RESEARCH 4GOOD

UNIVERSITY OF BATH
SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

ISSUE TWO

EXPLORING THE HUMAN SIDE OF SUSTAINABILITY

9 KEY MOMENTS IN OUR BUSINESS AND SOCIETY RESEARCH

HOW CAN WE PREVENT ONLINE HATE SHIFTING TO OFFLINE VIOLENCE?

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WELCOME MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Welcome to the latest issue of *Research4Good*, a magazine showcasing some of the exciting research being carried out here at the University of Bath School of Management.

In this issue, we're celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Centre for Business, Organisations and Society (CBOS). I was one of the Centre's co-founders back in 2005, and I am so proud of how it has flourished into one of the world's leading research groups tackling questions around business ethics, corporate social responsibility and the role of business within society.

CBOS is now home to 60 faculty members and 26 PhD students, with our members having published a total of over 700 journal articles, 100 conference papers and 100 book chapters or sections since the Centre's inception.

Read on to explore how CBOS academics are examining the human side of sustainability; look back over nine of the key moments in the Centre's history; and hear from CBOS Director, Professor Andrew Crane, on how business and society research is more pressing than ever.

I hope you enjoy learning about some of the exciting research we're carrying out here at Bath. If you're interested in finding out more or would like to receive email newsletters from us, please do get in touch at:
researchoffice@management.bath.ac.uk

Professor Steve Brammer
Dean of the School of Management

UPDATES FROM THE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

FOSTERING INNOVATION TO ADDRESS GRAND CHALLENGES

In June 2024, we hosted the annual European Academy of Management conference, bringing together approximately 1,800 scholars from across the globe.

We were delighted to welcome the EURAM community to campus for a week of stimulating discussion and debate centred on how management scholars can tackle the biggest issues facing society today. The conference was co-chaired by Professor Panos Desyllas and School of Management Dean, Professor Steve Brammer.

"We were delighted to host so many colleagues from around the world in Bath," explains Panos. "The conference provided an unparalleled platform for networking, sharing knowledge and building partnerships. One of the most rewarding experiences for me was learning about the numerous new research collaborations that emerged from connections made during the EURAM conference."

Our keynotes featured Copenhagen Business School's Professor Nicolai Foss talking about managerial authority, and KPMG UK data science lead Leanne Allen and University of Bath Institute of Coding Director Professor Rachid Hourizi sharing their insights on the future of artificial intelligence.

The final keynote session boasted a panel discussion on the future of management research from CBOS Director Professor Andrew Crane; EURAM President Professor Alessandro Zattoni; British Academy of Management President Professor Katy Mason; and the University of Strathclyde's Professor Peter McKiernan.

We also invited researchers, doctoral students and practitioners to join us for a day of interactive Lab sessions ahead of the main conference. These collaborative sessions covered the impact of regulation on grand challenges and the role of innovation, as well as an 'Action Lab' site visit to AirBus Filton.

TEXTBOOK DONATION SCHEME EXPANDS

Readcycle Bath has been widened to include universities in Kenya. The initiative sends surplus management and engineering textbooks to countries in need, and was originally set up with partner institutions in Nigeria. Readcycle's mission is to inspire reading, studying and sharing books for the global good.

In total, approximately 5,000 books have been donated to date to more than ten universities. The impacts of this benefit upwards of 300,000 students.

The scheme is led by Dr Teslim Bukoye from the School of Management. The idea was sparked during the move to our new building in summer 2022, when he and colleagues found many recent editions of modern textbooks that were no longer being used.

"I thought, how wonderful if we could collect these and ship to universities and students who could benefit from them," he explains. "I put out a call to my colleagues and their response was marvellous – we have already shipped thousands of textbooks to Nigeria and I am confident we can do more."

Dr Teslim Bukoye

NEW PROJECT TO OPTIMISE OCEAN ENERGY SUPPLY CHAINS

The University of Bath has joined the OcEn offshore renewable energy (ORE) research consortium, which works across science, industry and communities to examine the opportunities and challenges facing the sector.

Dr Shuya Zhong from the School of Management is part of the £1.7 million project, along with 11 other universities from the UK, USA, Canada and Australia.

The project will explore how ORE can support the fight against climate change, and its potential benefits for the global environment and economy. It will also examine whether the world's manufacturing, construction and logistics sectors are ready to meet the demands of the sector's expansion.

Shuya says: "With the project, I aim to develop innovative solutions for optimising ocean energy supply chains, making them more efficient, sustainable and resilient. The goal is to enhance the sector's readiness by addressing key challenges in operations, logistics, and supply chain management."

MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION

1st Impressions, a not-for-profit set up by School of Management senior lecturer Dr Jane Ellis-Brush, has helped nearly 400 women to build their self-esteem and achieve their career goals.

The organisation was set up in 2021, when Jane realised that pre-loved outfits could be key to giving women self-assurance when going into job interviews. "Clothes matter massively," she explains. "Wearing an outfit that feels right and looks the part can be transformative for confidence and the impact of that can't be underestimated."

In addition to offering free personal styling and interview coaching sessions across Bath, the south west and south Wales, supported by a team of volunteers, 1st Impressions works with a range of charities and job centres to help and support their clients.

For more information about getting involved, please contact **jane@1stimpressions.org.uk.**

THE HUMAN SIDE OF SUSTAINABILITY

The research from the Centre for Business, Organisations and Society examining how and why we make the choices that matter for our planet.

"One of the interesting things with research on food sustainability is that everybody has to eat. And food can also be, I think, quite an emotive topic," says Dr Friederike Döbbe.

Friederike is one of several researchers at the Centre for Business, Organisations and Society (CBOS) looking at sustainability on a personal level. How is responsibility for addressing socio-ecological issues allocated? How far does this responsibility relate to individual lifestyle and behaviour choices rather than the responsibility of corporations and politicians – and how do we feel about it?

She continues: "This thinking of individuals as consumers creates a very specific subjectivity – one that individualises responsibility to address sustainability issues through consumer choices. But what about our role as citizens? What about voting and democratic processes?"

Much of Friederike's research focuses on the intersection between sustainability and food. One of her recent studies focused on the ways in which a marketing campaign from large Swedish poultry producer Kronfågel backfired.

The company's 2019 campaign focused on the climate benefits of eating chicken rather than beef, and included messaging such as, 'If everyone who reads this chooses chicken instead of beef only once, it's like compensating for 14 long-haul jumbo jet flights' and 'Chicken has a tenth of the impact on climate compared to beef'.

WRONG REASONS

As Friederike points out, "it's not that their calculations are wrong or anything!", but there was widespread online backlash against the adverts regardless. The negative comments spanned myriad stances, from those entirely averse to the consumption of animal products, through to those angered by the perceived pitting of beef and poultry farmers against one another.

In short, the respondents weren't opposed to the prospect of taking responsibility for their own choices: what they took issue with was the framing of the messaging, and the idea of a large company deferring the onus of making an ethical decision wholly onto them as individuals.

"We've been studying this as a form of power," explains Friederike. "There's a lot of discussion about consumer choice – even if there's a company saying like, 'Oh, choose chicken over beef,' you still have the choice, right? But there's this idea of governing through the freedom of choice; it's a form of power that's more subtle. Through being given the choice, you're [now the one who has to] deal with that ethical question."

While for some, these ethical questions might weigh heavily, for others they're something to celebrate. Research from Dr Diletta Acuti has been looking at how people choose to incorporate sustainability into their weddings. This could come in the form of ethically produced garments, recycled paper invitations, biodegradable confetti alternatives or an avoidance of plastic, to name just a few examples.

"I think it's a way for them to use an occasion where they are in the spotlight to show it off, and to show guests that there is an alternative," she says.

Diletta carried out interviews with brides and grooms who were either planning or had recently held their wedding. She used these to delve into which elements of the event were most important to them, and how making sustainable choices helped them – or didn't – in achieving these priorities.

Dr Friederike Döbbe

DAY TO REMEMBER

Diletta carried out interviews with brides and grooms who were either planning or had recently held their wedding. She used these to delve into which elements of the event were most important to them, and how making sustainable choices helped them – or didn't – in achieving these.

The study found that uniqueness, desirability, emotion and memorability were the most important facets of the event for celebrants. As Diletta points out, people usually spend large sums of money (the average UK wedding in 2024 cost over £20,000) and tend to host only a few such events across a lifetime. For many people, these are among the most special days of their lives – and they understandably want an event that reflects both this fact and their own values and personalities.

So, why might people be turned off by a sustainable wedding? For some, she found, "people think there is a sort of stigma, [that sustainability is] something uncool or for more alternative people". On the other hand, Diletta identified that for others, sustainability fed directly into these positive attributes. A handmade dress, say, might be viewed as a one-off item and of higher quality, and so more likely to last and be passed down through generations.

As a result, Diletta suggests that brands targeting the wedding industry should emphasise the positive factors around the sustainability of their products, such as how they might be more unique.

"I think the big challenge is making sustainability something cool rather than boring," she explains. "This is difficult, but I think they can do it by communicating the attributes that can enhance the priorities people have for special occasions. [You need to] link sustainability with emotion, and something good for you and the environment."

For the couples who chose to incorporate these values into their wedding, though, doing so made the event even more special in their eyes: "They say that this playing a key role in the wedding was something that was empowering to them, sharing this idea and showing how important it was to them."

It's not just our life events that might be affected by environmental concerns, either: it can be our livelihoods, too. A third of UK employees say they have resigned from a job due to a conflict in values between themselves and their company. Dr Grace Augustine is currently studying the phenomenon of 'climate quitting' amongst employees in the fossil fuel industry – whereby employees become concerned enough about their employer's contribution to the climate crisis that they leave their jobs altogether.

It's a big step. "These are normal people," asserts Grace. "They have the same financial and material concerns as anybody. Sometimes they have a very specialised degree, like petroleum engineering or geology, that is not easily transferable to another industry."

Dr Diletta Acuti

WALKING AWAY

Grace has carried out interviews with a spread of climate quitters about their experiences and motivating factors. While you might expect this trend to be most prevalent among younger workers, who are earlier in their careers and so may have less to 'lose', she has identified the same concerns and actions among people at all stages of their careers.

But what causes professionals who may have spent years in education geared towards a specific industry to take such a leap? "People seem to be getting really fed up with the slow pace of change within their organisations," explains Grace. "They're choosing to leave certain workplaces because they have lost hope that those workplaces will improve around the issue of sustainability."

These workers, who may not have had especially pronounced climate concerns when they started in the industry, go through a growing cycle of disillusionment. They report feeling their companies are engaging in hypocrisy and greenwashing, paying lip service to environmental values while acting in a manner at odds with their promises. At the same time, they sense that the climate crisis is speeding up.

"It's interesting to understand from a research standpoint – what actually prompts such a massive personal decision," she says. "I also think understanding the ecosystem surrounding this decision is key, because it's not just about individual feelings and decisions. People find that they need to link up with others. These moves may also speed up climate transition in workplaces, as employers increasingly recognise that a portion of their workforce has these serious concerns."

The idea of linking up with likeminded others is also central for Dr Annayah Prosser, whose research includes work on activist burnout. Some of her recent research has centred on vegans, and the tensions they encounter around their diet. Plant-based eating is on the rise, but estimates suggest just 3.2% of the European population identifies as vegan.

Dr Annayah Prosser

A large majority of vegans made this choice due to ethical motivations, including both animal welfare and climate concerns, but when interacting with meat-eaters, they tend to minimise this moral stance. Some even pretend to love the smell of meat or to miss it in their diet. When interacting with plant-based peers, Annayah found something very different.

"In one study we got people from dietary identity groups into a room only with other members of the group, because we wanted to know more about how they talk together," she says. "What was interesting about the vegan group is that they all constructed activism as necessary or a natural extension of their practice. It wasn't necessarily enough just to eat vegan food: you also had to be an activist."

The tensions between this 'necessary' activism and the urge to avoid friction with others can lead to negative effects on mental health. Annayah explains that vegans may feel the need to constantly defend their dietary choices, something that can also extend to other climate action-related decisions, such as abstaining from flying. How can you avoid burnout in the face of criticism – real or anticipated – from wider society?

A PLACE TO BELONG

Finding community, says Annayah, is vital. The presumption among meat-eaters might be that vegans act as a collective, but Annayah's research has found that in reality many feel significantly isolated. "The single best thing you can do is connect with other people doing the same things as you," she asserts. "We know from a lot of research that having shared social identities with other people is really protective when it comes to mental health. You're less likely to have symptoms of

anxiety, depression and burnout if you are regularly connecting with people."

This connection could take place among online communities, on social media or in WhatsApp group chats, but Annayah has also identified larger-scale gatherings as being useful. In a study carried out at the Vegan Camp Out, an annual festival held in the UK each summer, she found that these dedicated spaces act as a useful recharge for activists.

Such experiences can not only help to prevent burnout in the shorter term, but have an ongoing effect, which Annayah is hoping to study further in the future.

"There is already a big research focus on trying to get people who don't care to care and, to me, that's a bigger step than trying to understand how we can make people who already care care more effective," she says. "But if we can understand why people sacrifice a lot to be sustainable, even though it's practically difficult, then that can give us insights that will hopefully transfer to the rest of the population."

Despite working on different elements of a vast problem, our researchers all agree that now is a better time than ever before to be studying sustainability – with more focus on the issue and greater awareness of the impact such research can have.

"Thankfully the topic has gone a lot more mainstream within the management world," concludes Grace. "I think the challenges someone with my interests would have faced 15 or 20 years ago are not as pronounced... Issues of sustainability are seen as valid in and of themselves: they don't need to be justified any longer through the lens of profitability."

Dr Grace Augustine

MAKING MOVES

When it comes to relocating employees, many companies express the need to make their processes more sustainable – yet only 5% of people worry about the issue during their own relocation. A knowledge transfer partnership (KTP) between the University of Bath and global relocation firm K2 Corporate Mobility is aiming to reduce this disparity.

Funded by an Innovate UK grant, this two-year project features a research associate embedded within K2, supported by a team from the School of Management, including CBOS' Dr Iina Ikonen. The goal is to develop a set of behavioural 'nudge' techniques that will encourage clients to opt for more sustainable transport methods and packaging materials.

"At present, K2 do not have detailed knowledge of what is driving this attitude-behaviour gap," Iina explains. "We have the expertise and skills to support both the theoretical and data-related aspects of this, and are delighted to put our research to use here."

UPPER ECHELONS

What goes on in the boardroom? Research from our Accounting, Finance and Law Division is uncovering some interesting insights.

SIGN HERE

What factors can have an influence on a company's credit rating? Surprisingly, the size of the chief executive officer (CEO)'s signature. Dr Richard Fairchild and Dr Pietro Perotti, along with PhD student Zehan Hou, examined the correlation between narcissism levels in CEOs and the credit rating of their firm.

The researchers used area-per-letter of the signature as a proxy measure of narcissism, aligning the size of signatures with the projection of ego. They then compared this data with information from leading credit rating agency S&P Global Ratings on the companies' creditworthiness.

What they found was that higher levels of narcissism among CEOs were linked with significantly lower credit ratings. However, this effect was less pronounced in companies facing financial constraints.

This could be explained by the fact that narcissistic personality traits can lead CEOs to behave recklessly or unethically - even making them more likely to engage in white-collar crime. While credit agencies largely use quantitative data around cash flow and liquidity, they also take qualitative information around governance into account when building a profile of a company's risk levels.

GIVING AWAY

Corporate philanthropy may not be the selfless gesture it seems on the surface. Yes, it's a form of corporate social responsibility – offering evidence of a company's commitment to its espoused values – but it is also used to achieve more self-serving goals, such as image management and customer satisfaction.

It can also be deployed opportunistically by CEOs to bolster their firms' – and by extension their own – reputations.

Research led by Professor Michael Adams examined charitable giving in the UK insurance industry, where most firms are required to disclose annual donations over £2,000. The team compared this data with information on the 'power' held by the companies' CEOs – such as length of tenure, number of shares owned and whether they were also chair of the board.

The study found that CEO power was positively associated with both the likelihood and amount of donations to charitable causes.

It also, however, revealed that firms with other risk-management strategies in place were less likely to donate, as in these cases boards had less impetus to agree to CEOs' proposals on the matter.

FEELING GOOD

Obviously, CEOs need to have confidence in their decisions and abilities, but what happens when they're *too* confident? According to research from Dr Fanis Tsoligkas, along with colleagues from King Abdulaziz University, Durham University and the University of Glasgow, it can act against them in terms of investments in research and development (R&D) and firm performance.

Specifically, the team looked at CEO confidence levels – measured through the language used in their letters to stakeholders – as well as their firm's accounting around R&D expenditure.

The researchers found that capitalising R&D expenditure (treating it as an asset rather than a cost) shows a positive correlation against future cash flows – this spending enables growth and sends positive signals to both internal and external stakeholders. However, this link was much weaker in companies whose CEO had higher levels of overconfidence. This suggests that the amount capitalised in firms with more overconfident CEOs delivers less future cash flow than in firms with less overconfident CEOs - indicating a signal of lower quality in the first place for such firms.

In firms with greater gender diversity on their board, however, this overconfidence had less of a negative impact, suggesting that more diversity can make for better-quality financial reporting.

OUT OF OFFICE

Why the rise of coworking spaces needs to be incorporated into regional policy.

For a large proportion of UK workers, the idea of spending five days per week in an office has become alien. According to Office for National Statistics figures, 41% of UK workers spend at least part of their week working remotely.

Rather than sitting alone in your spare bedroom, home office or at the kitchen table, you might consider using a coworking space – shared facilities offered on more flexible and affordable rental terms than a traditional office. But what can these environments offer, other than chats around the watercooler and a better cup of coffee than you might get at home?

"Unlike flexible office spaces, at their heart, true coworking spaces are about a sense of belonging, connection and community between users of the space and increasingly beyond it, into the local area," says Dr Felicia Fai, Co-Director of the Centre for Governance, Regulation & Industrial Strategy (CGR&IS). "They provide social networks that can build into knowledge networks and formal business linkages."

The mix of digital nomads, local entrepreneurs and residents working remotely for their corporations can spark novel conversations unconstrained by office politics or 'organisational thinking'. As a result, casual chats evolve into deliberate knowledge-sharing, informal learning, training and the sharing of contacts at an individual level.

Felicia, along with CGR&IS Co-Director Professor Phil Tomlinson and colleague Dr Mariachiara Barzotto, carried out over 35 hours of interviews and focus groups with owners and users of coworking spaces, as well as policymakers, in three areas across England. They found that coworking spaces feed into the so-called 'six capitals' of regional development: social, intangible, human, financial, physical and institutional capital.

Capital development

"Coworking can facilitate local connections and relationships to generate ideas and innovation, stimulating business growth. They can help upskill people, enabling them to undertake decent work, whilst bringing balance to professional and personal lives," Felicia explains.

"She continues: "Financial investments in coworking spaces can revitalise under-utilised buildings and revive local high streets, and they can contribute to local leadership capacity and capability."

However, despite offering significant benefits to regions – not to mention their positive impact on users' mental health thanks to shorter commutes and a reduction in social isolation – coworking spaces are often overlooked in terms of policy.

In contrast, the Irish government is investing in 400 coworking spaces in rural areas and towns requiring regeneration – and offering vouchers for free access to entice remote workers into making use of the facilities.

However, coworking spaces are also very fashionable, and over-supply in the wrong places may undermine their utility as a whole if users have poor experiences. So the researchers suggest local authorities should consider a degree of regional oversight to manage networks of coworking spaces, making it more feasible for local governments to offer support on a more targeted basis.

"Coworking spaces offer many benefits to individuals, entrepreneurs, hybrid workers and companies, but their potential to support local areas and regional growth is both under-recognised and under-utilised," Felicia concludes. "Compared to Ireland, Italy, Germany and the US, this is a significant blind spot in the British regional growth strategy and skills agenda."

FORMATIVE MOMENTS

The 9 moments that shaped our business and society research – and the papers that responded to them.

The world has transformed at an overwhelming pace over the 20 years since the Centre for Business, Organisations and Society (CBOS) was founded. The world's population has grown by almost two billion people; the value of global trade in goods and services has more than doubled; the percentage of people living in poverty globally stands at less than half its 2005 rate.

Technology is more of a staple in our lives than ever before – the iPhone was launched in 2007, and has since sold over 2.5 billion units – and the majority of us now take internet access for granted as part of our daily lives.

But global temperatures have continued to rise alarmingly, and a climate emergency has now been declared in 40 countries. The Covid-19 pandemic claimed more than 7 million lives across the world, and months of lockdowns fundamentally shifted the ways in which we live and work.

Throughout all of this change and more, CBOS members have been responding to real-world events in their research, seeking to achieve impact through engagement with business and society.

Here are some of the key moments and papers from CBOS' history – so far…

INCREASING FOCUS ON CSR

Brammer, S., & Millington, A. 2008. 'Does It Pay to Be Different? An Analysis of the Relationship Between Corporate Social and Financial Performance'. *Strategic Management Journal*, 29(12): 1325-1343.

"It was a paper motivated by the confusion in research and practice regarding whether being a 'good' firm paid off financially. Our paper sought to distinguish more precisely what 'doing good' meant at the firm level by identifying those firms that made higher, or lower, levels of charitable donations than is implied by their size, industry, profitability, etc.

"We then used this classification to explore whether those that gave more than expected performed better financially, showing that both those with unexpectedly high and unexpectedly low donations tended to outperform other firms.

"We argued that this reflected a differentiation hypothesis in which firms needed to 'go big or go home' with their CSR or simply save their money. Being stuck in the middle was the worst outcome."

**Professor Steve Brammer,
Dean of the School of Management**

2007-2008 GREAT FINANCIAL CRISIS

Grosvold, J., & Brammer, S. 2011. 'National Institutional Systems as Antecedents of Female Board Representation: An Empirical Study'. *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, 19(2): 116-135.

"The paper was written at the time when the topic of corporate board gender diversity was gaining traction. This was partly driven by Norway's decision to introduce a quota of 40% female representation on the boards of public companies in 2005, and the now infamous quote by Christine Lagarde that had Lehman Brothers been Lehman Sisters, the bank would never have collapsed.

"Board gender diversity started to form part of a global conversation, but whilst we knew that the share of board seats that women held across countries differed, we had little insight into why. We therefore set out to understand more about what could cause these systematic national differences. The paper was cited in a number of policy documents, suggesting that this research impacted policy formation and practice."

**Dr Johanne Grosvold,
CBOS Deputy Director**

2015 EUROPEAN MIGRANT CRISIS AND THE BREXIT REFERENDUM

Dawson, C., Veliziotis, M., & Hopkins, B. 2018. 'Understanding the Perception of the "Migrant Work Ethic"'. *Work, Employment & Society*, 32(5): 811-830.

"The 'migrant work ethic' was a common phrase thrown around when it came to Central and Eastern European workers operating in the UK.

"We wanted to test whether this was something innate about these migrant workers or whether it could be explained by simple economic models – and it turns out that it could.

"Migrant workers from these (at the time) poorer countries received positive income shocks in the UK and therefore worked harder, as standard economic theory predicts. Moreover, as they acclimatised to wages in the UK, their perceived stronger work ethic disappeared."

Professor Chris Dawson

INTRODUCTION OF THE UK'S MODERN SLAVERY ACT 2015

Crane, A., LeBaron, G., Phung, K., Behbahani, L., and Allain, J. (2022) 'Confronting the Business Models of Modern Slavery'. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, vol. 31 (3): 264-285.

"We were already working on the topic of modern slavery in business, and then the UK Modern Slavery Act was introduced and there was suddenly a lot more interest and engagement in the research we were doing.

"This paper won several prizes and received plenty of media attention but also got rejected by quite a few journals before it was eventually published. We knew we were on the right track, though, and just needed to persevere to get our ideas out there.

"Between starting the research and publishing the paper, our team also went through three international relocations, two births, a marriage, an adoption and several changes in job. This paper taught us that life happens while you're busy doing research and you meet plenty of obstacles along the way, but you just have to press on and believe in what you are doing."

**Professor Andrew Crane,
CBOS Director**

#METOO MOVEMENT

McCarthy, L., & Glozer, S. 2021. 'Heart, Mind and Body: #NoMorePage3 and the Replenishment of Emotional Energy, *Organization Studies*, 43(3): 369-394.

"The origins of this paper date back to 2014 when Lauren and I were fresh-faced PhD students. Funnily enough, this paper also introduced me to CBOS; I was invited to present this research as a guest speaker for a seminar in 2015!

"Lauren and I were passionate about sharing the story of #NoMorePage3 – a feminist collective campaigning to remove sexualized images of women from a UK newspaper.

"At the time, feminist activism was receiving increased attention as the #MeToo movement was on the rise, so we were pleased to be developing insights on how campaigners could recharge their emotional energy in the face of online abuse.

"After numerous conference presentations and lots of deep thinking, we carved out a contribution we were excited about and sent the paper to *Organization Studies*. Following several rounds of reviews (and the arrival of a baby for both authors!) the work was published in 2021."

Professor Sarah Glozer, Head of Marketing, Business and Society Division

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Dar, S., Liu, H., Martinez Dy, A., & Brewis, D. N. 2021. 'The Business School Is Racist: Act Up!' *Organization*, 28(4): 695-706.

"Back in 2020, we were writing this article as part of a broader set of interventions we were leading in higher education, including workshops on Building the Antiracist Classroom. All around us, we were witnessing people probing their own interactions with others in their community, their practices, and the ways their organisations operated; seeking to overhaul and better them.

"In our own discipline, there were a handful of scholars producing compelling analysis, but their writing was remaining at the margins and unheeded. We wrote this polemic in the spirit of 'Acting Up!', a space carved out in the journal *Organization* to call others to action through decisive critique.

"The piece succinctly dissects key elements of the business school system that contribute to the continuation of racism today and explains why we need support systems across generations of scholars in order to make change."

Dr Deborah Brewis

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

The surprising factors affecting whether small businesses are able to access the finance they need.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) comprise over 99% of the UK economy, according to government statistics from 2023. These firms – boasting fewer than 249 employees – make up the backbone of our economy, but most will need access to external funding from banks. Not all of them are getting it, and it's not always for the reasons you'd expect.

"A non-negligible proportion of SMEs in need of external finance, albeit credit-worthy, voluntarily choose not to apply for any because of fear of rejection," says Dr Weixi Liu. "Those SMEs are termed 'discouraged borrowers'."

Weixi, a member of the Centre for Research on Entrepreneurship and Innovation, focuses on the impacts of 'credit rationing' – when SMEs are denied the financing they have applied for – and the knock-on effects this has.

Some of his recent work examined data from a longitudinal survey of UK small businesses, spanning a five-year period. He and fellow researchers looked at the types of finance sought by firms, whether they were approved and whether they went on to apply for further credit. They found that smaller firms were more likely to face credit rationing and that an average of 4.1% of SMEs simply stopped applying for finance altogether, often following a denied application.

In total, this meant an average of 230,000 UK SMEs withdrawing from credit markets per year, impeding their growth and ability to create new jobs. What's more, the effect was more pronounced in regional areas of the UK, such as the East Midlands and the North East.
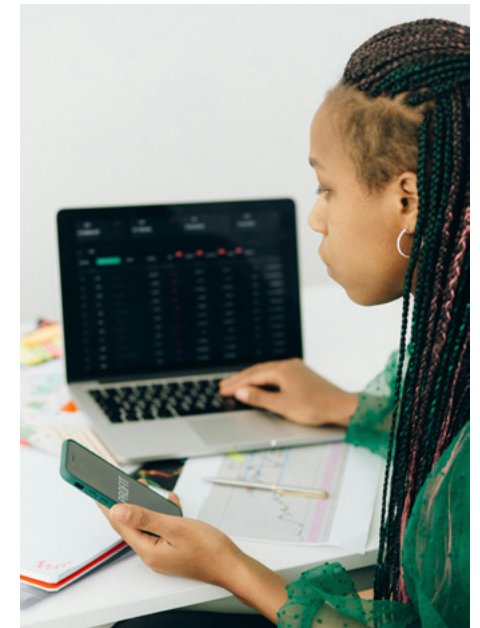
Crisis averted?

However, the Covid-19 pandemic had an unexpected impact. SMEs with ethnic minority owners have historically tended to be more reluctant to apply for traditional lines of credit – potentially due to concerns around perceived discrimination in finance markets – and in times of crisis, banks usually increase their lending standards and approve fewer loan applications. But Weixi's research has shown that this wasn't the case, particularly in the wake of the three loan guarantee schemes implemented by the UK Government during the early stages of lockdown in spring 2020.

The researchers examined data around bank loan applications and approvals in the run-up to and during the pandemic. Their conclusions were that in the absence of access to their preferred, more informal sources of credit, loan applications from minority ethnic-owned SMEs did surge more sharply than other SMEs – but that approval rates were the same as or higher than those for other SMEs. This suggests that racial discrimination plays less of a role than might have been assumed.

Weixi explains: "With generous government guarantees that de-risk bank lending, and as more UK commercial banks adopt transactional lending technologies such as automated credit scoring systems, there is clear evidence of narrowing 'funding gaps' for traditionally disadvantaged small business owners."

Still, this doesn't mean access to finance is entirely equal. Further research from Weixi and his fellow academics has gone on to explore whether gender stereotypes may also play a role, comparing entrepreneurs' confidence levels with the credit rationing they faced from banks.

At moderate confidence levels, women's loan applications were more likely to be approved than men's. However, female entrepreneurs were punished far more harshly for overconfidence than male counterparts – an effect the researchers attributed to lenders seeing egotism as a deviation from their expected gendered attributes.

"Although it remains unanswered whether this increase of credit supply reflects a longer-term alleviation of financial constraints, we suggest that banks should continue to engage with asset-poor SMEs to consolidate this improved situation," says Weixi.

"On the other hand, banks could engage more with the business and seek to understand its true potential, and explore alternative lending technologies or communication styles to increase financial inclusiveness in lending decision-making."

CONTENT WARNING

Digital spaces can be rife with toxicity – and it doesn't always stay online. Meet one of the researchers working to identify the red flags for action offline.

"We all use our mobile phones pretty much every hour of every day," states Dr Olivia Brown, Associate Professor in the School's Information, Decisions and Operations Division. "The internet is completely ubiquitous in everything that we do, which means it's now becoming more and more ubiquitous in everyday harms – whether that's terrorism or whether it's slightly less extreme harm in terms of violent protests or hate speech."

As such, Liv believes it's more important than ever before to look at online data – not just in the context of preventing harm, but also in understanding its origins and spread through social networking sites.

Liv's research focuses on examining how people communicate online and what it can tell us about 'mobilisation', the process by which people move from online discussion to real-world action. Some of her recent work, published in summer 2024, compared social media posts from a sample of convicted right-wing extremists with posts from non-offenders who interacted in the same online spaces.

She and her fellow researchers found a number of signals that a user was moving towards committing offline violence. Surprisingly, the ideological content of users' posts was less indicative of mobilisation than the length and amount of punctuation used – with longer posts and increased punctuation (such as exclamation marks and question marks) more common among the convicted sample 's posts.

Clearest signs

The most telling signal that someone would take offline action, however, was explicit talk of operations and logistics. Liv explains: "It suggests that people are developing the efficacy and ability to actually engage in the action. So we would suggest a focus on that, [as part of] a holistic approach."

She continues: "What has been the posting activity of that person over time? Do we have any information about their offline behaviour? Are there any risk factors in their day-to-day presentation? Have they violently offended before? Those sorts of things should be combined with these indicators that we find in online data."

Such markers – as well as Liv's wider understanding of the online far-right ecosystem – could be useful for intelligence agencies in identifying those most at risk of carrying out real-world offences. She is, however, emphatic that caution is key.

"We would never want to claim that that our work could single out somebody as being a potential terrorist, for example," she says. "I think there's always a really careful balance that has to be done in terms of how data is used and whether and where it's used appropriately."

The paper garnered widespread attention, and Liv has worked with UK police and government agencies to share her insights. She was also interviewed by numerous media outlets about the role of social media in the far-right protests and riots that erupted across several UK cities in July and August 2024.

"Why is it that we see an incident like [the mass stabbing in] Southport happening and then we see this enormous increase in hateful rhetoric on social media?" she muses. She identifies the situation around X – formerly known as Twitter – as a perfect storm.

While all platforms will have their darker, more harmful corners ("those actors will always exist; people will always look to leverage platforms to meet their ends") the changes made to X's algorithms and the re-instating of several far-right figures on the platform has fuelled an echo chamber of increasing toxicity.

Her future research plans include carrying out a large-scale survey and focus groups to investigate public sentiment around the use of artificial intelligence in policing. How might people feel about forces using AI to counter, monitor and potentially even remove posts spreading disinformation around inflammatory current events, for example? "We know that the idea of social media being monitored raises a lot of strong feelings for people."

Digital developments

Liv is also Deputy Director of the newly launched Bath Institute for Digital Security and Behaviour. The Institute is an interdisciplinary research group, encompassing experts from across the University in management, psychology, computer science and social sciences – including Co-Director Professor Adam Joinson and others from the School of Management.

It aims to work with industry, government and academia to respond to the evolving security risks to – and from – digital technologies, and to create a safer digital society for the UK.

"My role within the Institute is very much about research and development, and how we can support that through our activities," Liv explains.

Engagement with practice has been a passion of Liv's throughout her career, and she is excited for the chance to build further connections through her work with the Institute. "I think it's going to provide a platform to really increase the awareness of the work that we're doing," she concludes. "I'm really excited about having the opportunity to make Bath a university that comes to people's minds straight away when they think about digital security and behaviour."

Dr Olivia Brown

SPOTLIGHT ON: CENTRE FOR BUSINESS, ORGANISATIONS AND SOCIETY

Centre Director Professor Andrew Crane shares his thoughts on the growth of ethics in business, having real-world impact and the need for urgency in the field.

What are your own current research areas?

I have three main research areas. One is on the political role and responsibilities of business – in particular, looking at how those responsibilities change over time, how firms and politics influence one another, and how businesses respond to populism.

The second is on business and modern slavery, both how firms are involved in contributing to modern slavery and what they can do to address or combat it. That looks at a range of things, from supply chain responsibility, to consumer responses, to how firms might report on this.

The third is broadly on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and communication. In recent years, we've looked at things like, what is authenticity in relation to communication about corporate responsibilities? We've also examined issues around stakeholder dialogue – how do firms interact with their stakeholders?

Those are the three main ones and then there are always bits and bobs of other things.

How and when did you first get involved with CBOS?

I've known of CBOS for a long time, and then I joined the Centre when I moved to Bath to be its Director – Bath recruited me for the role when [previous Director] Andrew Millington was retiring in 2016.

I wasn't really looking to move at the time, but it was a great opportunity. I was already directing a centre at my institution at the time so, with my research interests, this was a natural progression.

Tell us about some of the recent research coming out of the Centre.

We've had some research coming out from Grace Augustine about the Post Office scandal here in the UK. It's been super interesting and focused on an issue that's very topical and has important implications for how we might deal with such problems in the future. Some of Rob Branston's research on the tobacco industry has also been really significant, looking at issues around taxation and pricing.

And then there's been Vivek Soundararajan's research with Pankhuri Agarwal looking at issues around worker exploitation in global supply chains. Some of their work has been looking at what's happened in Leicester since the accusations of modern slavery around [fast-fashion company] Boohoo. Those are just some of the things that I think have been particularly interesting in the past couple of years!

Are businesses increasingly considering ethics in what they do? How do you predict this will change in coming years?

I've been working in this field now for 30 years and there's been a huge change over that time in terms of how businesses tackle these issues. These issues are seen as mainstream now, right? 30 years ago, they were still quite marginal and on the periphery.

You don't really have to make the argument anymore that firms should be dealing with them. The real question is: how and how much? My view is that we haven't gone nearly as fast as we needed to and still need to, particularly around things like climate change.

But I think that there's still a very strong kind of forward momentum, so even when we see governments and firms stepping back from their commitments, the overall direction of travel is broadly positive.

It's absolutely an exciting time to be doing this kind of research. These are the biggest issues confronting us as a society and we've got companies being called upon to deal with them. You can't get any bigger than that.

Where do you see the Centre's future direction?

We now have something like 60 faculty members and a number of PhD students, so there are a lot of people involved and we do a wide variety of different research around business and society.

In one sense you're always driven by the interests, desires and perspectives of your members, but clearly there are certain issues and topics that are becoming much more important – such as climate change, inequality, technology and the corporate responsibilities around these.

Going forward, I think the Centre is also becoming much more interested in how the research we do makes a positive and meaningful impact in practice. That's both in terms of disseminating our work to different stakeholders, but then also working with these stakeholders to make a difference on the ground.

CSR CONVERSATIONS

In September 2024, Andrew was one of the hosts of the International CSR Communication Conference, hosted at the School of Management. The three-day event brought together around 100 global academics, PhD students and practitioners to share their insights on the issues facing corporate social responsibility dialogue in a world facing multiple crises. A highlight of the conference was a practitioner panel focusing on how research can feed into sustainability, featuring Lauren Branston from the Institute of Business Ethics, Jack Hodgkiss from Hubbub and UN SDG campaign creator Gail Gallie.

THE POWER OF MICRO-RESISTANCE

How small feminist acts accumulate to real progress.

In November 1975, the UK's Sex Discrimination Act passed into law. The Act made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of sex or marital status – promoting 'equality of opportunity between men and women' – and was eventually replaced in 2010 by the Equality Act.

Almost 50 years on, it's easy to get disheartened about a perceived lack of progress. After all, gender pay gaps abound, women remain under-represented in senior positions and many still face sexual harassment in the workplace.

However, Professor Nancy Harding believes there is nonetheless cause for cautious celebration.

"Women have entered management and the professions in large numbers and will not tolerate the types of treatment regarded as 'normal' 50 years ago," she says. "The internet may be a breeding ground for misogyny, but now we fight back."

Nancy's recent research, conducted with Professor Sarah Gilmore from Cardiff Business School and Professor Jackie Ford from Durham University Business School, examined one of the author's memories of working in a male-dominated trade union in the 1990s. It did so through the lens of both feminist psychoanalytic theory and their experiences over the succeeding years.

This approach enabled the researchers to identify some of the everyday strategies women have employed to resist misogyny in the workplace. Despite their 'micro' nature, Nancy believes that these are key forms of resistance, and that their aggregate effect is what has helped to drive change over the past five decades.

She explains: "The Act did not usher in a revolution that changed things quickly. Instead, women developed strategies of micro-resistances that, little by little, slowly changed culture. There is still a long way to go, and we are still very concerned by how 'women's work', especially caring work, is under-valued – but we've laid the foundations for more change."

TINY REBELLIONS

Collaboration

"Remember how we survived conferences by going to them with friends. Remember the macho fights for intellectual dominance!"

Women may turn to female colleagues for support, advice and empathy in difficult situations. By forming a mutual understanding, even covertly, they find the strength to reject negative forces such as misogyny.

Departure

"I am overcome with a sense of amused resignation, but I don't think that this man and what he stands for is the future."

By excusing themselves from uncomfortable situations – such as one-on-one meetings with inappropriate male colleagues – women silently refuse to perpetuate these colleagues' power over them. By refusing to submit to the status of 'objects', they regain their own authority.

Humour

"I am presented with my boss' symbolic samurai sword for safekeeping. My PA and I shove it behind a filing cupboard in disgust."

In making light of difficult situations by laughing at them, women are able to undermine problematic objects and, by extension, their owners. As a result, this robs the offensive or aggressive artefacts of their agency and thus their power.

Resistant recognition

"When I left, I distributed all my teaching/learning resources [only] to appropriate colleagues I had worked with to promote women's inclusion and leadership."

If recognition on one's own terms is not offered by those in charge, women may choose to cooperate only with those whom they have connected in meaningful ways – resisting those who have denied their selfhood and seeking recognition elsewhere.

> "I hope companies can use my findings when developing their responsible business strategy in anti-democratic contexts"

ZENA AL-ESIA is in the fifth year of a part-time PhD with the Centre for Business, Organisations and Society (CBOS). She shares her research on the importance of corporate social responsibility in difficult contexts.

"When I began researching potential places to do a PhD, CBOS was something that really attracted me to Bath: I was keen to be part of a research centre focused on business and society, particularly around the topics of sustainability and corporate social responsibility. That's what I'm interested in, so I wanted a place that's really active in terms of research, outreach and impact in that area.

"The other thing that appealed to me was the supervisors. For example, [CBOS Director] Professor Andrew Crane: he's a CSR expert. He wrote the textbook! Likewise, Dr Kostas Iatridis has a strong practitioner and academic background in sustainability. Having a strong supervisory team was definitely an important element.

"My research is centred on how businesses become political actors through engaging in responsible business – and how this might impact society in terms of democracy and human rights, particularly where governments are lacking in upholding these rights. I'm looking at this in two anti-democratic contexts: populism and authoritarian regimes.

"In the context of populism, I explore how responsible business is impacted by populism and the scope for responsible business in different populist environments. In the context of authoritarianism, where conditions can be hostile, I explore how multinational companies can engage with stakeholders through their deliberative (talking) practices, and the implications of this for democracy.

"I'm using interviews, so qualitative methods. It's been very eye-opening to speak to businesspeople directly and tap into their experience, but it's also been hard to get those interviews, because the context is quite difficult to access. I've secured a good number of interviews now and I have started writing up one of my papers based on the data.

"My interest in the interface between business and society began during my time volunteering as a human rights advocate with an NGO, where I would visit the UN Human Rights Council several times a year to do advocacy work.

"During that time, I witnessed a shift in human rights advocacy away from states and towards the private sector. Business was perceived to be more responsive and have strong economic leverage, and so could lead speedy outcomes, particularly when states were unwilling to protect societal welfare.

"At the same time, I was a management lecturer and wanted to really explore the link between business, government and society. So it was both my NGO work and my teaching background that really sparked my interest in the role of business and how it can impact society.

"I'm doing the three-paper format for my PhD, which is where you write three connected papers. The first was a theoretical paper looking at how populism impacts political corporate social responsibility. It theorises that the use of mis- and disinformation by populists can affect public opinion on key hot-button issues and complicate a firm's CSR strategy.

"In the second paper, I'm looking at how multinationals in authoritarian contexts behave as political actors through the use of deliberation (talking spaces) to address social issues. I'm looking at the innovative and non-conventional ways that multinationals deliberate in such contexts, which are often hostile to democratic discussions, and the impact this is having on stakeholders and society.

"I firmly believe that companies have the potential to play a pivotal role in society, particularly where undemocratic governments fail to do so. Overall, my hope is that companies can use these findings when developing their responsible business strategy in anti-democratic contexts. What my work particularly highlights is the need for responsible companies to be carefully attuned to the challenging political environment in which they operate.

"The theories developed in my populism paper can help practitioners be cognizant of, and navigate responsible business in a polarised world, as well as helping companies to understand the associated limits and risks of responsible business in such contexts.

"In fact, the findings of the populism paper have already been translated to a practitioner audience with an article in *SSIR* (a publication read by managers all over the world), in which we translated our academic findings into a practical framework for responding to populism.

"As for my findings on deliberation, typically it's understood that public discussion on hot, and often controversial, social issues can't happen in an authoritarian context – but my research has found that companies do indeed deliberate, but in more private, covert ways. I can see this work being useful for multinational companies who want to responsibly navigate authoritarian spaces, and authentically engage in dialogue with stakeholders to address societal concerns."

LEADING PUBLICATIONS

Recent publications from our academics in AJG4 and 4* journals.

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Augustine, G, Hedberg, L, Choi, T-U & Lounsbury, M 2024, 'Wasted? The Downstream Effects of Social Movement–Backed Occupations', *Administrative Science Quarterly*.

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