investigation.

4.2 Philosophical Considerations

4.2.1 Ontological Choices

This section considers the philosophical options available to the researcher and, in doing so, explores a more fundamental argument that questions the assumption held by some commentators that scholars must align themselves with metaphysical positions (paradigms) when conducting research. The following paragraphs start with a consideration of those who defend the concept of research paradigms, arguing that they constitute a valid and valuable collection of epistemological/methodological genres that provide guidance and clarity to scholars in their search for new knowledge (Johnson and Clark, 2006). The script will then consider those who suggest that a paradigmatic approach is counterproductive to the research process, comprising little more than a set of loosely defined and commonly misunderstood classifications into which different approaches to academic research are notionally pigeonholed. The section will finish with the author's position.

4.2.1.1 Arguments for a Paradigmatic Approach

The notion that researchers must adopt a particular philosophical paradigm as a prerequisite to conducting academic research (Bassey, 1999) is predicated on the principle that epistemological choices and subsequent methodological designs are informed by ones' ontological perspective on reality and existence (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). The value of paradigms in social research is described by Johnson and Clark as accruing from the methodological guidance they provide to social science researchers (2006. op.cit.). The authors argue that such philosophical commitments are significant not only in guiding researchers in what they do, but also in helping them truly understand what it is they are researching. Saunders et.al. suggest that one's ontological position will not only determine the adopted strategy and methods of research, but will also influence what researchers believe to be important and useful. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) stress the positive value of diverging research paradigms, suggesting that different philosophical positions provide researchers with the facility to look at similar problems from different perspectives, thus making available different kinds of knowledge for different contexts. James and Vinnicombe (2002) argue that the value of including one's philosophical starting point comes from the exposure of potential biases, enabling research audiences to understand the reasons behind methodological choices.

The ontological options in question are generally, but not universally, portrayed as two mutually exclusive and incommensurable positions described as 'Realism' and 'Relativism'. (Cohen et. al., 2011. op.cit.).

4.2.2 Realism

Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away

Philip K Dick (US science fiction writer) 1986

At one end of the ontological scale is the 'realist' belief system that supports the viewpoint of a single perspective of reality that is context free and independent of human belief. Advocates argue that truth is static and normative (Baily, 2007). This ontological perspective is usually associated with a deterministic view of human behaviour, suggesting that man's actions are a response to the environment in which he exists. The position suggests a rather mechanistic interpretation of human nature, however variations do exist. The 'Pure realist' takes a reductionist stance, arguing that social phenomena resemble their natural science counterparts in so far as they share the characteristics that enable them to be measured and expressed as generalised laws. A different position is taken by those who describe themselves as 'critical realists'. Whilst sharing the notion of a single reality with the purists, they hold the view that such reality can only be experienced through the subjective experiences of the individual and is therefore incapable of being accurately defined.

4.2.3 Relativism

At the other end of the ontological scale is the relativist belief system that is based upon a view of context laden multiple realities (Popper, 1980; Feyerabend, 1975; Reichardt and Rallis, 1994). Rather than being objective and reducible to universal laws, relativists take the view that social facts are dynamic and socially constructed (Nisbett, 2005). While relativists posit that human action is individualist and self-determined (Becker, 1970; Garfinkel 1969), this perspective argues that individual behaviour is influenced by contextual issues such as social norms, cultural values and external environment. It is grounded in the conviction that there can be no objective truth, only subjective interpretations of truth. In its purist form, relativism questions the very notion of accountability for right and wrong in society by questioning the legitimacy of the definitions of such terms outside one's personal perspective.

The differences of opinion over which of these perspectives is most appropriate for social research are often described as "paradigm wars" because of the entrenched and, at times, uncompromising positions taken by proponents on both sides. (See, for example, Datta, 1994; Gage, 1989; House, 1994 and Rossi, 1994)

4.2.3.1 Arguments against Paradigmatic Approaches

Perhaps the greatest criticism of the paradigmatic approach comes from the way in which the expression and its jargon laden off-springs are misinterpreted and misused within the social science community. The result is a body of literature from which many different interpretations can be drawn. There is some evidence to suggest that this approach, which sets out to provide a framework to support researchers by clarifying their methodological design options, actually does more harm than good in this respect. Research conducted by Mkansi and Acheampong (2012) to assess the understanding of the terminology within a group of Ph.D. students studying at three UK universities concluded that the respondents had an inconsistent understanding of the relationships between paradigmatic approaches and specific methodologies. The authors of the research paper provide a number of examples where contradictory interpretations of similar paradigms can be found in the academic press. They go on to describe the predicament in which the doctoral students were placed as 'bewildering' and note the demoralising effect on those who look to such classifications for guidance and justification for their methodological choices.

There is no better example to demonstrate the confusion that this inconsistency reaps than the work of the originator of the notion of the paradigm, Thomas Kuhn himself. The term first came into existence in the social science community in 1962 following the publication of Kuhn's seminal work 'The Structure

of Scientific Revolutions' (Kuhn, 1962). Kuhn's depiction of a paradigm in this publication is that of a mutually exclusive "accepted model or pattern" which exists for a limited period (of *normal science*) until a critical mass of research evidence refutes current thinking (a *crisis*) and (following a *breakthrough*) an alternative orthodoxy takes over, which better fits the evidence (resulting in a *paradigm shift*) (p.23, *ibid.*). Kuhn considered all significant 'breakthroughs' as 'breakdowns' in existing understanding, suggesting a chronological series of epiphanies in our understanding of phenomena. Commentators often cite examples of this type of transition throughout history to illustrate this concept. These include: Copernican heliocentrism which replaced the theory of the earth as the centre of the universe and Einstein's theory of relativity which accounted for discrepancies in Newton's theories of motion when applied to bodies moving close to the speed of light.

Whilst Kuhn used the term to describe a longitudinal process of improvement in the evolutionary understanding of phenomena, it has been adopted (some may say 'abducted') to represent the opposing ontological and associated epistemological positions to which social scientists align themselves. In the context of social science research, the term paradigm is used to describe a number of 'simultaneous' rather than 'sequential' world views on the nature of truth and reality. In a later edition of his book Kuhn comments that paradigms may coexist, but qualifies this position by describing how this is more likely to occur in immature sciences (Kuhn, 1970), thus reaffirming his definition of a series of chronological steps that may or may not be separated by overlapping transitional periods. One might consider the gradual ascendance of Darwinian Theory over the notion of intelligent design as an example of such transitions; albeit the latter is the result of religious dogma rather than the evolution of scientific progress.

This is not the only source of confusion that abounds around Kuhn's work. Margaret Masterman (1965) lists no less than 21 different possible interpretations of the term 'paradigm' within the 1962 publication. Despite Kuhn's efforts to clarify his position during his lifetime commentators at both ends of the ontological spectrum continue to claim Kuhn's allegiance to their own cause because of the many contradictory statements made within his writings. Relativists argue that Kuhn's notion of "*scientists working in different paradigms with difficulty in even communicating*" (Kuhn, 1962. p150. *op.cit*) confirms his belief in multiple realities. Realists counter that Kuhn described these paradigms as progressive, leading ultimately to a single interpretation of reality, citing his view that "*latter scientific theories are better than earlier ones for solving puzzles*" (Kuhn, 1970. p35. *op.cit.*).

The reinterpretation and/or misinterpretation of academic nomenclature is ubiquitous in the philosophical debates that exist around the various approaches to social science research. The inability

to hold authors to account for such apparent contradictions stems from the highly abstract nature of the idiomatic phrases adopted by participants, leading to what Guba has described as a process of blurring and interbreeding within the definitions of the paradigms described (2005).

Many of those who defend the need for researchers to hold philosophical positions on matters such as truth and reality describe an individual's ontological stance as an 'inherent' human trait (see James and Vinnicombe's comments above for example). This contention suggests that one is either born with such opinions or that they have evolved as the result of a lifetime of experiences prior to one's research career. To the purist, this chronological order is fundamental since it is critical to the '*ontological/epistemological/methodological*' orthodoxy upon which the paradigmatic approach is founded and from which its value as a source of guidance to researchers is said to accrue. Michael Billig offers a very different interpretation of the ontological developmental process in his book "*Learn to Write Badly – How to Succeed in the Social Sciences*" (Billig, 2013). In this publication the author describes how young aspiring researchers studying for Ph.D.s are often coerced into such positions to fit in with the conventions of their more senior peers or risk negative judgements of their work. Billig goes on to assert that, once converted, such recruits often become entrenched in their doctrines and apply such requirements to their own protégés. According to Prior (1998), the adoption of a philosophical position provides the would-be author with a '*rite de passage*' to being accepted by his/her peer group within academia. This self-sustaining merry-go-round is fundamentally conservative since new entrants to any particular viewpoint join a society as it exits with little room or desire for innovation.

4.2.4 The Author's Position

My own position in this discussion would most likely be described, by those who feel compelled to give it a title, as that of a critical realist. This view holds that truth is singular and static in both the natural and social world but accepts that attempts to reduce phenomena to generalised laws are hampered by the existence of innumerable combinations of variables to such an extent that the formation of such laws becomes unachievable. In the social sciences these variables and their interactions upon each other are so complex and unique they render the circumstances that result in particular cause and effect relationships impossible to replicate. However, evidence from the physical sciences seems to indicate that as the tolerances of causal variables are controlled to a greater extent, so phenomena tend to converge on a single outcome. If, like the author, one is of the view that human emotions such as happiness and fear are the result of neurological impulses reacting to external and internal stimuli, it follows that, if such stimuli were exactly reproducible, as though through winding back time, consistent social outcomes would follow. Hence one might produce laws for humanistic responses to social situations just as one does for chemical reactions and conclude that these laws represent a single truth,

albeit in that exact instant and under those particular circumstances; just as they do in chemistry. Naturally this assessment must be accompanied by a degree of healthy scepticism since, by definition; it is unlikely that it can ever be definitively proven. The inevitable consequence of this position is that the dichotomy that is said to exist between the opposing factions in this debate is a false one (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). According to this interpretation these differences come down to no more than the granularity with which phenomena are considered. That is, the multiple realities held so dear by the interpretivist camp are no more than a series of disaggregated single realities as described by the realists.

One cannot help concluding that the philosophical, and, to some extent epistemological, debate considered in this chapter, with its contradictory and overlapping jargon, portrays a picture of a research community in a state of disarray. As we have heard above, the confusion this creates in the student community has been described as bewildering. If this is the case within the gates of academia then one might suspect it to be magnified ten-fold outside in the commercial world, repudiating much of the utility and respect academic research might have there.

A consideration of the paradigmatic approaches discussed thus far might leave the reader with the impression of a research community split into a small number of homogeneous and polarised positions; each restricting its affiliates to methodological choices that flow from the incompatible belief systems (Smith and Heshusius, 1986) to which they are wed. In practice however, many researchers are now adopting approaches that exhibit rather more fluid boundaries, embracing the advice of Cohen et.al. to educational researchers when they recommend that scholars assume 'different research paradigms for different research purposes' (2011. p1. op.cit.). This pragmatic approach to inquiry adopts the position that researchers, like quantum particles, are capable of co-existing in more than one paradigmatic space at the same time.

Pragmatism rejects the need to be constrained by the notion that research methodologies must be dictated in a 'top down' manner by a limited number of fixed ontological positions. It takes the view that the best guidance for those designing research projects is to use the method that 'works best in the circumstances'. These methodologies may be associated with one of the ontological camps described above or some combination of these approaches. The use of multiple methodologies, more commonly referred to as 'mixed methods', has become very popular in recent times and is claimed by Tashakori and Teddlie (1998) to have acquired paradigm status in itself. As well as abrogating the requirement for researchers to pin their colours to the mast of one or other of the restrictive ontologies (Howe, 1988),

pragmatism offers the additional benefit of negating the need to inflate research publications with philosophical discussion intended to justify the link between ones' world view and the ensuing methodology. There are many commentators who support a more pragmatic and pluralistic approach that eradicates the need for the divisions described above. (See Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003; Cohen et. al., 2001. op. cit. and Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998. op. cit.) In the words of the latter *"pragmatism is intuitively appealing largely because it avoids the researcher engaging in what they see as pointless debates about truth and reality"* (p 240).

4.3 Research Strategy

Whilst I have no desire to be constrained by the ontological positions described thus far, this standpoint does not negate the need to consider the epistemological approaches to research that they spawn. These approaches are described below and once again my own position will be provided at the end.

4.3.1 Positivism

The epistemological implications of the realist ontological paradigm are generally considered to fit under the umbrella of the positivist approach. Flowing from a belief system that describes truth as singular and nomothetic is a conviction that knowledge must be considered as both objective and tangible (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Hence positivists concern themselves with facts rather than impressions in an attempt to identify laws that facilitate the anticipation and subsequent control of phenomena (Collis and Hussey, 2003). Such facts are consistent with the notion of an 'observable social reality' (Saunders et. al., 2009). This perception of the nature of knowledge leads on to methodological implications that see the positivist researcher gathering data from an 'etic' (external) observational perspective; the assumption being that the researcher is independent of, and neither affects, nor is affected by, the subject of the research (Remenyi et. al., 1998). Positivists place great value on the validity and reliability of their research; hence methodologies are often highly structured to facilitate replication (Gill and Johnson, 2002). Humanistic investigations invariably struggle to accurately measure cause and effect because of the difficulty in isolating the complex social variables associated with such research. Practitioners tend to adopt the scientific 'deductive' approach, testing hypotheses with tactics such as random control tests, considered by Killam (2014) as the gold standard of quantitative investigation, as well as random sampling and control groups. Studies are usually quantitative in nature, often employing large data sets gathered from questionnaires to provide statistical rigour.

4.3.1.1. Criticisms of Positivism

Arguments against positivism are often presented by those who disapprove of its capacity to dehumanise society into a set of universal laws (See, for example, Nesfield-Cookson, 1987 and Ions, 1997). Anti-reductionists argue that, unlike natural science phenomena, issues such as freedom of choice, individualism and human responsibility do not lend themselves to measurement, classification and conceptualisation (Beck, 1979. op.cit.). Whilst those who favour the scientific approach consider subjectivity as a source of inaccuracy that must be avoided at all costs, interpretivists such as Kierkegaard (1974) and Warnock (1970) embrace it as the light that reveals true reality. Other criticisms of the positivist approach focus on its perceived restrictiveness and incompleteness in terms of capturing the most important human attributes. Hampden-Turner (1970) contends that this is a result of the etic approach adopted by social realists which draws upon only 'visible externalities', thus restricting it to the repetitive, predictable and invariant aspects of the person. This argument is rather eloquently framed by Wittgenstein's observation:-

"...if all possible scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all".

From "Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary" by Marjorie Perloff (1996)

4.3.2 Post-Positivism

Following influential works in the late 1950s by author's such as Hanson (1958) and Popper (1959), the more extreme ontological, epistemological and axiological principles of traditional (or 'logical') positivism tended to give way to a version that shared some the philosophical tenets of the subjectivist research community. Reichardt and Rallis (1994, op. cit.) suggest that after this time the writings of many quantitative methodologists, who had hitherto subscribed to a pure realist ontological position, began to demonstrate traits in their writing that indicated a change in position on the following aspects of that philosophy:

- The value-ladenness of inquiry: *that is, the belief that research is influenced by the values of the enquirer.*
- The theory-ladenness of facts: *that is, research outcomes are capable of being influenced by the theory or hypothesis applied.*
- The nature of reality: *that is the notion that human understanding of reality is socially constructed.*

Adapted from Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998. op.cit.)

According to commentators such as Howe (1988. op.cit) and Philips (1990) this approach has become increasingly widespread to the extent that logical positivism is now considered a somewhat discredited paradigm in the social science community. Guba and Lincoln describe 'post-positivism' as the intellectual

heir to positivism, suggesting that it has addressed several of the discredited characteristics of its forerunner (1994).

4.3.3 Interpretivism (Anti-Positivism)

The consequence of the relativist ontological position that reality is informed by a unique but ever-changing set of personal circumstances (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, op. cit.) is the interpretivist epistemological contention that social researchers must consider the contextual milieu of their investigations to fully appreciate the meanings of social phenomena (Remenyi et al., 1998, op. cit.). Since reality is considered to be socially constructed, advocates of this viewpoint argue that the role of the researcher is to uncover the individual's perceptions of that reality (Cohen et al., 2011, op.cit.). In doing so their objectives are to explain and demystify social phenomena rather than provide edicts that seek to define causal relationships within human behaviour. Proponents justify this position by arguing that truth is not a pre-requisite for belief and human actions are based upon individuals' 'interpretations' of events rather than the events themselves. Thus, as in Thomas's aphorism of the perceived mouse under the table (1928), if people believe a thing to be true, they will act accordingly, irrespective of the reality of the situation (Morrison, 1998).

Anti-positivists contend that humanistic behaviour can only be fully understood if the researcher is immersed in the context of the investigation, thus sharing the frame of reference with the observed. This position dictates an emic methodological approach, which, where possible, should be undertaken in the natural setting of those under study. Unlike the detached objective observations inherent within the positivist perspective, social research is seen as a subjective undertaking that seeks to interpret reality through the eyes of participants themselves (Beck, 1979, op.cit.). The application of external structure is resisted since it is considered to impose a bias that has the potential to jeopardise the fidelity of the reporting process of the social phenomena. However, Delbridge and Kirkpatrick note that observers also have their own interpretations of meaning (1994) and, as Nisbett points out, just as social facts are social constructions, so are the ways of observing them. (2005, op.cit.). Hence, implicit in the interpretivist methodology is the importance of neutrality in the interpretations of that which is observed (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

The manifestation of these views is a methodology in which theory is emergent and grounded in the contingent, unique and subjective data from which it was developed (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Researchers seek to elucidate the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of those studied and must suspend their own cultural assumptions (Hammersley, 2012). Observers often adopt qualitative and unstructured ethnographic techniques or action research approaches where the researcher/researched

relationship is more akin to that of a partnership. Studies are often in-depth and based upon relatively small sample sizes. Data are gathered using techniques such as focus groups, interviews and observation (Easterby-Smith et. al., 2008). In terms of the outputs of the process, Geertz describes the need for ‘thick Descriptions’ rather than simplistic interpretations of social phenomena to represent the complexity inherent in social research (1973).

4.3.3.1 Criticisms of Interpretivism

Many of the criticisms aimed at the interpretivist approach relate to the potential for inaccuracy within the methodology. Argyle (1978) highlights the subjective nature of the recording process and the associated potential for imprecision in the data collected as a result of misinterpretations between the observer and the observed. For some commentators the complexity of the transmission process whereby the latter are required to precisely describe their innermost emotions and the former to faithfully interpret and record them appears fraught with the potential for error. Burnstein (1974) describes the possibility of incompleteness in subjective data that he suggests may result in misleading outcomes whilst Rex (1974) points to the potential failure to identify ‘false consciousness’ in the actors involved in interpretivist studies, arguing that these may arise because of their own biases or their misconceptions of the reality of the situation.

..if a student believes that the teacher does not like him, he may well act as though this is the case (a self-fulfilling prophesy). If, in reality, the teacher actually does like him; the student’s perception is incorrect.

Adapted from Morrison, 2009.

Questions of accuracy and interpretation of data are dealt with in the natural sciences through the process of peer review that draws much of its authority from the ability to validate research by replication. This form of authentication does not lend itself to interpretivist research approaches that tend to study at levels of disaggregation that are exclusive to the moment, where emphasis is placed upon the unique and, for the most part, unreproducible context (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, op.cit.; Kirk and Miller, 1986)

A second area of criticism relates to the utility of the research gathered by interpretivist approaches. Here authors argue that the highly unique context of such investigations produce outcomes that have little value in any other circumstances. Hammersley argues that “*the sort of descriptions it [interpretivism] encourages are too vague and variable to provide a sound basis for comparing the orientations of different people, the character of different situations or institutions, and so on*” (2012. op. cit. p.23). This criticism is based upon the assumption that the bedrock of academic research is the

development of theory, where such theory is considered to equate to the generalised rules sought by those in the realist camp. In the words of Kerlinger, theory is defined as “*a set of interrelated constructs, definitions and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena*” (1970. p9). Cohen argues that it is theory that “*gathers together all the isolated bits of empirical data into a coherent conceptual framework*” (Cohen et.al., 2011. p9. op.cit.) Proponents of this argument suggest that it is only when theories lead to generally accepted laws that they can influence actions and policy; moreover, theory is itself a potential source of further information and discovery (Siegel, 1987) . Critics argue that a world without laws is a random world in which research has no practical value.

4.3.4. The Author’s Perspective and the Resulting Research Strategy

The notion that this or any other humanistic research might result in definitive laws of cause and effect translatable into strategies with guaranteed outcomes is clearly unrealistic. The best one might hope for is a better understanding of the effect of existing strategies and some context specific and non-universal indicators of what works and what does not in terms of changing hearts, minds and hopefully, practice. Therefore, despite the shortfalls described above, this research will adopt an interpretive approach to the investigation into the way academic researchers are currently responding to strategic and operational steers which seek to engender more impactful outcomes from management research.

4.4 Research Design

With the research strategy defined, the remainder of the design decisions tend to flow naturally, guided by the authors who publish in this area, and constrained by the practical limitations of time and cost. These decisions are described below.

4.4.1 Data Collection Instruments

Here the decision is often dictated by the nature of the data necessary to achieve the objectives of an investigation including requirements for volume and depth of information. While interpretivist approaches do not preclude the choice of quantitative data collection mechanisms (Johnson and Clarke, 2006, op.cit.), the need to collect humanistic attributes such as values, beliefs and attitudes in this particular study tend to negate the viability of this option. This narrows the choice of data collection instruments down to the use of interviews, questionnaires, or some combination of both.

Questionnaires offer anonymity that, according to Cohen et al, result in less pressurised and potentially more open responses to sensitive questions (2011, op.cit.). On the other hand their remoteness from

the inquirer gives rise to the potential for the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of questions with no opportunity for explanation, thus threatening their reliability as a mechanism where complex scenarios exist (Denscombe, 2010). While careful design and piloting have the potential to alleviate these issues to some extent, the questionnaire suffers from a more fundamental shortfall in relation to this and many other investigations; that being, they are limited to predetermined questions that are bounded by the inquirer's understanding of the situation prior to the investigation taking place. Interviews, on the other hand, have the capacity to be flexible and adaptable to new streams of thought as they arise (King 1994). They offer the enquirer the opportunity to clarify questions and test for understanding as well as providing the possibility to spot non-verbal signals associated with emotions that often indicated issues such as the respondent's depth of feeling associated with particular responses. The interview is not without its own shortcomings. The flexibility it offers to both the interviewer and the interviewee brings with it the potential for misinterpretation, bias and anecdotalism. There is no simple way to avoid these issues although Silverman (2001) has suggested that standardised analysis and the use of full transcripts may go some way to minimising their effect. To avoid the a priori privileging of a favoured investigator and avoid the impression that research outcomes are free from researcher influence, Gewirtz and Cribb (2006) argue that, for ethical reasons, the researcher must identify himself in any discussion that attempts to interpret meaning. This is provided in Chapter 5 (Findings) when the author provides a brief personal interpretation of the research findings following each sub-section where the results of the interviews are presented. In conclusion then, while I recognise some potential value in the use of questionnaires in this project, the flexibility of the interview was felt to be a more appropriate option.

Next the issue of the interview structure must be decided. Here a dichotomy exists between the ability to directly compare responses to similar questions, offered by higher levels of structure, and the desire to allow respondents to follow their own thoughts into potentially new areas of interest. A tool that attempts to plot an aggregated course through these competing objectives is the semi-structured interview. I adopt the view of Mason (2002) on this issue who suggests that the semi-structured approach offers an acceptable compromise, providing the fluidity to develop unexpected themes whilst following predetermined categories of investigation. The result is an interview schedule that can be found at appendix A. The logic behind the categories and individual questions in this schedule will be explained in the section entitled "Data requirements and interview design" later in this chapter.

4.4.2 Sampling

For the purposes of this study samples were required at both the institutional and the individual level. The size of both were constrained by time and access constraints. The number of institutions was limited to those that could be visited on multiple occasions throughout the data gathering period. This was hampered by a need to provide flexibility to researchers in terms of the dates and times available for interviews. In most but not all cases it was necessary to arrange single visits to institutions for each interview scheduled. The greatest constraint on the number of individual interviews possible was the willingness of active researchers to take part in the study.

4.4.2.1 Institutional Sample.

The three institutions that took part in this study have been anonymised but can be considered to fall into the following categorisations:-

1. University A - Member of the Russell Group.
2. University B - Traditional 'Red Brick' Institution.
3. University C - Post 1992 University

These institutions were chosen partly on the basis of convenience – all being concentrated in a relatively small geographical area in the north of England. The author also has the benefit of having close ties with all three business schools. The institutions can also be considered to be part of a purposeful sample that represents a spectrum of research prowess as defined by historic RAE scores (not provided to protect anonymity). These institutions and the interviewees have been designated a code to facilitate the identification of phenomena relating to their different standings in the university system.

4.4.2.2 Individual Sample

Individual research staff within these schools were chosen using a 'snowball' sampling technique. This required an initial respondent who then proposes one or more others on the basis of his/her view of suitability. These people were then contacted and asked to take part. According to Cohen et.al. (2011, op. cit.) Snowball sampling is a useful means of identifying and attracting participants when the researcher has no previous association with them. The sample contains a spectrum of staff seniority in each institution from those who were responsible for developing and applying school strategies, including decision makers on employment and promotion issues, to more junior staff who were affected by such decisions. The initial target for interviews was set at ten individuals per institution, however, this turned out to be over-optimistic in the time available and a final figure of eight was achieved.

The breakdown of participants is shown in the following table

University A (Russel Group Member)			University B (Redbrick)			University C (Post 92)		
Ref	Designation	Interview Date	Ref	Designation	Interview Date	Ref	Designation	Interview date
RG1	Prof Research Dir.	04/02/15	RB1	Prof	04/12/14	PN1	Dr Research Champ.	05/02/15
RG2	Prof	18/02/15	RB2	Prof Research Dir.	08/12/14	PN2	Prof Research Dir.	09/02/15
RG3	Prof	18/02/15	RB3	Prof	18/05/15	PN3	Prof	19/01/15
RG4	Dr	27/02/15	RB4	Prof	18/05/15	PN4	Prof	02/06/15
RG5	Prof	27/02/15	RB5	Dr	18/05/15	PN5	Prof	22/06/15
RG6	Prof	03/03/15	RB6	Prof	17/06/15	PN6	Prof	22/06/15
RG7	Prof	24/04/15	RB7	Prof	08/09/15	PN7	Dr	19/09/16
RG8	Prof	30/04/15	RB8	Prof Dean	14/09/15	PN8	Dr	19/09/16

4.4.3 Sample Bias

The sampling techniques adopted in this study are neither random nor probabilistic. This said, Saunders et al. (2009, op.cit.) argue that non- probabilistic sampling can be considered valid when studies are more concerned with uncovering insights that build deeper understanding than those that demand a precise representation of a total population. Since this is the case in this particular study the sampling technique is considered to be acceptable given the logistical, financial and time constraints imposed.

4.4.4 Ethical Considerations

The researcher has a duty of care towards all those who participate in an investigation as well as some who do not (British Educational Research Association, 2011). While this study is not considered to be particularly threatening to any of the participants or institutions involved, it is still important to mitigate potential harm through the design process. To this end the research will seek to meet three ethical principles identified by Denscombe (2003, op.cit.) as described below.

The interests of the participants must be protected from harm.

This includes physical and psychological harm as well as financial and reputational (Saunders et. al., 2009, op. cit.). Most of these issues arise when the outcomes of the research process result in unanticipated impacts on participants. To avoid this it is necessary to assess these impacts in advance of gathering empirical data and make all concerned aware of such risks and the actions taken to address them. This involves providing a detailed description of how the data provided will be used, who will have access to it, what publications are likely to arise and what efforts will be made to protect anonymity.

Participants should provide voluntary informed consent.

With an understanding of the risks posed participants can make an informed decision to take part in the research or otherwise. This decision must be capable of being taken free from coercion by persons who are not subject to any form of vulnerability.

Researchers should avoid deception and misrepresentation

Informed consent can only be valid when participants are explicitly aware of the details of the research and when these details are accurate and complete. To provide confidence and a mechanism for redress should things go wrong it is important that agreements are in writing and include some form of grievance procedure. Copies of all such materials should be provided to the participants to retain.

To meet these demands I have drawn on the research ethics code of practice within my own institution; the University of Hull code of ethics (2003). This dictates that all participants are written to prior to an interview taking place and such correspondence should contain the following components:-

1. A covering letter of invitation describing:-
 - The purpose and brief scope of the investigation
 - The format (recorded) and likely duration of the interview
 - The dissemination details of the final report and any other publications
 - The rights of the participant to anonymity and to withdraw from the study
 - The treatment of data held during and after the study
 - The requirement to sign a consent form
 - The procedure for complaints.
2. A brief synopsis of the project
3. A consent form to be completed prior to the interview taking place
4. A copy of the interview schedule.

A copy of this letter can be found at appendix B at the end of this thesis.

Additionally, institutional approval was sought from the schools participating in the study. In two instances this was provided by the dean of the school whilst in one case permission to proceed required a more formal application and approval from the school's research committee.

4.4.5 Data Requirements and Interview Design.

The data requirements necessary to meet the objectives of this study are best considered in the context of the individual objectives themselves. These are described below and, with the exception of the first

objective, linked to the interview schedule that was developed to capture them. A copy of this interview schedule can be found at appendix A in this report. The interview schedule was piloted on two senior members of staff with many years of research experience within my own academic institution. This process resulted in several changes being made as well as the implementation of one or two ideas not previously considered.

4.4.5.1 Introductory Questions

Before delving into the specifics of the interviewees' opinions, preferences and research practices, three general questions were asked. The purpose of these is described below

“Please describe your understanding of the nature of impactful research”.

The reason for this question was to confirm that both the participant and the researcher had a common understanding of the meaning and purpose of research impact. There is an interpretation of this expression that has more in common with the objective of achieving multiple citations from one's academic peers than the requirement to make an economic or social difference to society. I believed it was important to clarify this point before proceeding.

“What Actions have been taken by the school to promote this objective?”

To be able to assess how academic researchers are responding to the institutional steers towards more impactful outcomes it was necessary for me to ascertain how, and indeed if, these steers were being delivered. This gave the participants the opportunity to describe the actions undertaken by their schools to encourage this change.

“How do you feel about the requirement to provide impactful outcomes from your research?”

The purpose of this question was to assess how welcome the recent demands for impact were likely to be within the academic research community. Additionally it gave a personal perspective that indicated the respondent's willingness to change that might be correlated against answers provided to subsequent questions.

4.4.5.2 Meeting Objective 1 – The Components of Impactful Research.

This objective provides the theoretical underpinning for the research. For the purposes of this investigation, the adoption of these components are accepted as constituting a valid means of improving the likelihood of achieving impactful outcomes from academic research. To meet this objective the investigation has drawn from existing literature and previous research to gather these requirements which have been compiled into a theoretical conceptual model. These components form the basis of the interview schedule.

4.4.5.3 Meeting Objective 2 – Understanding and Adoption of the Components of Impactful Research

The researcher's understanding of the impact agenda and their views on its legitimacy as a requirement for academic research were established in the introductory question. To identify the extent to which impactful practices had been adopted within the schools the interview schedule was broken into the themes identified by the literature as prerequisites for impact. The arguments behind each of these themes were explained to the participants before they were invited to discuss their own research. This enabled the author to identify the degree to which the components of academic research that are thought to yield impactful outcomes are being adopted by the participants in the study. The questions in the interview schedule that address this objective are those which seek to identify personal preferences and practices. They include, for example:-

“What sort of research do you prefer to conduct”?

“Where do you prefer to publish your work”?

“Who do you have in mind as an audience when you are conducting research”?

“What actions do you take to engage with the business community”?

4.4.5.4 Meeting Objective 3 – The Effects of Current Policy and Practice

For the purpose of this study the term 'constraint' included all factors that might lead a researcher to conduct anything other than research that had the objective/likelihood of providing impactful outcomes. Hence, incentives to conduct highly theoretical research or research aimed exclusively at the academic community fell into the category of a constraint. Once again the questions asked to address this issue were framed within the themes in the theoretical conceptual model. These questions included, for example:-

“Are you incentivised to conduct applied or theoretical research”?

“How is an academic's research performance judged for recruitment and promotion purposes”?

“Do you feel the need to conduct any particular type/style of research to be published in academic journals”?

4.4.5.5 Meeting Objective 4 – Willingness to Change.

The questions up to this point have attempted to gain insights into the current practices of researchers. To investigate academics' willingness to change the sample were asked to describe the type research they would prefer to conduct if pragmatic and theoretical styles were equally recognised and rewarded. Specifically the author asked:-

“What type of research would you prefer to conduct if all research was equally recognised and rewarded by the institution and the journal system”?

4.4.5.6 Meeting Objective 5 – Opportunities to Improve Impact.

Finally, participants were invited to describe changes to current practice that would attract them to those praxes that are believed to result in more impactful research outcomes. This line of investigation was pursued in the final two questions of the interview. The questions were:-

“What actions, in terms of policies and processes, need to be taken to achieve greater economic and social outcomes from academic research”?

“What would encourage you personally to change the focus of your research towards the direction of those factors that are considered to engender impactful outcomes”?

4.4.6 Data Analysis

All interviews were audio taped and, with several sessions running over their estimated one hour durations, the resulting data set comprised approximately 32 hours of recordings. These were transcribed for analysis using Dragon’s ‘Simply Speaking’ voice recognition software. Unfortunately this software (and all others currently available) is not sufficiently developed to recognise and translate into text more than a single voice. It was therefore necessary to re-dictate the content of the tapes into the programme by listening to the original recordings through a set of headphones and repeating the content into a microphone. This was an arduous process initially taking around three hours for every hour of taped conversation, however, as the author became more skilled this time came down to a figure closer to two hours.

A combination of ‘content’, ‘discourse’ and ‘relationship’ analysis was applied to the transcriptions of these interviews to identify a common structure onto which the data could be organised. This involved an iterative process of ‘open coding’ and subsequent aggregation of these codes into a smaller number of key themes; back checking for consistency along the way. This was repeated for each of the 24 interview transcripts before a second level of aggregation was conducted between transcript level categorisations to produce a top level of overarching data themes. These high level themes can be found in the following results chapter. The author decided to adopt a ‘bottom-up’ inductive approach to the analysis, avoiding any influence from possible pre-existing themes emerging from the literature. This separation would, it was felt, facilitate any new insights not identified by that source of theory and accommodate phenomena, identified in this study, that contradicted the views expressed in the material reviewed in Chapter 2. No attempt was made to conduct any form of statistical analysis on the basis that the relatively small sample size used in the study does not lend itself to this type of computational exploration (Cohen et. al., 2011, op.cit.).

4.4.7 Validity, Reliability and the Limitations of this Methodology.

4.4.7.1. Validity

Methodological validity is a measure of the appropriateness of the research process adopted in terms of its ability to meet the objectives it sets out to achieve. 'Internal validity' relates to the degree to which a researcher can support the findings of a study with the data collected. In its simplest form a methodology must demonstrate 'face validity' (Easterby-Smith 2008, et.al. op.cit.). This is achieved if a non-expert adjudicator can conclude that 'at face value' the method is likely to yield an appropriate outcome. If, for example, a study is seeking to identify the average height of a group of students, then face validity might be apparent if the method adopted involved measuring the appropriate group of students from the top of their heads to the floor, employing an accurate measuring device and applying an appropriate mathematical averaging technique. In more complex situations face validity becomes more subjective and the best the researcher can sometimes offer is a clear explanation of how his/her interpretation of this validity is claimed. In this report the author has attempted to provide this transparency by linking the objectives of the research directly to the methodology in the sections entitled 'Meeting objective #'.

'External validity' concerns itself with the reliability of the claims made in relation to the scope of the research. This is sometimes flouted when a study overstates the applicability of the findings or their potential to be generalised. This is a common mistake made in undergraduate dissertations and is sometimes the result of something as simple as the terminology used. For example, a study conducted outside a supermarket to seek shopper's preferences on green products might inappropriately conclude that *'shoppers seem to be persuaded by ethical products when the price is similar to non-ethical alternatives'*. The use of the word 'shoppers' exaggerates the value of the study by implying that all shoppers exhibit this trait rather than the small sample questioned in the survey. This study is based upon a sample of 24 academic researchers from three higher education institutions and this is the limit of its scope. No attempt is made to demonstrate statistical significance. Whilst some readers may wish to extrapolate the findings to a wider community or consider its applicability in different contexts, this must be done at their own risk.

Silverman (2005, op.cit.) suggests that one of the greatest threats to validity in social research is anecdotalism, the tendency to be selective with qualitative data for the purpose of demonstrating a particular point, either to make that point more conclusive, to avoid 'messy' results, or worse, to confirm the author's bias. In this report the author has attempted to include all of the data in the analysis. Full transcripts were used in the initial coding process that was undertaken using sentences or

parts of sentences as the unit of measure. The aggregation process ensured that none of the codes were left behind and all of the data became absorbed into the higher level themes.

4.4.7.2 Reliability

Reliability is related to the consistency of research outcomes. In the natural sciences this characteristic enables experiments to be repeated with common results and requires that processes are documented comprehensively and accurately so that independent variables can be reliably controlled. As we have read earlier in this chapter, humanistic investigation does not lend itself to this type of repeatability because of the number and nature of variables at play, however, this does not relieve the interpretive researcher from his/her duty to address issues of reliability.

Silverman (2001, op.cit.) suggests we concern ourselves with three forms of reliability, comprising; quixotic, diachronic and synchronic. Quixotic reliability might be suspected if an interview question yielded similar results when logic suggests that there should be variation. If, for example, a test of a person's medical condition were collected on the basis of a question such as "how are you today"? the outcome might show a high level of responses indicating the participants were "fine", "OK" or "not too bad". Yet common sense would suggest that the sample are likely to have a wide range of conditions and exist at a variety of states of wellness. To avoid this position it is important that the researcher does not phrase questions or couch them in such a way that favours a particular outcome. For example, whilst it is not uncommon for researchers to have a personal opinion on the issues they investigate, they must be seen to be neutral in the eyes of the interviewee to avoid favourable responses that avoid uncomfortable confrontation.

Diachronic reliability is concerned with the stability of research findings over time. When dealing with socio-cultural phenomena, as is the case with this study, it is unlikely that data will remain constant as time passes. An academic researcher's focus on impact may well change over a number of years depending upon situations such as whether assessments like the REF are immediately in front or immediately behind them. There is no way to overcome this issue in social research so it simply exists as a limitation to the value of the study in the longer term. Researchers can only highlight issues of timing and their impact on the reliability of the results when drawing conclusions.

Synchronic reliability refers to the stability of data in a similar time period. It is considered to be achieved through higher levels of consistency in the measurement process. In the social sciences this is achieved by employing greater structure in our investigations. However, as we have read earlier in this chapter, methodological structure comes at the cost of restricting the interpretivist's ability to explore

deeper and richer phenomena that are often uncovered by straying from the script. The semi-structured interviews employed in this study are clearly sub-optimal in this respect but provide an unavoidable compromise between two conflicting research objectives. This compromise is considered by the author to be an acceptable limitation in terms of the objectives of the study.

4.4.7.3 Limitations of this Study

As well as the health warnings described above which accompany all social research, this study has its own potential limitations which readers may wish to take into consideration.

- The study is conducted on a relatively small sample of researchers based in only three of the 165 higher education institutions in the UK (Universities UK, 2016). This introduces the potential for data to be biased towards the views of an unrepresentative sample and/or incomplete in its representation of all possible views.
- The desire to interview research intensive academics skewed the sample towards more senior staff – 79% designated as Professors compared to 21% with the title of Doctor. Again, this may result in a bias within the findings of the research towards the views of the former.
- The timing of the research has the potential to influence results with the next REF assessment not expected until 2021, some five years from the time the interviews were conducted. This may limit the applicability of the findings to a period when the requirement for impact, for REF purposes at least, was not high on institutional or individual agendas.

Chapter 5. Findings

This chapter presents the outcomes of the 24 interviews conducted with academic researchers that have been categorised by the research objectives described in the introduction to this report.

Responses that are cited verbatim are shown indented, in italics and within double quotation marks [*“quote”*]. Questions put by the interviewer are shown in bold text.

All comments are referenced to indicate institutional and individual sources. The former is provided to identify any cross-institutional phenomena identified in the interviews and the latter to enable the reader to identify the designation of the individual making the comment (Professor; Dean; Research Champion; ...etc.) An explanation of the referencing convention is provided in section 4.4.2.2.

5.1 RO-2. Samples' Perspectives on Impact

5.1.1 Defining the Objectives of Impact

The opening question in the interviews asked respondents for a definition of research impact. The purpose of this question was simply to ensure that the interviewer and the interviewee were setting off on the same page.

A majority of the interviewees responded to the request for a definition with some reference to “benefits to society” or “making a difference”. Typical responses falling into this category included:-

“Anything that makes a difference to the real world outside. Good business research is motivated by what is seen outside – Impact is those ideas making a difference”. (PN1)

“Research that actually makes a difference – In my case its policy”. (RG3)

“Benefits to society, but it’s not just a commercial thing”. (RG5)

“The answer to the ‘so what’ question”. (RB2)

Several respondents who shared this view felt the need to differentiate their definition from one involving citation metrics:-

“Any time your work is shown interest in, used or acted upon outside the university system. Nothing to do with citations”. (RB5)

“Impact to me means what are the effects of the impacts of a particular piece of research on society. Whilst citations are another indication of impact, I think what the REF is looking for is the impact on wider society”. (PN2)

“Benefit to Society – But many academics see it as a requirement to be cited by other academics”. (PN4)

Nine of the twenty-four interviewees expressed their definition of impact in terms of the requirements of the REF or made some mention of a separate REF definition. Examples of these responses include:-

“From a procedural point of view you have to find some case studies describing how your research has affected the outside world”.(PN1)

“Impact comes back to proof”. (RB3)

“It depends what you mean by impact. I believe impact should be about making our research relevant to the business community. That’s what business schools should be for; but for some academics it’s just about how convincing you can make your REF case studies”. (RB4)

“The demonstration of the influence of your research on others”. (RG8)

Author’s interpretation of the data

What resulted identified an unexpected and interesting theme whereby most academics saw impact from a societal perspective but over one third of responses captured interpreted its objectives in terms of meeting the requirements of the REF. These interpretations are very different: The first identifying the purpose of the impact agenda as providing a contribution towards social improvement and the second as a demand to score well in the REF assessment process. There was no indication in the sources of these responses to suggest that different institutions had different interpretations on the purpose of the impact agenda. It was clear from the interviews that research quality indicators such as the REF were equally as important in the post 1992 institution as they were in the Russel Group business school.

5.1.2 Understanding of the Requirements of Impact.

The next question sought to identify how well academics understood what was being asked of them in terms of the impact strategy of their institution and whether they were clear on the steps they needed to take to meet these requirements. Some interviewees provided responses that indicated a clear yes or no to these questions but most answers did not lend themselves to this categorisation. The responses indicated a lack of clarity in terms of what was required to achieve impact but this was not always the case. It is worth noting that here again responses sometimes differentiated between social impact and the case study requirements of the REF. Responses included:-

“I think Universities are still coming to terms with this – I know I am Impact champion and I am still coming to terms with it”. (PN1)

“It’s becoming quite confusing – Academics just don’t know what to do about it”. (PN5)

“I’ve been to many presentations on the topic and many of them leave you more confused than when you went in. The problem is that the REF looks at the big picture and impact is set up for the science departments. Social sciences and humanities struggle to interpret the requirements”. (PN5)

“The school has a number of workload allowances that can be bid for by anyone who wants to develop an impact case study”. (RG1)

Has the school done anything to support this apart from giving workload? *“No, the academic has to figure out how to use this time to get impact but in getting the allowance he will have had to say something about how he intends to do this”.(PN5)*

Are you clear about what you have to do to achieve impact? *“Yes I have done much research on how impact works. [...]. I think I have a good idea how to achieve impact but it can never be certain. I think when we describe ways to impact we are discussing ways to increase the likelihood”. (RG7)*

“I pondered for 7 months about how I could convert my research into an impact case study and in the end I gave up because I just could not figure out how to do it. It’s bazaarre really because making a difference was my primary reason for moving into academia. If all my years in industry can’t help me to produce research that is impactful, what chance do the career academics have”? (RB4)

“Beyond a general requirement – No. I don’t know how to respond. We are supposed to be targeting 3-4 star journals and these are not consulted by practitioners - maybe MBAs”. (RB3)

Do you think that academics have a clear understanding of how they might achieve impact? *“No, the conversations I have held with my colleagues suggest most of them are still in the dark”. (PN2)*

Author’s interpretation of the data

These responses seem to suggest that many academics are still unclear about what is required of them. As hinted at above and confirmed later in this chapter, this uncertainty is compounded by a feeling that academics are subjected to conflicting demands. Those which require them to produce the theoretical/conceptual research which is favoured by high level journals and those which require a more pragmatic approach. The following section attempts to draw out the differences between these.

5.1.3 Impactful and Theoretical Research – The Same or Different?

Before proceeding to investigate the ‘type’ of research the sample of academics were conducting and the reasons for their choices, it was necessary to ensure that the classification assumed in the methodology was valid. For the purpose of this study the researcher used the descriptions ‘impactful research’ and ‘theoretical/conceptual research’ to differentiate two styles of investigation. All of the interviewees seemed to understand this classification but a small number, no more than four, were keen to point out their view that these styles were not mutually exclusive and did not sit at opposite ends of a continuum. In response to the question, ***“Is there a difference***

between impactful research and theoretical or conceptual research ? The group's replies included:-

"I don't agree that they are different things. It's a sequence rather than two different things. But we are not incentivised to go to the second step". (RG2)

"The argument put buy those who are promoting the move towards impact is that the journal system is the biggest hurdle in terms of its realisation. They argue that academic research and applied research sit at opposite ends over continuum. I don't think this has to be the case". (RG2)

"I like to think that I am a theoretical researcher but that my work does have an impact. I don't like the classification that says applied equals impact and theoretical equals no impact". (RB4)

This said, none of the interviewees voiced any objections to accepting the classification as a way forward to enable them to express their views. There was also a general agreement that most, but not all, higher ranking journals seemed to prefer theoretical rather than applied research. Other responses to the "Is there a difference" question were fairly unanimous in their view that there was. Responses included:-

"They seem to require very different things". (PN2)

"If you believe that academics are rational then they want to get into three and four-star publications so they produce the type of research required by these journals. This gets them the criteria for promotion etc. If you look at the ABS list there are very few high ranking applied journals". (RG7)

"There are so many hurdles and protocols associated with 4 journals it is very unlikely that a four star journal paper will have any impact. I've heard stories that suggest that the best impact case studies are based upon research published in 2* journals. I don't think the two things are mutually exclusive but my guess would be that the higher ranked the journal, the less potential the research has to provide impact". (RG7)*

"Only a very small number of the research papers that underpinned our impact case studies were entered in the REF. In fact some of the authors of the case studies were not entered in the REF for their research, which suggests to me that impact and high quality research require different skill sets". (RG1)

"The majority of the high ranking journals require you to demonstrate some form of novelty in your work. This type of research is about developing theory but it's unlikely to be of any value outside the university system because it's written in a way that a practitioner wouldn't understand. They are so scholarly and rigorous in not a very good way. It's so hard to publish in them and it can take 3 years for your research to be accepted. By the time it is, if it is, the practitioner community are unlikely to be still interested. Journals can only have an impact if there is something else going on; KTPs, exec ed., or consultancy". (PN2)

“The problem is that the publication criterion of the REF drives your research one way and the impact agenda drive it another. It’s not 180 degrees but it’s close to that. The ABS list seems to inflate the value of theoretical journals and deflate those publications that are more pragmatic. So the ABS list drives the policy of institutions who then incentivise their staff to produce publications for higher ranking journals on this list”. (RG5)

Author’s interpretation of the data

These responses seem to confirm a clear distinction between the conceptual/theoretical research favoured by many, but not all, academic journals, and the type of research that the sample believed was likely to provide impactful outcomes. There was a clear view that both the process and the outcomes of the two research styles were very different. Those that disagreed tended to do so based on the argument that theoretical research ultimately becomes impactful, through a process akin to Weiss’s linear model.

5.1.4 Legitimacy and Desirability of Impact

Thirty-eight comments were found offering a view on the legitimacy and/or desirability of impact as a requirement of academic research. Only five of these could be said to exhibit a fundamental disagreement with its introduction. These were:-

“Any attempt to make research driven by end users would kill creativity”. (RG2)

“I am no fan of the impact agenda. It was formed from some minister feeling that we are not getting much in return for the research funding and the response is to try and measure it. The REF impact agenda is a bunch of old guys sitting down every five or six years looking at tall tales told by departments and that is the notion of impact. If you start with a research agenda that says research should be impactful then you squeeze out blue sky research and we all end up as management consultants”. (RG2)

“Academics ask questions other people don’t ask. The reason we have universities is to develop knowledge and we are given the space and time to do this. The question would be “do people in industry know what they want”. I don’t think they do”. (RG1)

“In terms of my own research, I do think it falls into the theoretical camp but I don’t believe that this excludes it from being of practical value. I would be very cynical if the only reason I wrote was to have it published with no regard for impact. It’s difficult to give examples in business of the benefits of research because of the long term cumulative effect of research on practitioners. I am very happy to defend basic research, otherwise we just become an arm of industry”. (RG5)

“You create knowledge through your research and you disseminate that knowledge through your teaching. Research has impact over the long term by building up a body of knowledge. The demand for impact will go. I’ve seen many of these initiatives come and go over the years”. (PN8)

A large majority of respondents empathised with the criticisms made of academic research and respected the view that it must have some value to society. Some expressed this view unconditionally, whilst others added caveats reflecting the concerns of the sceptics above:-

“Impact is close to my heart being a past practitioner. To me it’s about the influence on the practitioner community but it’s not as simple as that because sometimes the impact can come many years down the line”. (RB6)

“Yes we should have that [Impact] but I don't know if we need it for all types of research. For example penicillin would not have been invented were it not for basic research. There are few examples in the business context I would argue sky research is needed”. (PN1)

“There is lots of examples of the research in my field having an effect over a long period and you cannot just cut off that type of research for immediate results. And there are many instances when things become useful in the long term. It’s not that I’m against impact and people like me should be thinking about it, not just trying to impress a few of my friends”. (RG1)

“All academics should have to demonstrate some form of practical value to their research. I think it [impact] arose because historically publication of research was considered a proxy for the value of that research. However what happened was that people did things that got published rather than things that were useful. Eventually they realised that publication is not a good indication of value so the impact agenda is a way of measuring value more directly”. (RG7)

“Since universities receive public money it seems legitimate to require them to be accountable and ask what they are doing with this money. Otherwise we end up with academics just talking amongst themselves”. (PN1)

“I’m not against impact. I certainly believe that we should be thinking about the value of our research and doing something other than trying to impress our colleagues with our impenetrable writing. I think there is a place for rigour and relevance in academic research”. (RB8)

“It’s a good idea. It’s been a long time coming. It helps people think about the implications of their research from day one” (RB4)

“I broadly agree that we are asked to pursue a different kind of research to that which is of interest only to other academics but I still believe that all our work should be underpinned by sound theory and I would resist anything that led us away from this fundamental rule”. (PN8)

“I think it’s good but dangerous. We shouldn’t be able to live our lives inside an ivory tower without impacting practitioners, but there is more to research than catering to the needs of industry and commerce. We have to develop new understanding before we can apply it”.(RG4)

“I’m not sure if we are going the correct way about it, the ref tends to define it in rather convoluted terms, but for me management research should be impacting on the practitioner community”. (RB7)

“Business research without a benefit is like angels dancing on the head of a pin. It’s a complete waste of time. In some disciplines – Philosophy for example, it’s different but business should be an applied discipline and it needs to be driven by and serving businesses”. (RB8)

“I think researchers should be asked to think about research and demonstrate where we can make impact. My concern is that you start going down a slippery slope to a place where government say we only want research in this area and only want stuff that will provide impact. If that happens we lose the ability to do the basic research that results in new knowledge”. (RB2)

“I don’t see anything wrong with it [the impact agenda]. It’s like all things becoming more KPI focussed. It might spread the funds a little wider. It seems perfectly legitimate to ask universities to demonstrate impact. It’s natural with the amount of money that gets spent in the sector that government’s want to demonstrate to the electorate that something is coming out of that spending”. (RB7)

Author’s interpretation of the data

Those that disagreed with the impact agenda tended to use the argument that it was the thin end of the wedge that would eventually drive out innovation and change the purpose of academic research forever. There was a more fundamental point that came through which touched on the purpose of academia. Some commentators pointed to a need to provide academics with the space and time to evaluate phenomena more deeply than would be the case were they subject to the commercial pressures they associated with impact. The notion that impact will put an end to blue sky research also entered into the arguments of this group as well as a belief that impact was too subjective a concept to be measured. Finally, there was a view that the impact agenda was unnecessary because theoretical research was capable of providing the same thing, albeit on a somewhat longer timescale. This said, the majority of those questioned demonstrated some sympathy with the notion that they should be required to justify the value of their work, however there was still a view held by some that this could be achieved from the development and testing of theoretical concepts.

5.1.5 Levels of Adoption

This line of inquiry was broken down into a number of sub-components that reflected the theory underpinning the characteristics of impactful research established in the literature review. Interviewees were asked to describe:-

- The type/style of research they conduct.
- The source of research ideas
- The publications choices they make.
- The audience they have in mind when conducting and writing up their research.
- The efforts they make to engage with the practitioner community.
- The degree to which they use jargon in their writing.

5.1.5.1 Research Type/Style

In response to the question “What type of research do you conduct?” almost all academics interviewed classified their research as existing at the theoretical/conceptual end of the applied-theoretical continuum. Most often this was to meet the requirements of the journals they targeted:-

“I conduct research to develop new knowledge. This is what academics’ do”. (RG1)

“As a professor I need to publish in three and four star journals. This drives me to produce theoretical papers because this is what the journals want”. (PN6)

“I’d like to have more impact through my work but I just don’t have time to do both”. (PN1)

“To get published you have to demonstrate a degree of novelty in your work. You can’t do this with applied research so there’s no point in trying”. (PN4)

“I’m an organisational psychologist so I want to look at things that I observe and that I believe will be of value if better understood. This isn’t going to get me very far in terms of the REF’s view of impact so I’ll have to leave that to others”. (RG7)

Those who described their research as ‘more applied’ tended to rely on the nature of their subject area as justification for this classification:-

“My research is in the area of operations management that tends to be an applied discipline anyway”. (RG3)

“Accountancy is a profession and doesn’t lend itself to much theoretical research. We do have a policy in the [Accounting and Finance] department that we won’t do blue sky research. Our view is that research should be relevant to real world. Town and gown should be linked”. (PN6)

“Much of the research I do on broadband is very topical so I’ve always hoped that my work is making a difference somewhere”. (PN5)

None of the interviewees described conducting any form of applied research exclusively. The small percentage that did engage in anything other than research destined for publication within the academic journal system indicated that this was something they did ‘on top’ of their mainstream research activities:-

“I still believe that the role of a university is to publish good quality research. On some of these projects I will collaborate with colleagues who are better at the applied side and this may be the best way to get impact and theoretical outputs”.(PN4)

“It may sound like I’m singing from the hymn sheet but I do both. I think one feeds off the other so, whenever possible, I modify my theoretical research for a practitioner audience. I get feedback from the practitioners because the real world is always more complicated than how you write it and this feedback influences my arguments. I do get into arguments that support and destroy theory”. (PN2)

5.1.5.2 Sources of Research Ideas

A large majority of respondents describing the catalyst for their research projects identified themselves as the source of ideas. Many added some form of caveat that their thinking was influenced by the need to be producing something worthwhile:-

“I prefer to conduct research on things that interest me. These are often where I see gaps in understanding in the literature”. (PN2)

“Curiosity but with an eye on what would be useful”. (RB4)

“It’s curiosity but there is always a subconscious feeling that a need exists. I sometimes look into things that I am frustrated with and I believe should change, so I’m on a personal agenda”. (RB5)

“I’m an organisational psychologist so I want to look at things that I observe and that I believe will be of value if better understood”. (RG6)

“I’m a great believer in curiosity driven research because I think that’s what universities are for. Otherwise we just become an arm of industry. People have political interest in these things”. (RG2)

A small number of respondents identified an influence from practitioners or being driven by commissioned research:-

How do you get your research Ideas? *“Curiosity”. **What about demand driven research?** “Yes, I get some ideas from my connections with industry but at the end of the day I have to get these ideas published so I have to keep one eye on what’s happening in the journals”.*

“The research I prefer to conduct is driven by my interests developed in industry. But having looked back at my research and what difference it has made, it’s questionable whether I have made any”. (PN4)

“I’m not a typical academic. Most of my research has been commissioned and I have had three stints in the consultancy sector. Making an impact is something that I have always measured myself on so all of my research is driven by demand, but if I’d spent my whole life in academia I may have had a different view. This is part of the problem”. (RB6)

“I have always done research that has an impact as a specific goal, rather than the open ended research that is done by some of the more theoretical researchers. Much of my research has been externally funded”. (RB6)

Several of those who described curiosity as the source of their research ideas felt the need to justify their choice. Typically, these justifications tended to be represented by the arguments described below:-

“I can remember a very useful piece of what might be described as “curiosity” research that set the agenda in child poverty and set the ball rolling for much of the commissioned research that

followed. Maybe that's an exception that proves the rule but it certainly was a case that without the curiosity research the whole agenda would be less developed now. I guess I'd agree that the chances of commissioned research resulting in an impactful outcome are greater than the chances of curiosity research having such an output but it depends how much you value the odd breakthrough. Whilst I understand the argument about the sacrifices made to enable curiosity research to go ahead, I don't believe in the idea that commissioned research is the only type of research that can make a difference". (RG6)

"As academics we are allowed the time and space to investigate the things we believe to be important to the business community and this is how it should be. The problem with allowing industry to drive the research agenda of universities is, firstly, they don't often know what they want, and secondly, they're not interested in generic knowledge that benefits society, they want the knowledge that will benefit themselves as a business". (RG2)

"... the problem with giving practitioners the power to drive research is that they sometimes want to hear what they want to hear. I have had experience of this when doing some work with a large oil company on diversity in the workplace, who effectively wanted me to justify their lack of diversity. In which case we all become consultants. I'm not against consultants but academics ask different questions". (RG1)

5.1.5.3 Publication Choices

The question seeking to elicit where academics target their research for publication purposes provoked the most unanimous response to all of the questions in the study. Whilst there were differences in the reasons provided for doing so, the importance of publishing in the highest ranking academic journals was almost unequivocal. The following comments were typical of those provided in response to the question; "Where do you seek to publish your research"?:-

"I prefer to be published in the higher quality journals. I guess that's what I've been conditioned to do". (RG2)

"I certainly aim for enough 3 & 4 journals to maintain my credibility. I have to perform at a particular level to maintain my professorship". (PN3)*

"In the highest journal possible" (PN7)

"Well, I guess I prefer to publish in four star journals but the last four star journal I published in was over 7 years ago". (RB4)

The most common reasons provided for making the choice to publish in academic journals were pressure from the institution and/or a belief that this would influence career prospects. This issue is covered in more detail in section 5.2.2 below but the following comments are representative of reasons given for targeting the journals:-

“This is how research is judged for promotion and recruitment. Journal articles are the only sure thing, then there is a black box containing impact, teaching, PhD supervision and research grants that can also have an effect on promotion. But if I’m honest, I don’t believe that Impact is the biggest thing in that box”. (RG5)

“It’s never been said that I’d be fired for not achieving my publishing targets but I think most of us in the business school understand that there is an expectation placed upon us. That’s the negative side but the positive side is that I know where I get read by a large audience so my best papers are published in org studies journal and I know they get read and have an influence. I want to be part of the debate and this is how I can best achieve this”. (PN2)

“I have two mentees and I advise them to concentrate on the journal publications if they want promotion”. (RG3)

“I had some research that I thought was really interesting and would have been very publishable in a project management journal, but both the PM journals are two star and my co-researcher would not hear of it. He would rather the research was not published at all because it affected his profile”. (RG4)

“Recruiters are certainly looking at publication outlets”. (RB8)

“I’m required to do this by the institution”. (PN2)

“My most cited papers are those not on the ABS list and those that are on the list are amongst my least cited, so I find it quite amusing to be told to concentrate on the ABS list”. (RG4)

“My position is complicated because I work with a retired person who no longer has to play the publishing game, as well as some overseas academics who have their own list of preferred publications. In Germany they get recognition for coming first on an alphabetical list of authors, so if you’re German and your name starts with a W you will not fare as well as someone whose name starts with an A. In Spain only the citation index matters. So keeping everyone happy isn’t always easy”. (RG4)

Only two commentators attempted to justify their decision to target the academic journals for reasons other than those that might be considered as having some element of self-interest.

“There’s no point in doing research unless others find it useful and in the academic arena this is done by publishing in these journals”. (PN8)

Why the highest journal? *“They are based in quality. It is the credibility that comes with having your work accepted by these journals. It’s also a challenge to get work published. If I publish in a high level journal I have produced something new by definition”. (PN8)*

A number of respondents articulated an appreciation of the value of disseminating work in trade journals and other outlets popular with practitioners. Although not everyone who held this view acted upon it, those who did tended to consider such papers as add-ons to their academic publications and/or

indicated that they published in such places 'in spite of' rather than 'in line with' the preferences of their institutions:-

What about writing in publications that are more accessible to those outside the academic network? *"I did try this once. Myself and a colleague dumbed down one of our papers and sent it off to a trade journal". (RG1)*

"I tend to publish in outlets that are more on the applied side". **Is this a problem?** *"Well it could be. I guess when the REF comes back around and people start to look at these things I might be asked where these [academic] articles are".* **Are you discouraged from publishing in these outlets?** *"Yes. But I am in a fortunate position in that I am in my late 50's and I don't have any desire to go any further in my career so I am lucky in that sense. If I were an early career researcher I would be very concerned. Although I don't come under pressure on a day to day basis. I guess the institution may look down on a professor who does not have that four star profile. However, I would answer this by pointing to the 10-11 research contracts I've won and the finances that these bring". (RB6)*

"I've always taken the view that it is better to be timely. In the IT business change happens more quickly than the time it takes to get published in high ranking journals so I've gone for domain journals rather than the ABS list. I'd rather be read by those who have an interest than get into the game of pushing up my research score. This was frowned upon in my last institution. I still have to do the theoretical stuff to keep my paymasters happy". (RG4)

"I'm not oblivious to the demands on me to publish in higher ranking journals but I prefer to go for the places where the audience will be most appreciative. I'd rather have my articles read by those who are interested than just go for the highest star rating". **How does that gel with your career aspirations?** *"There is a general rule that regardless of the above I must achieve a target of being published in 3-4 star journals. I tend to argue that I bring other things such as funding and impact. I am also good at my role as a leader. So I believe I can justify my position through a balance of things". (PN6)*

"I publish in a small number of journals relating to ethics and organisational theory but I also write in publications that are read by my primary impact audience to make my research change the way people behave. I also do other types of dissemination such as speaking at a head teacher's event, so there are other types of dissemination. I have also set up a network of practitioners and academics". (RG4)

"In a good rated journals so that academics can see that I am publishing and sometimes in places where practitioners can read it and act upon it. I do this with project management research". (RG4)

5.1.5.4 Target Audience

Responses to the question "Who do you have in mind as an audience when you conduct your research activities"? tended to align with the choice of publications targeted. When describing publication in academic journals almost all described this audience as other academics:-

“When I write in journals I am writing exclusively for academics”. (PN3)

“Books for lay practitioner, for academic texts its peers. It’s about forecasting who will be reviewing the paper for the journal”.(RB7)

“I think I have both audiences in mind. I hope that it will be relevant to my fellow academics in my discipline as well as managers and policy makers. I also think about the opportunities for consultancy”. (PN5)

“My academic peers and the companies who would be interested in my work. When I write for journals it’s the former. There’s no point in targeting managers if you’re planning to publish your work in a journal because they don’t read them”. (RG7)

“You have to target your work at an academic audience otherwise you will never get through the peer review process”. (PN5)

“That’s a very interesting question. When I write an article the audience is academics. When I first moved to a business school from an engineering department, where I received my PhD, I used to write for the business world but I quite quickly realised that this would not get me very far. Now I’m beginning to change my mind again because I believe that this is the future direction. I’m not sure if this is the right thing to do for my career but if the government are putting money behind it I’m sure things will change in this direction”. (RG3)

5.1.5.5 Practitioner Engagement

Although there were several respondents who recognised the value of collaborating with practitioners and some who expressed a desire to do so, there was only a very small number of academics in the sample who had ever worked closely with the business community on research projects. The reasons provided for this lack of engagement tended to fall into one of three camps; a lack of time, a lack of recognition by the school and the difficulty of getting business to engage:-

“There is a problem that users don’t often value the research of academics so it is difficult to get them to cooperate in research. This is an excellent way to get impact but it’s incredibly difficult”. (RG4)

“I do my best. I have links through the IMechE. and this brings me into contact with organisations. I also try other ways. I am always open to opportunities. The MBA is useful as well as projects that come to the university from companies that need help. It doesn’t often work though. It’s difficult to get research leads from business”. (RG4)

“I would like to do more of this but lack of time makes it a problem. It’s difficult to convert practical work into publications and working with business is time consuming, so it tends to get overlooked because it’s not an efficient way to meet the objectives placed on academics”. (PN2)

“I did try to work with a large oil company but I struggled to find a way to work with the person I met there because he didn’t want the type of diversity I could offer, he wanted me to justify his

own methods and I'm not going to do that. I don't think we want to put these people in power in terms of driving the research agenda". (RG6)

"It is very difficult to get managers to engage with academia. The Academy of Management Journal was set up with this sole purpose in mind but still it was not read by business people. Even the Academy of Management, a global player cannot achieve this. In the end the journal changed its name". **So do you think we should just leave things as they are?** "No, we need to connect managers and academics but I don't think impact is the agenda to achieve this". **Do you have an alternative?** "There is a big disconnect between the things that managers are interested in and the things that academic research, because they never meet up in the same places". **Is there a way of changing this?** "Well there has never been a way in my life time and I doubt there ever will be". (RG2)

"I got most of my demand driven research by going out of here and talking to people". (PN4)

"I come from a consultancy background where I was required to bring in funding to a budget, so when I get an opportunity to conduct an applied project my own immediate response is yes, but I think some of my colleagues would answer no. They would argue that they have no time because of teaching and research but I understand that some are not confident to work with practitioners". (RB4)

"I've worked with business on funded research. This was a requirement of the funding body".(RB4)

"Until recently it was all curiosity driven until I managed to get a network going with my end users and that has enabled me to listen to what they are saying". **What actions did you take to engage with them?** "There wasn't a forum to bring them together so I founded one called the [*] research network that has grown from 15 to 150 members and has a split of 50/50 between researchers and practitioners. This has worked very well because it attracts all sorts of academics who are interested in working with a small community to test many of their ideas. The [*] benefits because they get academic reassurance that they are having a positive impact on their audiences. I think networks of academics and practitioners is a move in the right direction. You don't get corporations knocking at your door". **Do these practitioners shape your research?** "They do now". **How does this work?** "The [*] will suggest areas of research that would be useful to them. For example, they may want to demonstrate the way they influence their audience to their funders. If they can show that their work with [*] affects other areas of their lives in a positive way then it's in their interest to have this confirmed". (PN4)

* Text removed to protect anonymity

5.1.5.6 Inclusion of Jargon in Output Reports

When describing the use of jargon in their research outputs some respondents described a need to write in a particular language to meet the requirements of the journals they targeted:-

Do you use a different language when writing for higher ranking journals? “Yes. Most journals have a formula that must be followed to get into them and half the battle is understanding that formula and sticking to it”. (PN3)

“They sometimes demand a jargon that can be impenetrable at times”. (PN7)

“It’s necessary to consider ontological and epistemological issues when doing good research both because it is necessary for good research and also to get published. The question is how we translate this into something meaningful to the business world”. (RG8)

“Yes. I find the difficult thing is changing your style for practitioner publications and removing the theoretical concepts. I think I forgotten how to write like this”. (RB4)

“This was discussed in the times higher recently. The starting point for getting published is to read the journal you are targeting to get the writing style and the message they are looking for”.(RG4)

“There is a requirement to use jargon but some academics seem to take a pride in making there topic inaccessible and a kind of black art”.(RG8)

“Some journals prefer a very obtuse language”.(PN2)

Other commentators argued the benefits of using a more technical language:-

“Yes some fields of research have their own jargon and it is efficient to use this to avoid long explanations”.(RG2)

“I try to avoid this. If I need to use technical terms I try to explain these. I like to think my papers are jargon free but this is possibly not always the practitioner’s view”. (RG6)

“Only technical language – Otherwise no” (RB6)

One commentator believed the very top journals discourage the use of jargon:-

“The best writing is in the top journals – Plain and simple and less jargon. Your papers get thrown out if you use jargon”. (RG2)

Author’s interpretation of the data

The differences between the research practices of the sample and the theoretical requirements for impactful research described in the literature were significant in every category. Interviewees were predominantly engaged in theoretical/conceptual research driven by their own ideas of what was of interest. Interaction with practitioners was minimal in terms of research collaboration although several respondents did engage for other academic reasons. In their publication choices few researchers targeted anything other than the highest ranking journals possible and jargon was often seen as a requirement to achieve such objectives. Those that did engage in more impactful practice often described this as an addition to their primary activities which was conducted ‘despite’, rather than ‘in line’, with the demands placed on them.

5.2 RO-3. The Effect of Existing Policies and Practices

The views expressed in this sub-section were gleaned in response to questions relating to the drivers that influenced the interviewee's style of research and their dissemination choices. Of all the questions in the interviews, these were by far the ones that resulted in the most vociferous and voluminous responses. To accept the validity of these statements and their place within the following sub-headings it is necessary to hold the view that impactful research and theoretical/conceptual research are not the same thing and, in a time constrained environment, encouraging one is analogous to discouraging the other.

5.2.1 Policies and Practices that Encourage Impactful Research

All of the institutions included in this project have made efforts to promote the adoption of impactful research. These efforts have included staff development events, the creation of 'Impact Champions' and the provision of time and funding to develop REF case studies.

"Do I consider impact more these days? I think so. There is an implicit pressure to think about it but the great and the good still want the four-star papers". (RG3)

"Well at present there is no-one being rewarded for this characteristic in their research. It will be interesting to see if this changes. However, we were once told in a meeting that one four-star impact case study counts as much as eleven four-star publications. In theory if the action matches the rhetoric then a single case study should get someone a chair. But this comparison seems not to be adopted". (RG4)

"Probably the best you could hope for going down the impact route would be that you would get promotion within your own institution to senior lecturer. We might see some people being incentivised to stay with an institution because of their impact but I have not seen this yet. Impact seems to rise up the agenda as the ref approaches but of course the institutions may have a good bargaining position on such staff if they do not have the quality publications to move on". (PN6)

"At the moment we pay lip service to impact but this may change as the ref approaches". (PN5)

"Yes of course impact is now said to be important but people don't believe it". (RG8)

"If the incentive structure changes because of the REF it will open up the system for people to do other kinds of research".(RB2)

"As far as this institution is concerned there is definitely a growth in the rhetoric". (PN3)

"The seminars we have had on impact have encouraged me to think more about it when I'm designing a piece of research" (RG7)

"I think something is changing. Here at [location removed] they have appointed someone at University level; a Dean for impact. I don't think it's that well managed at this point but people who wrote the last impact studies seem to be well thought of and there are high expectations on them for next time".(RG5)

5.2.2 Policies and Practices that Discourage Impactful Research

Many researchers described their actions as being led by institutional priorities that conflicted with the quest for impact. The following statements are included to provide an indication of what the respondents understand these to be and what they believed it takes to meet them:-

Do you feel incentivised to conduct impactful research? *“No I’m incentivised to publish in four-star journals and now I am incentivised to bring in research funding”. (RB3)*

“Although most impact is likely to be based upon two-star papers, the incentive system is not driving academics towards these publications. If you look at incentives in this institution, there is probably more incentive to publish a couple of obscure three-star papers than there is to do a KTP or to do anything practical. The ABS list provides a very simple way for business schools to judge their staff and it fits nicely with their own objectives to produce more high ranking papers”. (PN3)

If I were a new researcher what advice would I get from this business school? *“You would be asked to get up the lists”. (RG1)*

“People often ask me now how I am progressing towards the next REF but what they mean is how many publications do I have already and how many are in the pipeline. People sometime get a little upset if there is a period without publications”. (PN6)

“Personally I find that funded research gets me the most impactful outcomes but the institutional incentives are overwhelmingly to publish in high ranking journals. Given that the leading journals in my field are only interested in theoretical/conceptual papers, that’s where most of my efforts go”. (PN5)

“To make sure by the end of the REF cycle I had the requisite number of articles at the correct level people are asking you your score all the time ‘did you get twelve points?’”. (PN6)

“if I said I had two three-star papers and some book chapters I’m not sure how that would go. People would not look kindly on that type of performance. We could ask people to stick to their strengths and do either applied or theoretical research but I don’t think the former would get the same recognition as the latter”. (PN8)

Is the incentive simply to publish in the higher journals then? *“Absolutely it is”. (PN4)*

“The business school will be judged on impact but all my career I’ve been encouraged to write material that is not easily converted into impact and I continue to do this because that’s what I am judged upon”. (RB4)

“There is an interesting article on getting published in higher ranking journals and they describe the need for a ‘hook’ to keep the reader interested. This can be a gap in the knowledge or a new theory, or it could be the value of the research in terms of its potential to make a difference. But most of the high ranking journals seem to favour the first two”. (RG4)

Some commentators held the view that the 20% weighting that impact is currently given in the REF was indicative of the relatively greater importance of traditional theoretical research, concluding that impact could be left to others in the institution.

“You only need a certain number of impact case studies. Not everyone needs to do it. I’m not overly concerned that my own research does not seem likely to have an impact. I don’t need to be worried too much about it. As a business school you need a number of people, say 20%, to be impactful and the others need not bother”. (RB2)

“I am not being pushed by the institution to generate impact case studies. What they really want out of me is more three and four-star publications. Then research funding comes next and then impact. I don’t think that they will expect someone to do all three, so if you are doing a good job of the first two then I suspect that they will leave you alone with regards to a contribution to impact”. (PN3)

The following paragraphs describe how the incentives to publish in high ranking journal manifest themselves in terms of their influence on job security and promotion in existing institutions and also on their prospects for employment elsewhere.

i) Job Security/Promotion

Here the overwhelming view was that it was publications rather than impacts that were favoured by institutions:-

“In promotion panels we are always focussed on journal ratings. Funding for conferences is judged on the likelihood of getting a publication afterwards and workload for research is allocated upon the historic volume and ranking of an academic’s research. Impact does not fit into this model. After the ref we identified potential bodies of research that might underpin impact but this is still not taken into account on the application form for research hours”. (RG3)

“We are currently rewarded for producing theoretical research in obscure papers. In here we are employed on a probationary contract that is getting more harshly applied and this requires academics to publish in high ranking journals. If they don’t do this then they are out. There are three people who have not passed probation in the past three years”. (RG7)

“I’m incentivised to produce anything that gets into a 3-4 star journals. If I was advising a young person on how to progress in here I would say go for the Journals”. (RG1)

“The promotion criteria does favour publications. Anyone going for SL should have 12 publications”. (RG8)

“If I were pushed I think I would have to say that you would be more likely to get promoted to a profs position by going for the higher order publications and therefore, if you can’t do both, a new researcher would be wiser to focus on these things as the highest priority”. (PN3)

“I have chosen business analytics because it gets me closer to the end user community. I also do KTP’s but, to be honest, they do not help you to get promoted. If you don’t publish afterwards then you are wasting your time because we know what the model for promotion is”. (RB3)

How is an academic’s work considered for promotion? *“That’s an interesting question because we are just rewriting the criteria for Principal Lecturer. We have decided that you cannot be promoted to this position just by being a manager who teaches. You have to have a doctorate or the equivalent now. You have to be a teaching fellow but most importantly you need the publication profile, even in this post 92 university”. (PN2)*

“When you are a prof or attempting to be one then it’s the three and four-star journals that will get you there. And when the ref comes around business schools are so desperate to get hold of people who can achieve this they will pay over the odds to get them or retain them. So there is a clear individual incentive to go for theoretical papers”. (PN4)

How are people judged for promotion and recruitment? *“Volume of papers, ranking of papers and Money brought in. It varies with different disciplines for example economics is all about papers”. (RB3)*

ii) Employability

On the topic of employability respondents almost unanimously described a good publication profile as a prerequisite for any academic post. There was a common belief that it is this profile, rather than one’s achievements in delivering impactful outcomes that dictate an academic’s national and international worth in the job market. Some pointed to the REF’s regulations on the transferability of publications and Impact case studies as something that exacerbates this position:-

When you recruit staff what do you look for? *“Well it’s the standard baseline requirements. The entry level now is three-star publications for a lecturer. At a more senior level the publication requirements go up and I suppose we’d like to see some income generation or at least potential for this. By and large non-standard publications such as non-academic journals don’t tend to count”. (RB4)*

“The model of the REF last time meant that impact could not be transferred as academics moved between institutions if the original research was not completed at the new institution. Unlike research papers that travel with academics. This works well for natural sciences where institutions may have purchased a lot of kit for their research and want credit for this investment. The problem in business schools is that it deters academics from doing impact because it’s not something they can use to negotiate a better deal if they move”. (RG4)

“The key is transportability. Impact stays with the institution and that might sway institutions to keep good impactful researchers. On the other hand this might be a disincentive for those who want to move around to better their career since institutions can buy in their research but not their impact”. (PN3)

“When it comes to employment many of us play in an international arena. Publications are the common currency allowing us to be compared with others, say in the States. When we hire from overseas we can’t always depend on applicants having some measure of impact on their CVs because many countries don’t require academics to be impactful”. (RG8)

“It’s very difficult now to recruit on industrial experience. Applicants will not get through the vetting process that relies on the ABS list. If they have experience without publication they won’t be interviewed. On the other hand if they have publications and no experience they will get an interview and probably the job. Nine times out of ten we will recruit the person without experience. This is embedded in the systems of the University”. (RB3)

“In the past when the REF came around not even a lecturer grade will get a job without a publication record”. (PN4)

“I think the publication record is a default for recruitment because we only get QR funding for these outputs”. (PN8)

“The essential criteria in our recruitment interview forms don’t mention three or four-star journals. Our Adverts say high quality research and publications but I think in practice this means publications in high ranking journals. There’s no mention of impact”. (RB7)

“Most academics move around to pursue their career objectives so even though you may get recognition for applied research in one institution you have to look at what is recognised in all of them. There’s always a subtle pressure to keep your CV up to scratch with what employers are looking for and articles in the right journals are like gold. They can sometimes be traded for salary increases when the REF comes around”. (PN1)

“You must always think I need to bring in money and publish. I like to engage because I have a practitioner background but this route into academia is now closed. There was a time when you could get a job without a PhD, then it went to PhD, now it’s a PhD and good publications. Industry experience is given zero weighting except in accounting and maybe marketing because they are seen as professions. In the more social science subjects it means nothing”. (RB4)

“The REF window doesn’t help. Prior to the last REF we ran around looking for staff with publications. This was responsible for a large number of the Profs we currently employ. Lots of people play this game. The REF allows the transfer. In France the University owns your research as far as claims for REF-type funding. We could stop this by changing the rules to those more similar to France”. (PN3)

Several academics interviewed described a personal dissatisfaction with the way they perceived journal publications as monopolising recruitment and promotion criteria, but most who held this view accepted it as the ‘game’ they were in:-

“It’s not particularly rewarding to be part of a publishing sausage machine but if you want to progress in academia then you have to follow the rules of the game”. (RG6)

“Pragmatic research gets published primarily in the lower ranking journals but there is sense now that academics will not allow their research to filter down because it affects their profile if their papers go into low star journals. We should be encouraged to make a difference but the system doesn’t seem to want to know about impact”. (RG4)

“Academics are required to play the promotion game and the rules of this game are all about being published on a regular basis, particularly at three and four-star level. So no matter how many industrial projects you are involved with or how much your work benefits society these won’t be recognised as highly as being associated with such publications. The universities have always followed this model for recruitment and promotion and it dictates the type of research they produce. Unfortunately, if you are judging research performance by publication volumes then there is a message that impact is not being judged. You are considering rigour and originality that tends to push you in the direction of theory to try to make it original or at least advance that theory in some way. It’s not difficult to see why academia is held in such low regard within the business community”. (RB1)

“I think most academics accept that their research has little effect on the real world but it’s embedded that they play the research game because the prize in this game is research money. There should be much more of a debate on this matter. At the end of the day we end up with a group of theorists who cannot hold the respect of the MBA or anyone outside the institution”. (RB3)

Other less prevalent comments relating to the effect of existing policy and practice described a lack of support in overcoming the difficulty and time pressures involved in building relationships for collaborative research:-

“It’s difficult to convert practical work into publications and working with business is time consuming so it tends to get overlooked because it’s not an efficient way to meet the objectives placed on academics”.(PN4)

“We don’t have the networks here to facilitate collaboration with the business community. Many years ago we used to have a ‘best practice club’ that was very well attended by local businesses, but this petered out because the people who ran it were given no recognition”.

“I’d be happy to work with business if I had the time”. (PN1)

Some interviewees placed the blame for their lack of enthusiasm towards impactful research on the lack of clarity in terms of specifying what was required of them:-

“The problem with impact is that it’s such a nebulous area. I think some people are still confused about what is required. On the other hand the ABS list offers a very precise tool for business schools to judge the performance of academics. Even though it doesn’t necessarily reflect reality in terms of how good the research is, both sides understand it”. (RG8)

“I prefer to stick with what I know and what I’m good at”. (RB6)

“When someone tells me what it is and how I can achieve it I’ll maybe do something about it”.
(RG7)

Finally, from a more personal perspective that is less influenced by policy and practice, some respondents described an attraction to the high ranking journals that was driven by a desire for credibility, prestige and self-satisfaction:-

Do you see you own best interests in being published in these journals? *“Yes but it’s not just about that. It’s also about the satisfaction of being capable of getting published in such journals because they are deemed to have high standards”.* (PN8)

“Most of the social sciences have gone down the theoretical route because they believe it gives them the degree of credibility to match the science disciplines. Applied research is considered as second best; a type of research that anyone can do as it requires no theoretical understanding. The outcome is that academics want to publish theoretical research. This is driven by the REF and the way journals are ranked. Between them they are driving culture and behaviour”. (PN3)

“The four-star journals are the gold standard in the publication business that all academics strive for. They provide credibility within the academic community”. (RG8)

“The journals are where academics make a name for themselves”. (RG8)

Author’s interpretation of the data

There was a strong view that the policies and practices in all three institutions did not match the rhetoric. From employment and promotion criteria to time and financial incentives, respondents were of the view that their employers demanded high ranking publications above everything else. There was a perception within the sample that impact was a ‘nice to have’ but three and four-star journal publications were the thing that would dictate ones career prospects. Some commentators believed that this may be about to change as the impact agenda became more established.

5.3 RO-04. Willingness and Ability to Adopt a More Impactful Style

5.3.1 Willingness to Change

As can be seen from previous sections in this chapter, when describing their views on the legitimacy of the impact agenda, the type of research they currently engage in and the drivers that influence this choice, many of the respondents hinted at a degree of dissatisfaction with the existing situation and a need for change. To gain a more precise picture of how academics would feel about moving to a more applied style of research the sample was asked to describe the type of research they would prefer to conduct and whether they would welcome such a transition.

There were very few comments that could be classified as clear “yes” or “no” responses to this question although the following suggest a small number within the sample who were quite resolute in their unwillingness to change:-

Would you welcome a move towards a more applied form of research? *“This would require me to become a consultant and I don’t want to do this”. (RG2)*

“I have no intention of putting my efforts into catering to managers because they are not interested. Research should be theoretical, just as the journals want it to be”. (RG1)

“I have no interest whatsoever in applied research. I would try to circumvent any change in this direction and if I were forced to move away from basic research I would be looking for an early retirement package. I don’t think this will be necessary because, even if impact became 25% most people would continue to keep doing their conceptual research because this is what they know and this is what they want to do”. (RG2)

“No I would not. If I were forced to conduct applied research then I’d leave”. (RG1)

“Some academics don’t know how to engage or they don’t want to engage. One usually leads to the other”.(RB8)

More positive responses indicated a genuine desire to deliver greater utility from their research endeavours:-

“I would prefer to do something that someone out there wants. If you sit and dream up what you think the end user community want then you are limited by your imagination. But it still has to be grounded in literature and new knowledge”. (PN6)

“I have personal desire to be impactful, but that kind of research will benefit your career most? At the moment it’s not the type of research that is going to result in impact”. (RG4)

“I would prefer to do action research and publish it in applied journals”. (RG6)

What type of research do you prefer to do? *“I prefer the kind of stuff favoured by the non-ranked journals because these are read by the people who will appreciate my work. It’s ridiculous really”. (RB6)*

Would you prefer to conduct theoretical or applied research? *“My preference would be applied research that is publishable in three and four-star journals. But this can be difficult under the current system”. (PN2)*

“I’d like my work to be useful but that’s not the way I’m driven”. (RB6)

“As a manager of others I have to be honest and say that I advise my staff to do the research that’s going to result in three star articles if they wish to proceed. In many cases this is at the cost of the applied stuff. If I could change the system I would. I would like to see a broad spectrum of researchers from the applied to the theoretical working together but at the moment

the best interests of the individual are to stay at the publication end of the spectrum. This is not a great way to work". (RB2)

"The thing is that academics are not assessed on their impact. I've always been keen on KTPs but I get promoted for publishing in academic journals. If this changes, then so will I". (RG7)

"If I had the time I'd be more than happy to write in the trade press". (PN1)

"I'd be very happy to spend the remainder of my career in organisations trying to make change. I think this would be a nice end to my career and having developed theoretical knowledge to spend time implementing it in organisations". (RB4)

5.3.2 Ability to Change

This section identifies comments that express a view on the ability of academics to work with the practitioner community and deliver outcomes preferred by that constituency. These comments were not provided in response to any particular question on this subject but came out of the data classification exercise described in the methodology:-

"The business world want actionable advice and we are not good at this operationalisation of our research because we have never been required to provide it in the past. There are some exceptions to this. I suspect that this might be coming since we will need some training on this if impact is to become a reality". (PN8)

"We do encourage staff to do research that has the potential for impact but this can be quite a challenge particularly for those who have come up through the PhD route". (PN2)

"We do encourage staff to do research that has the potential for impact but this can be quite a challenge particularly for people who have little business experience such as those who have come up through the PhD route". (RB5)

"I have considerable experience in business and if I am unable to be enthusiastic about writing impact case studies then what chance is there that those who have come up through the university system are willing and able to produce impact". (RB6)

Author's interpretation of the data

As might be expected, respondents who saw no need for change were most reticent to move to research practices which were believed to engender impactful outcomes. Respondents who saw the value in applied research tended to be more acquiescent to change but only when impactful research was recognised and rewarded on an equal footing with its theoretical counterpart. These questions seemed to flush out a somewhat 'unspoken' concern that academic research was seen to be of little value outside academia. Many in the sample would have preferred to see this change; however, there was a view that, as individuals, there was little that could be done to make this happen.

5.4 RO-5. Recommendations to Better Achieve Research Impact

In attempting to ascertain how the quest for greater impact might be more effective the study sought to achieve two objectives. Firstly, it attempted to identify good practice in the existing strategies that have been applied within business schools to encourage impactful research, and secondly, it collected the views of academic researchers on what they believed it would take to achieve this transition.

5.4.1 Effectiveness of Initiatives Taken by Institutions

The actions taken by all three universities in the sample were remarkably similar. Respondents from each of the institutions made some mention of an impact strategy but most were of the view that it was not well developed at the time the interviews took place. No one was able to describe their school's strategy in any detail:-

"The university is currently developing an Impact strategy and we in the business school will eventually be required to work out an implementation plan. So, in a sense, that's how new it is". (PN1)

"I wouldn't say there is a clear strategy but people are aware of the need to do something to address the impact requirements in the next REF".(RB1)

"The university is adopting a policy of setting up institutes as a means of providing a single point of contact for businesses in a particular area". (PN2)

*"It's dominating. We did quite well in the REF on impact and our strategy is aggressive". **What's in the impact strategy?** "It lays out what we want from impact and what the key areas are. Our new research VC wants us to work across departments". (PN8)*

All three universities have nominated impact champions within their business schools and two of the three have made more senior appointments at institutional level. Those within the schools are tasked with raising awareness and providing training on impact, evaluating research for potential impact and facilitating cooperation across subject groups, departments, faculties and beyond:-

What has the University done to promote the research agenda? *"We have access to historic REF case studies and we have been given some training on what it is that makes a good case study". (RG3)*

"At the moment all the impact messages are very broad and general. No one is sitting me down and asking me what I am doing towards impact at this point in time. It's very hands off and that's the way most academics like it". (PN6)

What actions have been taken by the school? *"The University has a central impact manager and each faculty has been given funding for an impact champion but I believe that this has now dried up; the hope is that it is now embedded. I [as Research Director] have a list of potential case studies and I am examining these with the staff to identify which are the most likely to give*

us what we need for the next REF. The last time people were asked to develop case studies at the last minute without time or recognition and we want to avoid this next time". (PN2)

"We aren't doing very much at the moment. I suspect that training will ramp up as we approach the next REF and the requirements become clearer". (PN7)

"The Research Director and I [the Impact Champion] have been through an exercise to identify potentially impactful projects". (PN1)

"We are trying to tie up different groups. That is, those who have done the research but do not have the means to convert it into impact and those who might have the potential to apply the research. I think Universities are still coming to terms with this. I know I am Impact champion and I am still coming to terms with it". (PN1)

"I'm not aware of any activities to promote impact. I'm sure there are some but I don't know of them".(RB6)

"We are trying to link public engagement with impact. This University does a lot of public engagement and we see these links as potential pathways to impact so the school is trying to develop them. What we haven't done is figure out how to convert these pathways into REF impacts around publications". (RB6)

What is the institution doing to change the way things are done? *"We're working with individual researchers on a one to one basis as well as offering more generic training. I think that most staff are now aware of the importance of impact". (SN1)*

"The Impact champion is trying to get people involved in impact and asking what they need from the institution". (RB1)

"I don't see anything to encourage impact from this institution apart from a move towards funded research that has a knock on effect on the impact agenda because most grant awarding bodies now require some indication of the impact of the research they are funding. I think the day will come when income will be a source of career advantage". (RB3)

"The Director of Business Research is constantly reminding us to think about Impact. We also have a PR person who wants us to spread the word about the value of our research so we can use this to market the school". (RG3)

Have the institution done anything to incentivise impactful research? *"Hmm, not really. To be honest they probably want you to get the three and four-star publications first and then go for the impact. If you said you were concentrating on just the practical element I'm not sure how they would feel about it. We have had a few seminars on impact and there are staff who have the role of helping others to put bids together". (PN6)*

What actions have been taken by school? *"Seminars, funding to write up case studies and they have commissioned a PR company to help get our achievements out into the public domain". (RG5)*

What about help with designing impactful research? *"I think the University assumes that we do this anyway. There is not much support in terms of producing impactful research". (RG7)*

Finally, all three institutions offer funding and /or workload time for activities that lead to impactful outcomes:-

“There is some workload allocated to produce the case studies. Twenty projects of 100 hours are available for up to 5 years through a bidding process. The projects are reviewed each year”. (RG1)

“We have a fund for developing impact and the applications for this money have gone up from two last year to twelve so far this year. The maximum amount on offer is £3,000 and ten of the twelve have been approved. The approval process requires applicants to justify the use of this money in terms of impact”. (PN1)

“At the moment there is a small fund but no workload available to develop impact”. (RB5)

To assess the effectiveness of the strategies described above interviewees were asked whether they were doing anything differently as a result of the initiatives or whether they knew of any effects elsewhere in the school. Many of the respondents indicated that they were more aware of the importance of impact as a result of the activities undertaken by their schools but far fewer were able to describe any concrete changes to practice that had resulted. A small number suggested that impact activity was beginning to enter the institution’s academic performance management system and this may be the catalyst for future change. Most comments seemed to suggest that any effects were relatively modest:-

“It might be that we are at the beginning of a long process and it may be too early to say”.

“I have been influenced by the impact agenda. I wrote two short articles for practitioner publications based upon a 14,000 word paper I had published in an academic journal. I probably wouldn’t have done that five years ago”. (PN4)

“We have some staff who are listing their impact funding wins as part of their performance and promotion activities. For example we have an appraisal process and impact is creeping into this”. (RG8)

“In the past the school has paid lip service to the importance of impact but this year there is more focus on it. As a result I think staff are getting a sense that impact is becoming more valuable to the school and therefore to themselves”. (RG5)

Are people acting differently as a result of the changes? I think a small amount of people are doing things differently as a result of the changes and I also think that those who do things like consultancy or bespoke programmes have an opportunity to achieve greater credibility as a result of this agenda. There is a problem however. These staff need to demonstrate that there are publications linked to the impact that they create. So, for example, an excellent KTP project that results in great new products or improved processes is not eligible for recognition under the current rule unless you can demonstrate that they are rooted in primary research conducted by the university and that is really problematic”. (PN3)

“If I’m honest I’ve heard a lot of talk and the odd strategy but I haven’t witnessed much change. I’m not sure that the efforts to promote impact in here have had much of an effect on the staff. The people I know who are doing what I would consider as impactful research are the sort of people who would have been doing it anyway”. (RB3)

Have you changed the way you do your research as a result of the impact agenda? “No”. (RB3)

Author’s interpretation of the data

Few of the initiatives taken by the institutional sample have been perceived by their staff as adequate to do more than encourage them to ‘think about’ impact. None of the respondents described them as sufficient to justify a change in their research practice, although some predicted possible changes as the next REF approaches. Others commented on the lack of action in support of what they often regarded as rhetorical claims regarding the importance of impact.

5.4.2 Attracting Academics to More Impactful Research Practices.

The comments in this section were collected in response to questions that asked what could be done to make academic research more impactful.

Some respondents pointed to academic journal policies and the criteria used to rank these publications as factors that could be used to rebalance the rigour versus relevance scales:-

“I have been told anecdotally that most of our high scoring impact case studies came from two star journal articles. Since no one wants to be published in two-star journals, the only way to encourage academics to conduct impactful research is to give some recognition to the lower scoring applied journals and re-examine the criteria for ranking these publications”. (RG7)

“At the moment we get satisfaction for being published in higher ranking journals because of the respect this brings. But if impact did get the recognition that the star ratings get then this would certainly help. The best thing would be to get the rating and the impact up. This is down to those who rank the journals”.(RB1)

“The journals dictate the type of research that gets done in academia, so if you want to change the focus of the research you have to change the acceptance criteria adopted by the publishers and their editors”. (RG4)

What does the school need to do to make you personally change? *“Stop banging on about three and four-star publications. It’s impossible to produce impact while you’re constantly under pressure to be published in these journals”. (PN6)*

“There have been a lot of articles recently about the university's third objective to develop economic growth. I think that this is constrained by the focus on three and four-star journals

because these journals are typically not interested in the type of research that is likely to produce economic impact. So it's simple really, we need to recognise the contribution made by this type of research by recognising the journals that publish it. At the moment this is not happening".

(PN4)

What would make you go further down the applied route? *"If we scrapped the ABS list and looked at the articles themselves rather than the journals they are published in. We need to get away from this simplistic categorisation that defines good research and give some respect to those who are making a difference with their work. I think there is as hierarchy that is that natural sciences are better than social sciences and qualitative is better than quantitative".*

(PN3)

What is going to motivate people to change to a more applied style of research? *"That's quite interesting. Although we do not try to give the message that you live or die by your publications we are still very aware of the need for these papers and sadly where they are published. To get people doing more applied research we have to demonstrate that this type of research is equally valued and this means either we change the focus of the journals or we stop using them as the benchmark for judging academic performance".* (PN6)

"Impact comes back to proof. And I think that's where we are struggling. In engineering and medicine they can demonstrate evidence based outcomes that are supported by multiple studies and verified by meta-analysis. In B&M we are in a different world; our research is not cumulative. It is not verified because we cannot see the data or the way it's been interpreted. In B&M we actually discourage further study since to be published we need to be novel so verification is not something the journals would wish to publish". (PN3)

Many respondents pointed to the pressure to publish in the high ranking journals as the main focus of the REF:-

What would make you focus more on Impact? *"I think the REF is doing this. Its making people think about impact. The problem is that the rules are never clear in advance and there is a belief that to be in the REF you need the publications first and foremost".* (RG6)

"Maybe the weighting for impact in the REF needs to be increased. Twenty percent still suggests that it's the poor relation of prestige as defined by the journal rankings achieved. I can see why we need a mechanism to judge institutions but I'm not sure that the ref is the best mechanism for doing this. Nobody else has copied the REF that raises the question of its fitness for purpose. When I look at my junior colleagues they talk about qualitative research and three and four-star journals and nothing else matters. They spend very little time talking to business and this skews things and the entire thing is pressurised. No one seems to discuss their work. They never leave their rooms. All this behaviour is driven by the REF". (RG4)

"At the moment my focus is getting into the high ranking journals. If I don't get those publications I will get a letter from the centre to advise me that I'm not in the REF. I'd be very upset about that". (PN8)

What would make you change to focus more on the applied side? *“I think if the University encouraged applied research and asked me to concentrate on lower ranked journals because they are more applied I’d be more inclined to change but I’d still be a little worried about my image outside this institution. So it would have to be the whole system that would need to change and give greater recognition to applied research. We are obsessed with star ratings. I’ve been asked to edit a two-star journal and I turned the offer down. You must have one eye on your career”. (RG3)*

“So long as the REF requirement for case studies stay relatively small staff will leave the impact stuff to others. The system allows for this at present with the low number of case studies required compared to the number of articles. As I said, in our case its two hundred compared to five. Impact case studies are marginally changing what people do but there not changing the fundamental research practices of academics”.(RB8)

There were several comments that described a need to incentivise applied research by rewarding it more in recruitment and promotion criteria:-

“We need to incentivise it. If you publish in the best journals you do not have to engage. You have to make it in the interest of the academic practitioner to engage. For most people one of the most important things in their working lives is to get on and that’s what the game is. It’s a very simple game and it drives their behaviour. So if you want to change behaviour then you have to change the incentives”. (RG3)

“You need to be able to measure it and reward it. At the moment rigour is seriously winning out over relevance. So you need to be able to identify relevance and reward it. When I am on an interview panel all we are interested in is whether the applicants have published in the right places and can you get cash. We are not interested in impact”. (RG3)

“It’s all about being able to measure impact and feed this into academic progression”.(PN1)

“We should make it a condition of at least professorial appointments”. (PN2)

“There is absolutely no incentive to consider impact under the current system. All the incentives favour the theoreticians who get their work published in the top journals. Many of these staff don’t want to teach and they are allowed to do this. In here the system caters to these whims and the university cannot fulfil its teaching load. While these guys get more time to produce more articles and become more employable and hence have more power to get their way. So whilst we may have strategies to encourage researchers to be impactful, our recruitment and promotion strategies have not caught up. I don’t think they have bitten the bullet because the old system of journal article production is still considered to be most important. I don’t know when this will change. Perhaps as the impact agenda becomes more prevalent in the REF”. (PN3)

“It needs an upfront commitment in terms of time and money to demonstrate that it’s not all rhetoric. We need to institutionalise impact by writing the requirement into job descriptions as essential criteria”.(RB5)

“In terms of the solution it’s all about changing the metrics that are applied to people like me”.
(RB3)

Another potential area for improvement arising from the interviews related to the requirement to improve engagement with the world outside academia. The dominant view was that there was a need to employ staff with greater practical experience or at least take steps to improve the interaction between existing academics and the practitioner community:-

“We don’t do enough to get new staff into a position where they are comfortable working with organisations. We are also lax in the hiring process. In the UK we take 20 minutes to interview. In the US it takes 2 days”. (RB7)

What could we do to make the change? *“I think we need to start from a practitioner perspective to drive research questions, but this requires us to talk to each other and that’s a problem at the moment”.* (RB7)

“It seems that what we want for the REF are people who can look at theoretical research carried out in their institution and be able to find an application and apply it”. (PN1)

“Maybe there is potential to say to academics approaching the end of their careers - You have proved your worth as a researcher now go out and make it happen”. (RB4)

“I think there is the possibility to do both given that most institutions only ask for three or four publications for the REF. Maybe they should be saying – Ok you’ve got these in the bag, now go out and generate some impact. Maybe we should work in cycles but we are not managing researchers”. (RB1)

“What we do not do well is translate research for more general consumption. Most academics are not good at this, often because they lack experience in the outside world. We need to think about hiring more experienced staff if we’re going to achieve this”. ((RB4)

“I have argued that academics should be required to have some form of practice to be able to teach in business schools. At the moment we have many academics teaching senior managers who have no experience at all in the profession they teach. This would also put those academics in a better position in terms of understanding the research needs of practitioners”. (RB5)

“Some of the most impactful research I have seen is by PhD students who have come in from industry and reflect on their experiences. The reflective practitioner”. (RB8)

What would make things change? *“The key change necessary is a great deal more engagement with the people with whom we would like to make an impact and that has to be more than tokenistic. At the moment people come in here and we talk to them but we need to take this to a much higher level on a more regular basis. We need to understand why academics are reluctant to work with end users. Maybe we need more secondments into the practitioner institutions. One other thing, and I feel quite strongly about this, is that we should recruit more people with experience outside academia”.* (SN3)

The final topic of conversation on possible improvements to the existing system was in connection with the way research was funded. There was a view expressed by some commentators that funding specific projects was more likely to yield greater impact than the somewhat hands-off approach adopted in the QR funding process. However, it is worth noting that suggestions by the interviewer that all QR funding might be replaced by project funding were not always received positively:-

“This should be driven by the research funders who should be pushing the practical side of academic research. This is done in the natural sciences. To some extent this is happening in terms of the requirements placed on bids these days that include impact and dissemination explanations. In many instances this can be fudged, but at least you have to make some concession to being impactful”. (RB3)

What about moving more towards funded research? *“I can see some benefit in this but this may put the money in the hands of a small number institutions. I don’t think academics would take kindly to being told the topic and direction of all their research”. (RB3)*

“The good thing about funded projects is that, in many cases at least, they are driven by the market. They often have a requirement to make a statement in terms of what impact is likely to accrue”. (SN6)

“ESRC funding is the funding that attracts the most value and respect in academia and this funding is more often than not provided for academic type research”. (RB2)

“I would say that financed research is more likely to be impactful since it is being paid for, however this is not always the case. If a piece of research is being commissioned then it is usually being commissioned for a purpose”. (SN2)

“The funding applications now have a requirement to describe impact”. (SN2)

“I agree with the ref as it stands but the QR funding does not encourage Impact. It’s geared to the traditional model of research and based on the linear model that starts with basic research and filters through to action eventually”. (RB8)

*“If someone is prepared to pay you for research it suggests that they respect your ability to conduct it and value the topic that you are researching”. **What about giving all of the QR funding to those businesses that might benefit from it?** “That might work but the problem is that sometimes businesses don’t know what they don’t know and struggle to come up with useful areas of research”. (RG3)*

“I’ve just applied for a research grant and I needed to say how this will be disseminated. I said that part of the dissemination will go into the regular practitioner media rather than just the academic journals. This is driven by the funding requirements rather than any intention to change on my part. (RB7)

“I think there is an expectation when you bid for project research that there is some form of impact”. (PN1)

Author's interpretation of the data

In line with views expressed in earlier sections in this chapter, responses to this line of questioning were almost unanimous in their assessment that researchers are only likely to change their practices when impactful research is placed on a par with theoretical research in terms of recognition and reward. Some respondents proposed more specific and operational changes that might be made to facilitate this transformation. These will be discussed in detail in the final chapter.

Chapter 6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the outcomes of the research project in terms of the objectives listed in the introduction (Save for objective one which is covered in chapters two and three). The discussion will draw on the data collected during the interviews with academic researchers to consider how well business schools are prepared to deliver the requirements of impactful research. Research objective five will be covered in the final two chapters that present the conclusions and recommendations of the investigation respectively.

6.2 RO-2 Researchers Perspectives on Impact

The purpose of collecting personal perspectives on the impact agenda was to evaluate how far it had progressed since its inception in terms of changing the hearts and minds, as well as the practices, of academic researchers.

6.2.1 The Objectives of Impact and of How it Might be Achieved.

A consideration of the data in section 5.1 of the previous chapter indicates that most of those interviewed were fully aware of the economic and social objectives of the impact agenda. It was also encouraging that a small number saw fit to point out the distinction between these objectives and those of a now defunct interpretation of the term that focussed more on citation indices. This level of understanding might be expected from a group of active researchers questioned soon after the 2014 REF assessment had taken place. What was a little more surprising was the number of responses (9 in all) that made some reference to meeting the impact case study requirements of the REF as part of their explanation of these aims. This might be considered as a cause for concern were it to suggest that some academics see the purpose of the impact agenda more in terms of impressing assessment panel members by focussing on, as one respondent put it, *“how convincing you can make your REF case studies”*. This was not the only indication of a potential for game playing identified in the study. A response in section 5.4.1 describes how one institution has employed the services of a professional PR person to assist with the writing up of its impact case studies, suggesting that the school may believe there is something to be gained or lost in the assessor’s perception of impact from the manner in which this is completed. Perhaps, given the importance of the REF scores in attracting staff and students to HE institutions, we should not be so surprised that some within these institutions will be tempted to focus their efforts on their performance in the assessment process before turning their attention to delivering the intended benefits to society. To avoid such practice it is clear that the REF must ensure that assessment performance and impact are one and the same.

While most of the academics in the study demonstrated a clear grasp of the aims of the impact agenda, the research suggests that few possessed a clear understanding of how they are required to achieve these. Only one response to the question that sought to identify whether academics understood what was being asked of them could be described as an unequivocal yes. The remainder could be classified on a continuum from “yes I think I do” to “no, I have no idea”, albeit that all of the institutions had laid on training sessions on this topic. One professor described how he came out of some of these sessions more confused than when he went in. Another respondent, who held the position of impact champion in his school, described how he believed the university itself had yet to come to terms with the requirements of the impact agenda. At this stage in its development this lack of clarity must be seen as a failure of the REF.

6.2.2 Applied and Theoretical Research

The views described in section 5.1.2 confirm that the most of those questioned believed the type of research preferred by the majority of higher ranking academic journals in the field of business and management to be of a theoretical or conceptual nature rather than that typically described as applied. Not all agreed that this type of research was incapable of producing impact although only one offered an explanation of how this might occur, describing a “sequence” similar to Weiss’ linear model. The majority of responses suggested that theoretical and applied research had very different objectives and required dissimilar approaches. Responses described how the protocols for publication in these the journals, including the requirement for ‘novelty’, made the nature of the underpinning research less likely to appeal to practitioners.

Close comparison of the responses in this section and section 5.2.1 above indicate a subtle contradiction in the data. In the previous section researchers described a degree of confusion and a lack of clarity with respect to the actions required to provide impactful outcomes from their research. Yet when responding to the line of questioning in this section they appear to acknowledge that impactful outcomes are more likely to arise from a more applied style of research. One explanation for this apparent dichotomy might be that this confusion arises, not from a lack of understanding of what is required, but from the perception that these requirements are at odds with every performance indicator applied to them both past and present. This explanation is summarised in the final comment in section 5.1.2.

“The problem is that the publication criterion of the REF drives your research one way and the impact agenda drives it another”.

6.2.3 The Legitimacy and Desirability of Impact.

As we shall see in the following section, few of the academics within the sample were either interacting with the business community outside their institutions or conducting any form of the applied research that many acknowledged as a prerequisite to achieving impactful outcomes from their work. Yet despite this lack of activity, a large percentage of the comments (almost 90%), that addressed the legitimacy of impact as a requirement of academic research, supported it in principle. Not all of those who held this view believed that impact should be the only focus of academic enquiry, some including caveats warning of the dangers of handing sole control of academic research to practitioners, yet there was a clear message that these academics believed it was reasonable to expect them to make a difference with their work.

6.2.4 Impactful Practices Adopted within the Sample

For the purpose of this study, the degree to which impact has been adopted as an objective of academic research is considered to be indicated by the degree to which the theoretical components of impactful research exist in the practices of academics. The following table summarises these theoretical requirements and the degree to which they have been embraced by those in the sample. An explanation of these classifications follows.

Actions	Theory	Practice
Style of Research	Applied – Aimed at specific questions that have direct applications	Predominantly Theoretical – Aimed at the creation or development of theory in line with journal requirements
Origin of Research	Demand driven	Predominantly curiosity driven Some funded projects
Dissemination Choices	Applied/Trade journals Blogs Presentations	Academic Journals Some attempts to modify papers for practitioner publications
Target Audience	Practitioners and policy makers	Predominantly other academics in the field
Practitioner Engagement	High	Low
Writing Style/Jargon	Clear, Concise, Jargon free, Lay audience friendly	(Often) Complex, Expansive, Jargon laden, impenetrable by lay audience

6.2.4.1 Research Type/Style

When describing the type of research they conduct on a spectrum ranging from applied to theoretical, a large majority of responses indicated that their style was nearer to the theoretical end. This was often justified by the requirements placed on them to publish in the higher ranked journals. Even those who had worked on funded projects indicated that their research was swayed by the requirements of these journals since there was an expectation that these projects would culminate in such publications. Academics tended to accept that this work was unlikely to have much potential for impact. This view is supported by the comments made in response to an earlier line of questioning, described in section 5.1.2, when the sample were asked if there was a difference between impactful and theoretical research. These responses might best be represented by the following quote.

“The majority of high ranking journals require you to demonstrate some form of novelty in your work. This type of research is about developing theory but it’s unlikely to be of any value outside the university system because it’s written in a way that a practitioner wouldn’t understand”.

Those who indicated some level of applied research in their work tended to suggest that this was often carried out in excess of their mainstream research activities, suggesting that such work was more of an option than a requirement of their roles.

6.2.4.2 Sources of Research Ideas

A large majority of those questioned on this topic identified themselves as the source of ideas for the direction of their research although some qualified this by describing the catalyst for these ideas as a perceived need such as a gap in the knowledge on a particular topic. There were also a number of responses that indicated that personal interest was a factor in this decision. A small number argued that the validity of their choices was founded upon their experiences outside the university, gathered either from previous careers or as a result of their existing ties with the outside world. Some respondents admitted to being influenced by what was likely to be accepted by the journals in their choices. Researchers who had been involved in commissioned or funded projects accepted that their focus was dictated by the demands of the financiers in their calls to bid for research funding. Those who offered comments to justify the freedom they were given to choose their own research direction tended to rely either on the blue-sky argument or maintained that many organisations were unaware of their own research requirements and were only interested in their own issues rather than those that would also benefit others. This position is summarised in the following comment:-

“As academics we are allowed the time and space to investigate the things we believe to be important to the business community and this is how it should be. The problem with allowing industry to drive the research agenda of universities is, firstly, they don’t often know what they

want, and secondly, they're not interested in generic knowledge that benefits society, they want the knowledge that will benefit themselves as a business".

6.2.4.3 Publication Choices

In response to the question concerning their publication choices the overwhelming majority of researchers cited three and four-star journals as their first preference. Their explanation for this choice was described to be the expectations placed on them by their institutions and the influence such publications had on their career prospects. Some respondents indicated that they would have preferred to publish in lower level journals and trade publications because they recognised that this is where they could make a difference. However, most cited time pressure as the constraint that forced them to prioritise on the academic journals. Several had written or contributed to books but only six of the twenty-four interviewees had ever published in anything that might be considered as being aimed at a practitioner audience. Half of these authors indicated that this was an infrequent event that was conducted 'in spite of' rather than 'in line with' the preferences of their institutions.

6.2.4.4 Target Audience

Although we have seen in the last section that a small number of the researchers have made efforts to target practitioners with their publication choices, a large majority of the sample (over 95%) acknowledged that, when writing for publication in academic journals, it is other academics that they have in mind. Again, the demands of being published in the top journals and the preferences of those publications were cited as being the drivers behind this decision. As one academic commented:

"It's about forecasting who will be reviewing the paper for the journal".

6.2.4.5 Practitioner Engagement

The evidence in section 5.1.4.5 indicates that only a very few of the academics interviewed had ever conducted research in collaboration with any organisation outside their academic institutions. Moreover, those who had, had done so only infrequently. Although a larger number described being in regular communication with the outside world, further questioning indicated that these exchanges tended to be in the form of meetings related to educational matters or conversations during seminars that occasionally brought them into contact with practitioners. The notion described in the literature that academics were often averse to interaction with the business community was not supported by the evidence from the interviews. Several of the interviewees described how they welcomed opportunities to visit outside organisations but were hampered by a lack of time and the absence of institutional support. However, the view that the business community was not particularly inclined to engage with academics, also discussed in the literature, was supported by the evidence. Several of the participants

commented on the reluctance of managers to show an interest in their research activities, even to the extent that they frequently declined requests to provide interviews as part of an investigation.

6.2.4.1 Use of Jargon

Views on the use of jargon in academic research reports were mixed. All but one of the comments tended to agree that it was relatively pervasive in academic writing. Over half of these were critical of this position, even though some of those that held this view admitted to using it themselves. The reason given for this apparent hypocrisy was again described as the need to be published in the high ranking journals and the perception that this was a necessary ingredient. Others defended the value of what they viewed as a bespoke phraseology, or “*technical language*”, on the grounds of its grammatical efficiency. A common response to further discussion, questioning the impenetrability of this writing style to lay readers, was that academic publications were not intended for such an audience. One commentator shared his concern that it wasn’t always easy to switch between jargonistic and non-jargonistic writing styles:

“Yes. I find the difficult thing is changing your style for practitioner publications and removing the theoretical concepts. I think I’ve forgotten how to write like this”.

6.3 RO-3. The Influence of Policy and Practice

The following diagram is based upon responses in the study that describe how current policy and practice influence researchers’ decisions to adopt a particular style of research. These influences are discussed in the following sub-sections.

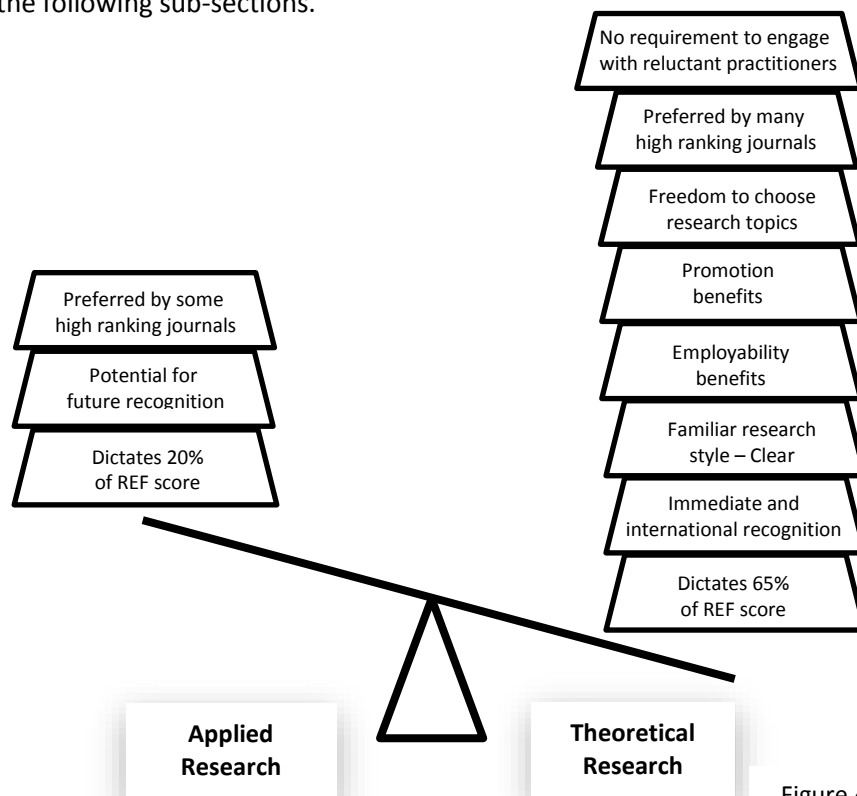


Figure 4. Drivers of Academic

6.3.1 Positive Influences

In this section the policies and practices of business schools that encourage impactful outcomes are discussed.

6.3.1.1 Drivers Inherent in the REF

“Do I consider impact more these days? I think so. There is an implicit pressure to think about it but the great and the good still want the four-star papers”.

The funding and reputational benefits that accompany a successful REF result are of paramount importance to all higher education institutions, so it is no surprise that their research strategies are heavily influenced by the need to meet the demands of such outcomes. Since the requirement to demonstrate research adoption was incorporated into the scoring criteria of the REF’s assessment process HE institutions have made considerable efforts to encourage their academic staff to deliver on this characteristic. The strategies adopted by the sample of institutions included in this study can be gleaned from a consideration of the comments in section 5.4.1 and include:-

- The creation of new roles to promote and facilitate impactful research at various levels in the university hierarchy
- The provision of training for academic staff.
- The review of research proposals to identify those with impact potential
- The provision of funds and workload allowances for the development of impact case studies
- The employment of public relations professionals to spread the word of institutional research successes and help with the development of case studies.

There is little doubt that these actions have been successful in raising academics’ consciousness of the impact agenda. The study demonstrates that researchers are in little doubt about the growing importance of including it amongst the objectives of their investigations. Indeed, views on the appropriateness of this requirement, described earlier in this chapter, indicate how a large majority of those polled welcome this change, some expressing a genuine desire to make a more discernible difference through their work. Several academics in the sample have described how they now consider impact during the development of their research ideas. However, the somewhat smaller number who have actually taken steps beyond this cognitive stage suggest that such considerations do not always result in action. The study also indicates that the 20 percent weighting given to impact in the 2014 REF has, in some cases, resulted in the view expressed below, that only a minority of academics need to be concerned with impact and therefore it can be left to others.

“You only need a certain number of impact case studies. Not everyone needs to do it. I’m not overly concerned that my own research does not seem likely to have an impact. I don’t need to be worried too much about it. As a business school you need a number of people, say 20%, to be impactful and the others need not bother”.

Given the incentives to produce theoretical research (described later in this chapter) there is a danger that this perspective may be counteracting the efforts of institutions to promote impactful practices.

6.3.1.2 Publication Requirements

For those who are persuaded to adopt the type of applied research approach that is considered by the literature, as well as a majority of those interviewed, to be a prerequisite to impactful outcomes, there are in existence a number of academic journals that welcome this style of investigation. Unfortunately, only a small number of these periodicals have made it into the upper echelons of journal hierarchies such as the Association of Business School’s ‘Academic Journal Guide’ that are used in the employment and promotion policies of academic institutions, as well as the university ranking criteria of the national press, to represent the highest quality in such publications. Those whose research areas are represented by applied journals at the top end of these lists are able to satisfy the requirements of impact without jeopardising their performance against the more traditional indicators of academic success. However, the study indicates that for others, the demands of the impact agenda and the requirements to publish their research in the highest ranking journals appear to be almost mutually exclusive.

6.3.1.3 Potential Future Recognition

Although academics in the study were aware of the requirement to produce more utilitarian outcomes, when asked whether the existing initiatives to promote impactful research were likely to change their practice, a common reaction could best be summarised as “not yet”. Responses (described in section 5.2.1) indicated a firm belief that impact was undoubtedly here to stay and would almost certainly rise up the business school agenda, particularly as the next REF assessment approached. There was also a degree of acceptance that those who were capable of delivering impact would be amongst the future stars of the business school world and reap the benefits of their skills. However, the overwhelming view was, as things stand, there were few indications of this happening in the here and now. Comments included the following quotes describing the institutional messages on the current primacy of impact as rhetorical and lip service, with little tangible evidence to support them.

“Yes of course impact is now said to be important but people don’t believe it”.

“At the moment we pay lip service to impact but this may change as the ref approaches”.

“Well at present there is no-one being rewarded for this characteristic in their research. It will be interesting to see if this changes”.

6.3.2 Negative Influences

6.3.2.1 REF Drivers

In the views of some respondents, the total predominance of theoretical research is confirmed by the REF itself in the form of the 65 percent weighting given over to this style of investigation in its own scoring criteria. Although the REF does not preclude applied research in its category that seeks to reward ‘originality’, ‘significance’ and ‘rigor’, current practice identified by this study indicates that it is rarely submitted. The following comment came from the Research Director of the only Russell Group institution in the sample.

“Only a very small number of the research papers that underpinned our impact case studies were entered in the REF. In fact some of the authors of the case studies were not entered in the REF for their research, that suggests to me that impact and high quality research require different skill sets”.

If the message, however subtle, given out by the REF indicates that theoretical research is of greater value than applied research, it is unlikely that academics will be inspired to adopt the latter of these styles, particularly if, as we have seen from the findings, the time demands of the former prohibit both.

“It’s difficult to convert practical work into publications and working with business is time consuming so it tends to get overlooked because it’s not an efficient way to meet the objectives placed on academics”.

6.3.2.2 Publication and Institutional Incentives

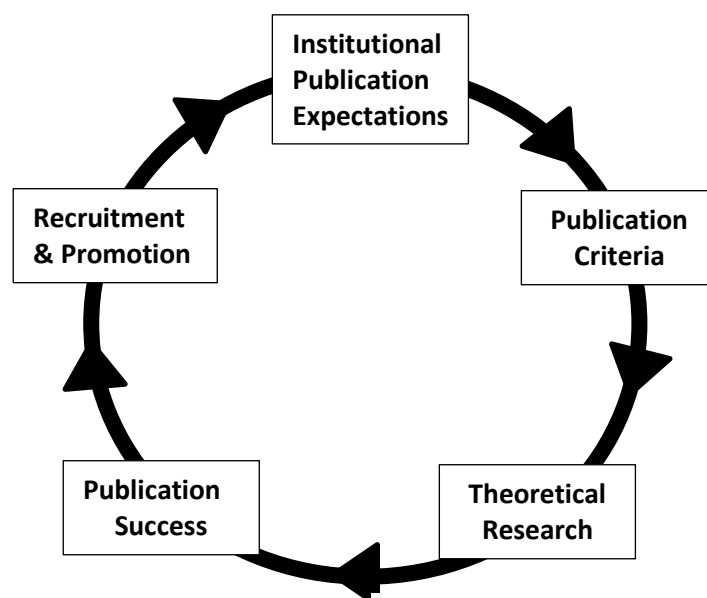


Figure 5. Institutional Drivers of Academic Research

“...the institutional incentives are overwhelmingly to publish in high ranking journals. Given that the leading journals in my field are only interested in theoretical papers, that’s where most of my efforts go”.

The study has shown the foremost influence on the investigative style, subject area and dissemination choices of academic researchers to be the institutional demands to publish in the higher ranking academic journals. The quotation above is typical of the sentiments of the large majority of those interviewed when asked to discuss the drivers that guide their actions. As the comment indicates, the way to meet these demands is by complying with the publication criteria of the academic journals in one’s particular field of interest. Hence, if we accept the views expressed in both the literature and in the responses provided in this study that these criteria are predominantly aimed at theoretical and conceptual research, then it follows that it is this style of investigation that will satisfy the strategic requirements of our business school leaders.

The institutions impose their requirements for publication rank and volume through their employment and promotion policies. Interview responses indicated an unambiguous belief that those who wish to progress their careers in academia would only do so by complying with such demands.

“When you are a prof, or attempting to be one, then it’s the three and four-star journals that will get you there. And when the ref comes around business schools are so desperate to get hold of people who can achieve this they will pay over the odds to get them or retain them. So there is a clear individual incentive to go for theoretical papers”.

Figure 5 shows how this process is circular and self-sustaining. Career progression is achieved by meeting the institutional demands for publication. These in turn are met by complying with the requirements of those academic journals that have had bestowed the status of ‘high quality’ by the ranking hierarchies that judge them. Once promoted, academics are then subject to ever greater demands in terms of the volume and ranking of their papers. It is worth noting that one of the few academics in the study to produce and publish applied research indicated that he felt able to do so only because he had no further career aspirations.

Are you discouraged from publishing in these outlets? *“Yes. But I am in a fortunate position in that I am in my late 50’s and I don’t have any desire to go any further in my career so I am lucky in that sense”.*

As we have read in section 5.3.1.3 above, impactful research was not perceived by those interviewed as something that currently satisfies their institution’s requirements for career progression. This view is compounded by the nature of the international recruitment market in which researchers exist, where the value placed on an individual’s academic publication record is not always replicated by his/her

impact credentials. Two reasons were given for this in the study. Firstly, as far as the 2014 REF regulations were concerned, unlike publications, credit for impact stays with the institution where it was created so job hunters are less able to use their achievements to enhance their employment opportunities. Secondly, not all business schools around the globe are subject to funding regimes that demand a demonstration of impact and do not place this requirement on their staff. Consequently, publications are seen as an international currency where impact is not.

6.3.2.3 Other Influences

Other influences on research style that were seen to disincentivise a move towards applied research included characteristics that researchers believed would be lost in the event of such a change:

“When someone tells me what it is and how I can achieve it I’ll maybe do something about it”.

Respondents pointed to their familiarity with theoretical research and particularly their clear understanding of what was being asked of them and how they might deliver it. As we have seen from previous discussion this clarity is not believed to be as apparent in the demands for impactful research. Researchers have expressed confusion over the mixed messages inherent in demands to produce pragmatic outcomes when they are combined with an ongoing requirement to publish their work in the academic journal system. The perception that demand-led research projects would remove the academic’s current freedom to choose their own research direction was also a concern of those who commented on the desirability of change. This view was expressed from a personal perspective as well as in defence of undirected blue sky research. Finally, researchers were concerned about their ability to maintain the volume of outputs expected of them if required to identify and collaborate with potentially unenthusiastic practitioners who some believe ‘don’t know what they don’t know’.

6.4 RO-4. Willingness and Ability to Adopt Impactful Research Practices

The findings of the study on the matter of academics’ willingness to adopt more impactful research practices were, for the reason described below, necessarily inconclusive. However, as described earlier in this chapter, the data does demonstrate, with only a few exceptions, clear support for the notion that research outputs should be more utilitarian than is currently the case. Respondents were typically aware of the denigrations made of management research from sources both outside and inside their universities and a number indicated a certain degree of acknowledgement with regard to the legitimacy of these aspersions. For some there was a sense of dissatisfaction and a tendency for self-criticism when discussing the current state of affairs but this was often tempered by a reluctant acceptance that this was just the way it was: a game that had to be played.

“I think most academics accept that their research has little effect on the real world but it’s embedded that they play the research game because the prize in this game is research money. There should be much more of a debate on this matter. At the end of the day we end up with a group of theorists who cannot hold the respect of the MBA or anyone outside the institution”.

Since it was not possible to model a scenario where the rules of this game changed in favour of a more pragmatic style of investigation, the study was not, nor could it be, conclusive with respect to how academics might react in such circumstances. For an indication of this reaction we can only rely on the responses in section 5.3.1 that describe the responses gathered when the sample were questioned on the type of research in which they would ‘prefer’ to engage. Many of the responses indicated an intrinsic desire to be more impactful without actually saying they would welcome a change. Some indicated that a move to a hybrid model would be favourable, enabling them to conduct both theoretical and applied research. Several added the caveat that any changes must be made on the proviso that they would not be sacrificing their career prospects.

With respect to the question of whether academics were ‘capable’ of delivering impactful research, responses, described in section 5.3.2, tended to reflect those expressed in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Respondents confirmed that a number business school staff, in particular those with little exposure to organisations outside academia, may find it difficult to provide operational advice to practitioners.

Chapter 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conducting this study I have attempted to better understand the drivers that shape the production of academic research within the business and management community in the UK's higher education sector. In the light of the government's emerging demand for economic and social impact the project has sought to identify the changes necessary to deliver on this mandate. The following chapter describes my own attempt to summarise the results. The chapter starts by considering the performance of existing research practice in terms of its ability to provide such outcomes. It then turns its attention to the effect of the strategies of government and the institutions themselves that drive current practice. Having considered the effect of these strategies I then offer some recommendations for change. The first set of recommendations are based upon the views provided by the sample in response to the line of enquiry asking what it would take to change the hearts, minds and ultimately the research practices of business school academics. These responses are summarised in section 5.4.2 of this report. Following this I offer some 'strategic options' of my own. The term 'option' was chosen carefully to describe these suggestions since the task of confirming the wider consequences of their application is beyond the scope of this thesis. As such, it may be more judicious to consider them as 'opportunities for further investigation' rather than recommendations that I believe should be implemented.

7.1 The Effectiveness of Current Practice in Delivering Impact

Anyone who has spent time within a university business school will be aware that they are by no means barren of practitioners and policy makers. On any given workday the visitor's car park at my own institution is generally overflowing with the vehicles of guests from industry and commerce, as well as the occasional local, national and even international politician. So, to say that business schools do not interact with the outside world or suggest that all their work is of purely theoretical value would clearly be a misrepresentation of the truth. Business school research adds value to society and the economy in a number of ways. Some of these can be gleaned from a consideration of the publicly available impact case studies submitted as part of the latest (2014) REF assessment. Further evidence is provided by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) who have provided their own assessment of this value in a recently published report. Although not always directly related to research activity, the introductory chapter of the report lists the following economic and social benefits that are claimed to accrue from the existence of its member institutions.

- *A contribution of £3.25 billion to the national economy arising from the 325,000 students studying business and management each year in the UK (One-fifth of all university students). This includes £2.4*

billion that comes into the UK economy from international students (One-third of all international students).

- *Employment opportunities both on campus, within the institutions themselves, and off-campus, as a result of student spending on goods and services during their time at university.*
- *The provision of “Anchor Institutions” for local economies. Connecting local businesses with their international partners and shaping policy through their links with local and national agencies such as the CBI and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).*
- *Developing skills and capabilities that underpin high value jobs through on- campus and in-house educational programmes.*
- *Support for SMEs and start-ups through incubator programmes and mentoring scheme.*
- *Developing new ways of understanding and improving organisational behaviour and operations.*
- *[Through their research and teaching] Development of capability and capacity in areas that contribute to innovation, economics and markets, business models and corporate strategy, people management, patterns and processes of entrepreneurship, technology diffusion, marketing and consumer adoption.*
- *Bringing empirical evidence to bear on real-world challenges through their collaboration with a wide range of practitioners and policy makers.*

Adapted from “Business Schools – Delivering Value to Local and Regional Economies”
(Chartered ABS Taskforce, 2016)

The document goes on to provide almost fifty pages of case studies describing initiatives, mostly in collaboration with external stakeholders, that illustrate the worth of CAB members. The final three entries on the list above, and possibly several of the others, are clearly underpinned by the research activities of these institutions, suggesting that at least some of the outputs from our business school investigations are providing significant benefits to society.

However, despite the good work described above, current literature and the evidence collected in this study indicate that the majority of academic researchers are not conducting the type of applied research that is most conducive to impactful outcomes. The data drawn from interviews with twenty-four research active academics supports the views of authors such as Mintzberg (2004, op.cit.) and Pfeffer (2007, op.cit.) in their criticisms that much of the work conducted under the banner of management research is likely to be of little interest to those who run our businesses or formulate wealth creation policy.

The following illustration attempts to portray how the curiosity driven inquiry conducted by many academics in our business schools has both the longest lead time in reaching an audience that might be

interested in it and the least likelihood of application if, or when, it does. The reasons for this have been discussed in the previous chapter but are worth summarising again here in the light of the conceptual exemplification provided below.

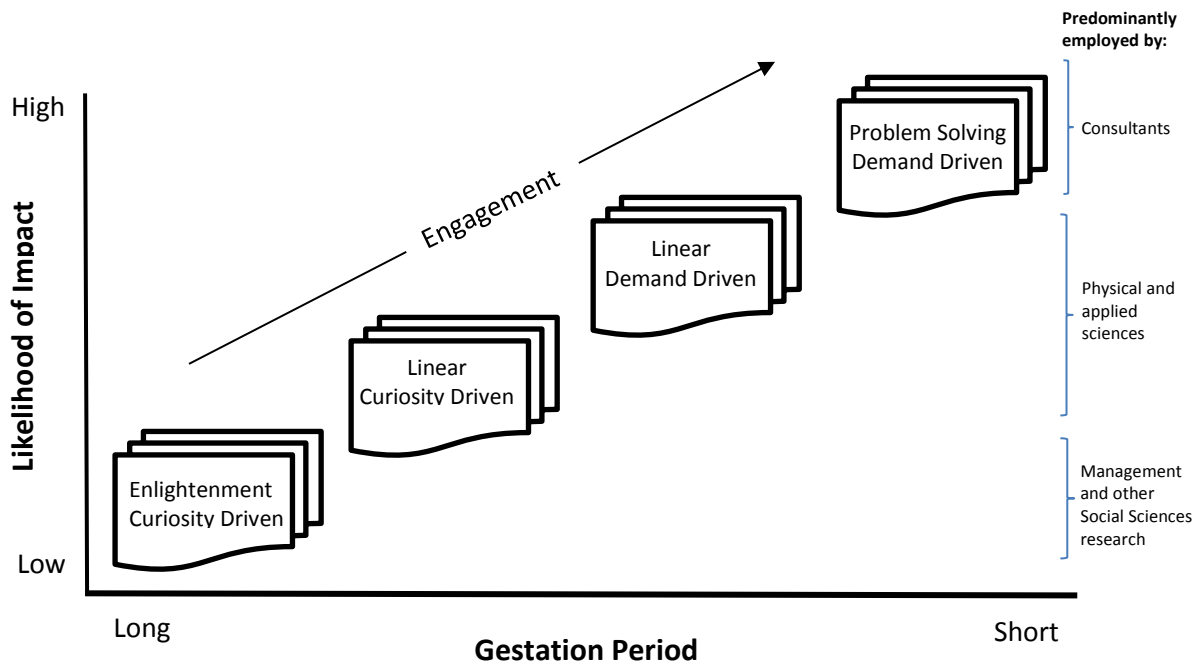


Figure 6. A taxonomy of routes to research adoption

Gestation Period

As a result of the theoretical nature, esoteric focus and inaccessibility of many of the journals that publish academic research, the outcomes of that research rarely enter the radar of the practitioner community when they become available. Instead they are reliant on a somewhat spurious and drawn out dissemination itinerary, labelled by Weiss (2007, op.cit.) as the ‘enlightenment’ route. Historically this method of propagation has shown little evidence of success in connecting the knowledge generated in our institutions with those who might apply it. Without an identifiable demand the research has no direct (linear) route to application; it is simply placed out in the academic media to be picked up upon and, hopefully, utilised. Weiss argues that over a period of time the outcomes of this work seep through into the practitioner domain to influence decision makers.

Likelihood of Impact

Both the literature and the views of those interviewed during the study suggest that curiosity driven research, while occasionally founded on the architect’s interpretations of end user need, is, more often than not, guided by the publication requirements of the so called ‘higher ranking’ journals. Researchers that attempt to foresee the needs of practitioners may well find some success in matching their

investigations to the requirements of the business community but should be cognisant of basic marketing theory, which dictates that any failure to confirm such need is likely to result in their offerings being overlooked. In terms of the likely impact of research that is destined exclusively for publication in the academic journal system, the study once again corroborates the view expressed in the literature, that is, there is very little prospect of a match between the theoretical requirements of the majority of these journals and the operational needs of the business world. Hence, as things stand, we must conclude that the likelihood of the majority of management research culminating in impactful outcomes continues to remain small.

7.2 The Effect of Existing Policy and Practice (1) – Government, Funding Bodies and the REF.

7.2.1 The Magnitude of Impact Currently Delivered by HE Institutions

One of the strongest impressions to come out of this study concerns the diversity in the expectations for the future of academic investigation held by the stakeholders at the very top of the strategic hierarchy in the HE sector. The UK Government describe their aspirations for the impact agenda as those that will see the transformation of higher education research to a position where it will have a significant effect on the nation's economic growth. It expects this to be delivered in return for an annual investment of some £4.7 billion (2016-17 figures, excluding capital investments). Of this total £1.7 billion is distributed by HEFCE; £1.07 billion through the QR funding allocated by the Research Excellence Framework (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2016).

If this transformation is to be brought about by the drivers inherent in the REF, then HEFCE's apparent expectations of this framework seem woefully insufficient. The REF exercise, that takes place every five to six years, assesses a relatively small sample of the research conducted by the institutions, drawn from the total amount of work conducted in the intervening period. This is clearly the case for academic papers submitted to demonstrate research quality. However, descriptions provided in this study, of business schools trawling staff to gather sufficient impact case studies as the 2014 REF approached, suggest that those submitted were not a sample, but something close to the sum of all impactful research conducted in this period. The following quote is provided by the Research Director of the Russell Group member institution in the sample.

"[...], the system allows for this at present with the low number of case studies required compared to the number of articles. As I said, in our case its two hundred compared to five".

This suggests that even institutions considered amongst the research elite in the UK had problems compiling five cases to demonstrate the impact of the research over the previous six years. The author is not aware of any criticisms of this performance. The recent 'Independent Review of the Research Excellence Framework' (Stern, 2016, op. cit.) made no mention of the magnitude of impact generated by the assessment exercise. If this is an indication that the level of performance achieved was acceptable, then of the expectations of the funding bodies would appear to be seriously out of sync with the government.

7.2.2 Questionable Commitment

The poor response to the impact agenda is indicative of the importance with which many academics view it. We have heard how some research staff have arrived at their perception of this importance from the weighting it is given in the framework. The failure to incentivise pragmatic research in the scoring mechanism is seen by some as an indication of the REF's lack of commitment to it. The 20:65 relative weightings applied to impactful research and that which demonstrates quality in terms of 'originality, significance and rigour' (REF2014, 2014) suggest that the latter is three times more important to the funding bodies than the former. When one takes into consideration the other disincentives to conducting applied research, it is not surprising that the REF has largely failed to change the habits of academic researchers.

7.2.3 Lack of Clarity

The study also identifies two rather fundamental shortfalls in the REF that relate to clarity. The first concerns its failure to clearly define what social science impact looks like and how it can be demonstrated. The rather generic explanations that seem to make sense in the context of the applied sciences have left some individuals and institutions scratching their heads when attempting to design qualifying social research. In particular, its dual requirements for pragmatic outcomes and rigorous underpinning research, capable of satisfying the criteria applied by the academic journals, appear to send out mixed messages to the academic community. There is considerable disagreement in the literature whether these two objectives can actually exist side by side and this is supported by the views of the sample. See Kieser and Leiner (2009, op.cit.) and Hodgkinson and Rousseau (2009, op.cit.) for the two sides of this debate.

The second issue raised in the interviews relates to the clarity perceived in the assessment of impact. There was a view within some members of the sample that the inevitable diversity between case studies would dictate a rather subjective approach to their evaluation. This was often accompanied by a degree of scepticism that the judging process would be more about the skill of the authors in describing impacts

than the real effect on social and economic outcomes. This suspicion is compounded when, as was the case in one of the sample institutions, schools employ professional PR firms to write them. It is not an overstatement to suggest that this lack of clear direction has contributed to what Vermeulen describes as an 'existential crisis' within universities that has resulted in academics asking questions such as "*Why are we here*"? And "*What are we trying to achieve*"? (2005, p.978, op.cit.).

7.3 The Effect of Existing Policy and Practice (2) – HE Institutions, CABS, Research Councils and the Academic Media.

The 'Quality Related' funding distributed by HEFCE on the basis of its REF assessment exercise is only one part of the 'dual support' system for academic research provided by the state (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2016 op.cit). As described earlier in this report, this funding comes with few strings attached and tends to be absorbed into the research allowances given to academics that provide them, in most cases, the freedom to decide the direction of their own investigations.

The model presented in figure 6 suggests that the Government's aspirations for impact are more likely to be delivered as a result of the research supported by the £3 billion of 'project' funding distributed by the various Research Councils (ibid). This money is allocated on the basis of the quality of the bids in terms of their likelihood to meet project objectives that accompany the calls for applications of interest. Although this report has argued that the demand driven nature of project funded research is more likely to return higher levels of impact than the curiosity driven research funded by the REF, the reality, in the area of business and management, is often somewhat different. When funding is awarded for business related projects, the natural tendency of academic recipients to seek theoretical outcomes from their research tends to shape the style and, more frequently, the dissemination channels in a way that negates such benefits. Although calls for project funding increasingly require the provision of impact statements, the view of one of the academics in the study, who had had considerable success in acquiring project funding, indicated that this requirement is not a significant influence on the award of funding and is typically satisfied with vague statements of potential future benefits. The predilection for basic research within business schools is shown in the study to arise from a combination of the incentive policies of the institutions and the publication preferences of the academic journals. However, it is worth noting that such theoretical approaches to funded projects could not continue without the approval of the research councils which finance them.

The scarcity of highly rated academic journals opting to publish pragmatic research is a consequence of the hierarchical lists that do not seem to value them. Within the field of business and management in

the UK, the most influential of these lists is the 'ABS list', compiled by the Chartered Association of Business Schools. So long as this list continues to be the yardstick for quality in business related publications, and consequently the basis for many business school employment and promotion decisions, it is unlikely that even project funded research will deliver any discernible improvement in the UK's economic position.

7.4 Recommendations

This section of the report attempts to offer practical alternatives to address some of the barriers to impactful research which have been identified in the script. Section 7.4.1 presents the views of the academic sample on this matter followed by the author's suggestions in section 7.4.2.

7.4.1 RO-5.2 Academics' Views on the Actions Required to Achieve Change

Comments provided by the sample tended to embrace a need to reverse many of the constraints and disincentives associated with applied research that were believed to be intrinsic to the existing policies and practices of their institutions. Suggestions for change are summarised below:-

7.4.1.1 Recognise and Reward Pragmatic forms of Research.

This was a highly pervasive theme. Respondents were relatively unanimous in the view that academics were unlikely to adopt research practices that resulted in adverse effects on their employment and promotion prospects.

7.4.1.2 Address the Overwhelming Emphasis placed on Theoretical Research

This was believed to be driven by the academic publishing system and suggestions to overcome it comprised:

- Change the publication criteria of the journals to recognise the value of applied research.
AND/OR
- Change the ranking criteria that define journal quality to promote more pragmatic publications to the top of these hierarchies.
AND/OR
- Ignore the journal ranking lists and judge research on other criteria including impact

7.4.1.3 Address the Problem of Engagement with Practitioners

Respondents tended to attribute the cause of this problem to the profile of academic staff in their schools. Solutions suggested included a greater recognition of applied experience in the recruitment processes and more encouragement to build linkages with the business community.

7.4.1.4 Encourage Applications for Project Funding

Despite the reservations described above, there was a view that Research Council funded projects would naturally move business and management research toward a more applied focus. Several commentators believed that this was already happening in their schools.

7.4.2 RO-5.3 Author's Views - Strategic Options for Greater Impact

7.4.2.1 Changes to Research Funding

One option, that relies on the conviction that project funded research has more potential to be impactful than the undirected research facilitated by QR funding, is to scrap the REF entirely and make 'almost' all business and management funding accessible through a bidding process. This change need not mark the end of blue sky research if a part of the total fund is ring fenced for this purpose. There are charitable funds currently in existence that offer financial support for undirected research and these could be employed to distribute this dedicated fund or used as a model for others. As well as the possibility to change the focus of academic research this strategy would stand to save the UK the costs of the REF that in 2014 was £246M (Stern, 2016: op sit).

Some work would be required to ensure that the focus of the projects on offer reflected the needs of those who could best make use of them and also to address the resulting volatility in income and staff movements. It is possible that this strategy will result in winners and losers in terms of institutional ability to attract research income. If this occurs the government may need to revisit the arguments for segregating HE institutions into research active and teaching categories.

As discussed in the previous chapter, this investigation has indicated that project funded research is not currently delivering on its potential for impact in our business schools due to the demands to make outputs appeal to the theoretically orientated academic press. For this reason this option must go hand in hand with one or more of the following options that address this constraint.

7.4.2.2 Changes to the REF

If scrapping the REF is considered as a political step to far, then policy makers might consider changes to the framework to make it more fit for the purpose of providing impact. The greatest factor making it currently unfit is the message it sends to academics regarding the value it places on this research outcome. The perception given by its assessment category weightings and relatively undemanding requirements for case study evidence is one that results in its quest for impact being effectively ignored. The author believes the requirement for researchers to deliver impact will only be addressed with any degree of resolve if it is seen to have parity with demands for what it refers to as 'research quality'.

The study also identified a perception problem with respect to the assessment process of the REF. This relates to a suspicion that the REF's judgement of impact is influenced more by the story telling capability of the case study authors than the effects of the associated research on society. To overcome this scepticism the author suggests it introduces a process of random audits to verify the evidence presented in a sample of these case studies.

7.4.2.3 Changes to the Academic Journal System

The constraints on impact that result from the theoretical preferences of the academic journals in the field of business and management have been well documented in this report. In proposing a solution the author concurs with the views of the participants in the study who have proposed three possibilities as described in section 7.1 above. The second of these options, involving a change to the journal rankings, offers a solution that is possibly the most appealing since the actions necessary to realise it lie in the hands of the association that represents business schools in the UK.

7.4.2.4 Changes to Business School Raison D'être

The final option is possibly the most radical of all suggestions proposed by this thesis and involves turning back the clock to a time when business schools did not see a need to compete with the natural sciences over the rigour of their investigative processes. This solution would require the business school community to think the unthinkable and accept that they do not fit into the academic faculty model of their universities. If they were to accept the notion of business and management as an applied profession rather than an academic discipline, it is possible that they could cast off the shackles of inferiority and achieve their ambitions to make a difference with their work.

7.5 Author's Final Comments

7.5.1 Responsibility for change

In the introduction to this report I suggested that the Research Excellence Framework may be too blunt an instrument to bring about the changes necessary to achieve the economic and social returns now sought from business and management research. In an attempt to test these suspicions the study has considered the performance of the REF in achieving this objective and has found it wanting.

Responsibility for change cannot rest with the academic institutions alone. Everything I have heard during the course of this research has led me to the view that current research practice exists because the institutions and their academic staff have followed the steers of their respective paymasters.

Changes to the style of research necessary to deliver the government's aspirations for social and economic impact are unlikely to be realised without a fundamental transformation of the existing

academic landscape, implemented with a conviction that cannot be interpreted as rhetoric or lip service. This can only be achieved by those at the very top of the higher education hierarchy.

7.5.2 The Desire for Change

Engles (1995) tells us that a prerequisite for change is a sense of dissatisfaction with what currently exists. When one considers the lack of progress towards the government's expectations of academic research it begs the question of how far this desire for change permeates down the research community hierarchy. Hughes et. al. argue that the funding bodies have the capacity to deliver the impact agenda, but are reluctant to do so, partly because of "*cultural issues relating to beliefs about the nature of knowledge and who is involved in its generation [that] permeate [such] institutions*" (2011, op.cit., p.55).

This research suggests that the appetite for change within the research community is mixed. The views on both sides of this debate are influenced by a desire to evade conflicting criticisms which have been aimed at social scientists over the years. Those who reject change wish to avoid a return to the pre-1950s period when business schools were perceived as inferior to other faculties because of their failure to exhibit methodological rigour in their investigations. On the other side of the debate, the views of those who believed that change is necessary were often fuelled by an emotion brought on by the growing criticisms aimed at the perceived lack of utility in their work. The latter sentiment typically goes unspoken in academic circles but was clearly evident in the responses offered when describing the type of research respondents would prefer to conduct; many including some mention of a desire to make a more discernible difference through their efforts.

7.5.3 Reflections on the Research Journey

In response to the historic steers of their funding providers, Universities find themselves with faculties who have, in good faith, acquired the experience, the skills and the motivation to produce a brand of theoretical research that now appears to be gradually falling from political grace.

As a result of the mixed messages and lack of clear direction identified by this research, these institutions find themselves in what Vermeulen describes as an "*existential crisis*", resulting in academics asking questions such as "*Why are we here?*" And "*What are we trying to achieve?*" (2005, op.cit. p.978).

It was with this in mind that I chose to conduct this investigation. As well as exploring the validity of the concerns expressed by the critics of academic research, I wanted to investigate the causes of this perceived problem with a view to identifying potential solutions.

As might be expected from a five-year journey, my experience was one of numerous emotional peaks and troughs. On a positive note, the fear that I might receive a rather cold reception from my academic colleagues for questioning the efficacy of their life's work was nullified early in the process. On the whole, I was left with the impression that academics were more than willing to discuss this somewhat hazy concept, lingering on the horizon. While most interviewees had a clear grasp of the mechanics of impact as part of the REF process, many were unsure what it would mean to them personally and seemed keen to explore this with me.

For myself, the interviews themselves were the most enjoyable part of the process. I felt very fortunate and a little humbled to be able to hold these conversations with a group of intelligent, articulate and generally warm individuals. It was also extremely enlightening to gain a grasp of the spectrum of work that goes on under the banner of management research.

My lack of research credentials (and associated credibility) was a slight source of concern for me given the track records of those I interviewed, but I was always given the impression that this was a non-issue by those I met.

I cannot say that the rest of the time I have spent on this project has been pleasurable. While much of the reading I have conducted for this research has been interesting and informative, I have certainly come across a considerable amount of material which conforms to the criticisms of academic writing included in Chapter two of this thesis. This, along with the requirement to transcribe this document using my two-fingered typing skills led me to doubt the rectitude of continuing on more than one occasion.

Now, nearing the end of the journey, I certainly feel that I have learned a great deal about the research process. This was a somewhat disconcerting gap in my knowledge prior to embarking on the Ed.D. programme which I now feel I have filled.

Finally, I believe I have learned something about myself during this time. Despite reassuring many students with similar emotions over the years, I started this programme with a degree of misgiving and apprehension as to whether I would be able to complete it. To some extent the purpose of pursuing this qualification was to test myself against this doubt. Now that it is over I am left with the view that it's never too late to take on new challenges.

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Appendix A - Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule – Active Researchers

Introductory Questions

- Please describe your understanding of the nature of impactful research
- What actions have been taken by the school to promote this objective?
- How do you feel about the requirement for impact from management research?

Impact Dependent Variables

Past research suggest a number of factors that are likely to increase the chances of academic research being acted upon by the practitioner community. I'd like to go through these and ask how they apply to you.

Supply side factors

These relate to academic's motivations on the subject and style of their research and their choices in terms of dissemination. These are thought to be influenced by institutional incentives.

- What sort of research do you prefer to conduct?
- Why?
- Where do you prefer to publish your research?
- Why?
- Are you incentivised to conduct applied or theoretical research?
- As far as you can tell, is pragmatic research favoured over theoretical research, or vice versa?
- How is an academic's research performance judged for recruitment and promotion purposes?
- What percentage of your research is financed by specific funding?

These relate to the value that practitioners place on the research. They are thought to be influenced by the degree to which research is aimed at their needs and whether the outputs can be operationalised.

- Who do you have in mind as an audience when you conduct research?
- Do you have a free hand in the content and style of your research?
- If not, what constraints are applied?
- How do you decide on the topics and style of your research?
- What percentage of your research projects are led by end user demand and what by your own curiosity?

Interaction Variables

These relate to the degree to which academics engage with practitioners for the purpose of research.

- What actions do you take to engage with the business community?
- Do you work with practitioners when deciding on the content topic and style of your research?
- If so, how does this typically work?
- What percentage of your research is conducted in collaboration with practitioners?

Dissemination Variables

- These relate to the efforts expended to reach the practitioner community with the research outputs of the school.
- Where do you prefer to see academic research published?
- Why?

- Do you feel the need to conduct any particular type/style of research to be published in academic journals?
- When submitting work to academic journals who are you aiming your research at?
- Do you use jargon when writing academic journal articles?

Resistance to Change

These questions attempt to identify how much academics would welcome change.

- What type of research would you prefer to conduct if all research was equally recognised and rewarded by your institution and the journal system?
- Would you welcome this change?

Improvement

These questions attempt to seek views on how impact could be made more effective.

- What actions, in terms of policies and processes, need to be taken to achieve greater economic and social outcomes from academic research?
- What would encourage you personally to change the focus of your research towards the direction of those factors that are considered to engender impactful outcomes”?

Appendix B – Introductory Letter to Institutions



03/07/2015

Kevin Ord
Hull University
Scarborough Campus
Filey Road
Scarborough
Tel:- 01723 357262
Email:- k.ord@hull.ac.uk

Dear

**A Review of the Utility of Management Research and the Quest for
Economic and Social Impact**

Thank you for indicating your willingness to participate in the research project described above.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with a little more information on the interview process and the way that your comments will be handled as part of the project.

Research Project

The project will seek the views of ten research active academics at each of three HE institutions in the UK.

Interview

Interviews will be recorded and are expected to last no more than one hour during which you will be asked to describe your own research and the motivations behind it. Please see the attached interview schedule for a full list of the questions.

You will be at liberty to stop the interview at any time and have any recorded material erased.

Anonymity

The final research report will be submitted to the Department of Education at the University of Hull in pursuance of the degree of Doctor of Education and thereafter will be made available within the public domain. The content or parts of it may also be published in academic journals and other generally available media.

Your level of anonymity will be dependent upon your willingness to be identified in the report as follows:-

- ❖ Should you give permission for your name to be included in the final report you will be identifiable only in so far as being part of an institutional group of

ten participants to which comments and views may be attributable. No comments will be attributed to individual members of the institutional group.

- ❖ If you wish your identity to be withheld from the report your participation in the project will be known only to the author and will not be disclosed any further.

The option to include or withhold your identity will be available until the point when the work is submitted to the University of Hull. Before submission you will be provided with a copy of the report for the purpose of vetoing any content you deem threatening or otherwise affecting you.

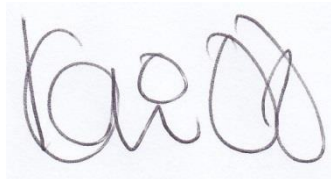
All tapes and transcripts will be destroyed immediately the report is submitted to the University of Hull.

You will be asked to sign a consent form to indicate your acceptance of the conditions described in this letter including your willingness to be identified or otherwise.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Rd, Hull, HU6 7RX; Tel No (+ 44) (0)1482 465988; fax (+ 44) (0)1482 466137.”

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Ord', written on a light blue background.

Kevin Ord



CONSENT FORM:

I, _____ of _____ University

Hereby agree to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by Mr Kevin Ord

I understand that the purpose of the research is:-

To examine the implications of existing policy and practice within UK business Schools on the focus, content and dissemination choices of their research active staff

I agree that

1. I understand the aims and methods of the research and I have considered possible risks and hazards of the study.
2. I voluntarily and freely consent to participate in the research study subject to the conditions outlined in the letter provided to me, dated _____
3. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
4. Individual results will not be released to any person
5. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.
6. I do/do not* agree to my identity being made available as part of this project

** Delete as appropriate*

Signature:

Date:

The contact details of the researcher are: Kevin Ord. University of Hull – Scarborough Campus, Filey Road, Scarborough YO11 3AZ. E-mail: k.ord@hull.ac.uk. Tel 01723-357262

The contact details of the secretary to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee are Mrs J.Lison, Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX. Email: J.Lison@hull.ac.uk tel. 01482-465988.

Research Proposal

Research Proposer(s): ...Kevin Ord.....

Programme of Study...Doctor of Education.....

Student No:.....

Research (Working Dissertation/Thesis) Title:-

A Review of the Utility of Business and Management Research and the Quest for Economic and Social Impact.

.....
Description of research (please include (a) aims of the research; (b) principal research question(s) (c) methodology or methodologies to be used (d) who are the participants in this research, and how are they to be selected.

Introduction

The study is prompted by recent changes in higher education funding policies that have been introduced to encourage greater economic and social returns from investments in academic research. The study is predicated on the prevailing notion that research that targets higher levels of utility is likely to require a more applied focus than that which is intrinsic in current business and management investigation methods.

The project seeks to identify the extent to which the “components of impactful research”, as described by emerging theory, exist, or otherwise, within a sample of UK Higher Education Institutions. The investigation will attempt to determine whether business school policy and/or operational practice encourage or discourage the adoption of these components in academic researchers. Specifically it will examine the implications of existing policy and practice within UK business Schools on the focus, content and dissemination choices of their research staff. This will be achieved through a consideration of the views of a number of research active academics in a sample of three UK Universities. The purpose of the investigation is to identify opportunities to improve the adoption of management research in the practitioner community.

Aims and Objectives

The study sets out to better understand both the magnitude and the requirements of the change process necessary within UK Management Schools to facilitate the government’s quest for greater social and economic impact. To this end, the research will seek to:-

- Review emerging theory that attempts to capture the components of management research that results in the type of utilitarian outcomes sought by state funders.
- Identify how well these components are embedded in the research practices of business school academics.

- Identify whether existing research policy and practice encourage or impede the adoption of such characteristics.
- Identify the changes necessary to encourage researchers to adopt tactics that yield more meaningful economically and socially beneficial outcomes.
- Identify the degree to which research active academics view their own research to be impactful.
- Identify the degree to which research active academics welcome, or otherwise, the move to a more applied research agenda.

Methodology

The research objectives described above will be accomplished from an interview survey of 30 research active academics from three UK universities

The individuals within each institution will be chosen using a snowballing technique whereby each participant will be asked to nominate two more potential participants who will be contacted by the author to seek their agreement to take part in the study. To avoid any suggestion of coercion or peer pressure those nominating others will not be asked to pre-empt this contact by the author. The process will start off with the Research Directors in each of the institutions.

The nature of the participants in this research suggests that they will be familiar with the process of research interviews and, as such, are unlikely to be vulnerable in any way. It is intended that interviewees will be anonymous in so far as they will be part of a group of ten participants from any given institution. However, permission will be sought to publish names and titles identifying participants as part of an institutional sample group to which comments and views will be attributed. Contributors will be given the option to have their names withheld from the final report and offered a veto on any content they deem threatening before the report is submitted for assessment.

This information will be explained in a letter sent to each participant prior to an interview taking place. Participants will be required to sign a written consent form stating that they understand and agree to the terms drafted in this letter.

(Please see the attached invitation letter and consent form for full details of the conditions under which the interviews will take place).
