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Making Wales an Anti-racist Nation: A ‘Public Value Mission’ in Action

A common criticism of business and management schools across the world is that they are not sufficiently invested in solving wider societal problems and concerns. A recent example that may be cited by critics to illustrate this is the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, business and management academics were generally slow in joining the debates both on the impacts of the virus and the transformation of post-pandemic societies to account for the failures of embedded structures, systems and processes. Arguably, the gaps left by business and management academics were filled by other disciplines. For example, scholars in healthcare have contributed several academic and practitioner research and lobbying activities through highlighting the health and well-being implications of social, economic and psychological pressures that were induced or exacerbated by the pandemic.

A second and pertinent example in relation to this article is that business and management schools continue to be criticised for not playing an active role in addressing issues of inequality and disadvantage in organisations and societies. However, as many articles in the previous issues of *Global Focus* reveal, many schools of business and management are addressing these criticisms in a variety of ways. Indeed, several schools are working hard to improve their external stakeholder engagement and to emphasise their social dividends and relevance, that which is commonly described as ‘public good’, or that which is referred to as ‘public value’ at Cardiff Business School. One example of this public value is the initiative to make Wales anti-racist. This example is significant because it is the first major national-level initiative on anti-racism by a ‘Western’ government. It is also notable because the design, development and implementation of the plan have been led by research emerging from Cardiff Business School. This plan thus provides a useful context for understanding the potential societal impact of business and management research.

Through a discussion of the recently developed Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (ArWAP), this article discusses the ways in which business and management research can shape the debates and policies that can lead to major societal transformations. The article begins with an overview of the context of racialisation in Wales and the UK to illustrate the necessity for change and to highlight the rationale for the adoption of an anti-racist approach rather than the conventional approaches to achieving racial equality. This is followed by a discussion of the process of developing the plan, with insights into the role of business and management research in guiding this process. The article concludes with a discussion of the

lessons that business and management schools and their scholars might learn from the ArWAP project in developing meaningful, impactful and societally relevant research.

Background to racialisation and racism in Wales and UK

Wales is a nation of 3.1 million people but it remains an integral part of the UK. This means that social issues such as racialisation and racism are best understood through the wider UK lens. In this regard, it is useful to note that race relations in the UK has a long history which has been explored from historic, economic, socio-psychological and health angles. A useful point to make in relation to this article is that previous race policies have failed to make a meaningful impact in reducing racial discrimination or in improving the lived experiences of ethnic minorities. The consequences of the failure of these policies can be seen in all areas of the lives of people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the UK. For example, in the labour market, ethnic minorities have consistently been up to twice as likely as their white counterparts to be unemployed since labour market statistics began in the UK. Those who are employed, commonly find that racism follow them through their working lives, with data showing, for example, that the average black doctor earns £10,000 less than their white counterparts and the average black nurse earns £2,700 less. Indeed, evidence from the respected think tank, Resolution Foundation, suggests that ethnic minorities in the UK lose £3.2 billion in annual cost of ethnic pay penalties, while another government sponsored review by Lady McGregor-Smith concluded that the full integration of ethnic minorities in organisations and institutions could add £24 billion a year to the UK economy. The disparities also extend to avoidable mortality, with data suggesting that black women in the UK are up to four times more likely to die in childbirth, and Asian women up to two times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts. In law and order, ethnic minorities are more likely to be jailed for the same crime than their white counterparts, and black people are seven times more likely to die following police restraint than their white counterparts. Further, specific evidence in Wales suggests that while the rate of police stop and search for white people is 8 per 1000 of the population, it is 56 per 1000 for black people and 16 per 1000 for those of Asian backgrounds and 28 per 1000 for people of mixed backgrounds.

Many researchers and commentators have argued that these anomalies represent outcomes in a society wherein racial discrimination is institutionalised. However, the history of this conclusion has been contested for a long time but especially since Lord Macpherson used the term ‘institutional racism’ to describe the activities of The Metropolitan Police Force

in London in the formal inquiry into the death of a young black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, published in 1999. Interestingly, the charge of institutional racism was repeated against The Metropolitan Police Force in another inquiry by Baroness Casey in 2023, in a way that suggests little change since 1999. Indeed, although several reports have highlighted the institutionalised nature of racism, the UK government, leaders of the devolved nations and major institutions have steered away from the social and political ramifications of accepting the charge of institutional racism, with the current UK government being especially hostile to any suggestion of structural racism. This denial of racism is widespread in the UK and is unfortunately profound in business and management schools and the universities that house them. The reluctance to accept the existence of institutional racism is, perhaps, a reflection of the domination of these organisations by white, middle class, middle-aged men who have been the major beneficiaries of racialisation. These attributes feed into the elite culture in academic and other professional institutions and such culture is maintained through ‘othering’, with questions such as ‘where do you come from?’, ‘which university did you attend?’ often posed in ways that reinforce the outsider status of ethnic minorities. Indeed, rather than look for alternative explanations of success, white business and management academics, like many other white professionals, are more likely to attribute their success entirely to their hard work and they commonly believe that this should be the same for everyone. Unfortunately, this view discounts the racialised anomalies that exist in degree awards, award of doctoral studentships, research funding and in employment and promotion opportunities. It is within this context that the significance of the work in Wales can be understood.

An anti-racist plan for Wales

At the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the First Minister of Wales became concerned about the disproportionate impacts of this disease on ethnic minority groups in Wales. He commissioned a series of investigations into this and one was tasked with exploring the socio-economic explanations of the disproportionate outcomes. I was invited to chair this group and following a three month investigation, the group published its report which, among other factors, identified institutional racism as contributing to the disproportionate outcomes from the pandemic (Ogbonna, 2020). The finding of institutional racism in relation to a country and not just organisations or institutions was profound and had implications that were widespread. The publication of this report also coincided with the killing of an unarmed black man, George Floyd, by law enforcement officers in USA before a social media watching world. This brutal

murder contributed a powerful world-wide visible manifestation of the potentially deleterious effect of racism.

However, while the acceptance of institutional racism at governmental level in Wales may have been novel, it was by no means surprising to those involved in race work. This is partly because scarcely publicised but important and authoritative social attitude surveys have consistently found that a sizeable proportion of British people have strong racist tendencies. Specifically, successive surveys by National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) show that racism is more common than people may ordinarily believe in the UK. The most recent survey of British racial attitudes in 2017 revealed that 26% of a representative sample of the British population described themselves as ‘very or a little prejudiced’ against people of other races. An earlier European Social Survey in 2014 also cited by NatCen found that 18% of British people believed that “some races or ethnic groups are born less intelligent” while 44% believed that “some races or ethnic groups are naturally harder working” (see Kelley et al, 2017). It is thus within the context of research-led investigations of the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 in Wales, the widespread protests from the killing of George Floyd, and our framing of the findings of wider British racial attitudes that the decision was made in Wales to fast track the race equality strategy that was developed prior to the pandemic.

Developing the plan

Under the leadership of two of the most powerful people in the Welsh Government (the First Minister and the Minister for Social Justice), a Steering Group was established with the remit of developing a plan that will help to eradicate racism in Wales. I was invited to co-chair this Group alongside the Permanent Secretary of the Welsh Government who is the highest ranked civil servant in Wales. The early decisions of the Group were potentially significant and provide the best examples of the ways in which research emerging from business and management schools could be deployed to shape external policy development. The Welsh Government wanted the Steering Group to adopt its existing template on race equality (developed prior the pandemic) in developing the plan. This template was based on the principles of equality of opportunities (EO) and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). I argued strongly (with the support of some members of the Steering Group) that EO and EDI approaches were implicated in the perpetuation of racialisation in that they have failed to make a meaningful impact on the lives of people from ethnic minority groups. This is because EO and EDI commonly adopt a colour-blind approach in ways that fail to recognise how historic

patterns of inequality and power relations combine to skew societal outcomes against ethnic minorities. Further, these approaches tend to advocate solutions which shift the burden of racism to the victims. That is, EO and EDI approaches by implication work on the assumption that there is a 'fair playing field'. This means that anomalies in outcomes are viewed as the results of individual deficiencies. In this regard, the task of organisations is presented as seeking ways of addressing these individual deficiencies (for example through additional training, mentoring, and coaching) rather than fixing the structures of racism which combine to weaken the agency of racial and ethnic minorities.

I drew on existing research on race and racialisation to position anti-racism as the only approach that will help to eliminate racism. Indeed, the finding that a sizeable proportion of the British population self-confessed to harbouring negative racial attitudes and the conclusion of the report of the socio-economic sub-group that institutional racism was implicated in the disproportionate outcomes from COVID-19 were instructive in this regard. I drew on my own research to argue that, contrary to the understanding of many, racism is not dichotomous, in that the opposite of racism is not non-racism. Instead, I positioned racism as a continuum wherein the racist individual is at one end, the non-racist is in the middle and the anti-racist is at the other end. Significantly, this understanding suggests that the opposite of racism is anti-racism. This is because while non-racism may be positive in intention, it is passive in action. Further, like all people in society, non-racists are often instilled with racist stereotypes from early ages which they commonly internalise and which can surface in times of anxiety. It is this type of response that gives rise to what is sometimes referred to as 'unconscious bias'. By contrast, anti-racism is a conscious process of *actively thinking* about and *changing* the structure, systems, processes and procedures that may give rise to racially differential outcomes. Importantly, these views were confirmed by discussions with the numerous ethnic minority groups that were involved in developing the plan. A critical aspect of the success of the plan is that we were able to convince Welsh Government Ministers on the importance of adopting an anti-racist approach in developing the plan.

A co-creation approach

The approach to developing the plan was collaborative and involved the cooperation of a variety of groups. The Steering Group members recognised the value of evidence based change from the onset and it commissioned Cardiff Business School's Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) to assist with the plan. The aim was to provide rapid reviews of evidence on the

substantive areas of concern. The evidence helped us to isolate the key problems in the individual policy areas, to understand how these have been interpreted and dealt with in the past, and to understand the intersectional implications of the various courses of action that were being explored. This also involved working with leading race and ethnicity practitioners and researchers not just from business and management backgrounds but also from healthcare, education and other policy areas. These experts were invited to attend meetings with Welsh Government policy leads and they participated in the numerous roundtable events that were held to shape the plan.

The Steering Group also involved representatives of key organisations and institutions in Wales such as trade union representatives, local government representatives and the Equality and Human Rights Commission, both in the Steering Group meetings and as part of the special roundtable events. However, the Steering Group placed members of ethnic minority groups in Wales at the centre, as the key stakeholders whose lived experiences of racism were pivotal to the recommendations and approaches adopted in the plan. We believed that it was important to ensure that the Welsh Government policy officials (who were predominantly white) had some understanding of the impacts of the policies they developed on the end users, in this case ethnic minorities. We recruited external members of the ethnic minority groups in Wales and we matched them carefully to work with individual policy leads. They were employed as ‘Community Mentors’ and among other things, their role was to help the policy leads to understand the dynamics and impacts of racism. We took the view that this was important work and we ensured that the mentors were properly remunerated.

Closing the implementation gap

Previous research contributions into the implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives commonly point to the difficulty that organisations have in controlling the agency of managers who do not always value or identify with the diversity agenda. This reluctance to engage with diversity creates an implementation gap (a gap between what is intended and what is realised). To this end, developing an approach that close the implementation gap is key to the success of any initiative, and we considered this to be even more important in relation to anti-racism. My research into diversity and inclusion and organisational cultures helped enormously in shaping the approach that was adopted in the plan. For example, we recognised the problematic nature of racialisation and the ways in which this increases the difficulties in closing the implementation gap. Theoretically, this problem is linked to culture, which was the topic of

my doctoral research and which remained my primary research area. I had spent most of my academic career theorising on culture and culture change and largely positioning my work on the idea that *planned* culture change (change in basic underlying assumptions or what is commonly referred to as ‘hearts and minds’ change) is difficult to achieve.

Juxtaposing this to our work on anti-racism led to the re-visiting of two competing approaches in relation to closing the implementation gap; whether the implementation of the plan should rely on appealing to the goodness of individuals, organisations and institutions to do the right thing and embrace anti-racism (voluntarism), or whether individuals, organisations and institutions should be made accountable for their actions in allowing racism to thrive and should be nudged to do the right thing (compulsion). We held a series of roundtable events to discuss this and the issue also featured prominently in the public consultation events that were held on the plan. We argued that changing intractable identity issues such as those around racialisation requires a different approach to be successful. This is because individual positions on identity (in this case race) tend to be relatively fixed, and such positions commonly require an element of compulsion to shift behaviours while trying to appeal to hearts and minds for sustained long-term change. The supporting argument here is that no similar change in history has been achieved without an element of compulsion. Indeed, it is arguable that slavery would have taken a lot longer to abolish had we waited for slave owners to change their hearts and minds. Similarly, equal pay for men and women may not have been secured in the UK and in other countries around the world if it had been left to the goodness of men to change their hearts and minds to promote organic change. We concluded that changing the visible manifestations of culture (behaviours, structures, systems and processes) could have longer-term ramifications through influencing the ways in which the deeper levels of culture (values, beliefs and assumptions) are interpreted and rationalised.

As the implementation process unfolds, we envisage that there will be challenges in managing the multiple and competing demands of the different stakeholders that are involved (the government, public institutions, businesses, white ethnic group and ethnic minority groups). We anticipate that members of ethnic minority groups who have been burdened by racism for so many generations will be impatient and expect change to be rapid and comprehensive. Conversely, businesses and institutions are likely to be concerned and may even protest against the perceived cost of any changes that will be required. The government is likely to grapple with its own internal culture challenges to ensure that it represents the beacon of good practice that it is encouraging others to emulate, and white society is likely to

embrace a mixture of support, fear and anxiety as some may erroneously view this as a zero-sum game that disadvantage them. The success of the implementation group will partly be measured by how well it manages these competing interests and expectations and how quickly some of the important milestones in the plan are achieved.

Conclusion

In this concluding section, it is useful to highlight three key lessons that business and management schools may learn from this work. The first is the importance of shaking off the perception of academic hubris that has affected the nature and extent of networking and interpersonal relationships between business and management schools and external stakeholders, especially government agencies and the civil service. Ann S. Tsui did an excellent job of articulating this problem and ways of improving it in previous issues of *Global Focus* but more work is required to establish the contemporary relevance of our scholarship and to link our work to the concerns of various stakeholders. My experience is that many senior civil servants are interested in collaborating with business and management academies in the same way they work with academies in the sciences and social sciences broadly defined.

The second and related issue is that we have to think about expanding the stakeholders we interact with beyond the traditional groups. Many researchers in business and management schools generate empirical data for their studies from managers and employees. However, in developing this plan, our most important source of data was the local ethnic minority groups. Our interaction with these stakeholders helped us to establish an evidential base and to highlight the importance of local community activism in change in ways that the traditional business and management research focus on formal organisations commonly preclude.

The final lesson is in relation to the potential role of business and management schools in leading the change towards anti-racism. This role arises from the importance of business and management schools in producing students who go on to lead private and public sector organisations and in relation to the research areas and topics we study. Race has for too long been neglected as a topic of research and theorising in business and management. Indeed, Sadhvi Dar and her colleagues recently wrote a powerful piece that characterised the ‘business school as racist’, an accusation they base on the ways in which business schools commonly uphold and perpetuate ‘white supremacy’. Business and management schools will require a radical re-think of their approach to race and racialisation to shake off this highly negative image. They should begin by acknowledging the centrality of race and racialisation in

organising and incorporate this into mainstream theorising in business management. Mainstreaming understanding of racism should go beyond the current focus of research and behavioural scrutiny on ethnic minorities as victims of racism. This should extend to studying and scrutinising the behaviours of white people as those who perpetrate racism, who witness racism, who preside over systems that maintain racism and as those who have the power to effect meaningful change (see also Christian et al, 2019). Similarly, business and management schools should seek to lead the charge on decolonisation by decolonising fully all the courses that are taught in such institutions. This will help to incorporate all cultures, values and histories in knowledge creation and development and encourage students and other learners to see the positive in ‘difference’ rather than find this threatening.

Overall, the work we are doing in Wales is still at an early phase and it will take a few years to evaluate the success. However, what is certain is that this work presents an exciting example of the application of public value. Other business and management schools are encouraged follow the example of Cardiff to extend their public value credentials to issues such as race and ethnicity that are traditionally neglected. In this regard, business and management schools can use their considerable power and influence to give voice to groups that are powerless and to help in promoting fairness and transforming society. The work to make Wales anti-racist is huge and is one that will face many obstacles and challenges. However, it is certain that the Anti-racist Wales initiative has laid the foundation for societal changes that are likely to be profound.

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