Re-Purposing Business Schools: Potential, Progress, and Precarity

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ABSTRACT   With recent management studies of organizational purpose concentrating on the reactions of corporate elites to external change stimuli, little attention has been given to the emergent phenomenon of internally-driven business school re-purposing. Breaking with a tradition of incremental change in the field, re-purposing denotes a transformational process that arises from business school leaders' attempts to focus their organizations on the pursuit of their purpose to enhance the public good, from management scholarship and the way that business schools operate. This paper frames business school re-purposing as the endogenous enactment of a purpose logic, and it draws from early cases in the UK and France to present an analysis of the leadership activity involved. The potential for further business school re-purposing is assessed critically with reference to general challenges of infusing purpose into organizations, and the specific threats posed by a field that is dominated by a countervailing logic of purpose, a conservative approach to management, and increasing financial pressures.

Keywords: business schools, de-purposed, leadership, purpose, re-purposing

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 70 years after Selznick (1957, p. 17) analysed how leaders 'infused' into organizations, commitments to advancing their purpose of enhancing the public good, there is a resurgence of interest in purpose among management scholars (Chua et al., 2024; Davis, 2021; George et al., 2021; Mayer, 2021; Zenger, 2023). In the interim, leadership activity in many organizational fields was directed towards the achievement of instrumental outputs such as profit (Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020). From a neo-classical economics perspective, this represents the rational and ethical way for leaders to pursue

organizations' purpose of advancing the public good (viewed as aggregate welfare) through the 'trickle-down' of producer and consumer surpluses (Friedman, 1970; Jensen, 2002).

Recognizing that the widespread enactment of the *instrumental* logic of purposeful action has done little to enhance the public good in terms of addressing grand challenges such as inequity and environmental degradation, some leaders have begun to 'repurpose' their organizations to address, more directly, 'the problems of people and planet' (Mayer, 2021, p. 887). From an institutional perspective (Thornton et al., 2012), re-purposing can be viewed as the enactment of a *normative* logic of purposeful action which asserts that leaders should transform their organizations to enhance the public good by addressing grand challenges (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1994; Ocasio et al., 2023). This normative conceptualization of purposeful action reframes leadership as vocational (Weber, 1946), and it suggests that processes of organizational repurposing offer a promising context for its study.

With most contemporary management research on purpose focussed on corporate responses to external change stimuli (Chua et al., 2024; Jasinenko and Steuber, 2023; Lashitew et al., 2024; Mayer, 2021; Zenger, 2023), analysts have neglected the emergent process of endogenous (internally-driven) re-purposing in the field of business schools (Kitchener et al., 2022). There, some of the first institutions (e.g., Harvard and Wharton) were established by leaders who sought to enhance the public good by addressing the contemporary grand challenge of professionalizing managers through a broad curriculum that included ethics and institutional economics (Augier and March, 2011; Khurana, 2007). However, from the mid-1970s, many business school leaders (re)directed all four areas of their organization's activity (teaching, research, internal management, and external engagement) towards the achievement of outputs such as financial contributions to parent universities (Parker, 2018). While this process (which I call de-purposing) enacted the prevailing instrumental logic of purposeful action, it hampered the capacity of all four areas of business schools activity to enhance the public good by addressing grand challenges (Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020).

Against a growing recognition that many business schools could do more to enhance the public good, it is reported that some leaders have begun to re-direct their organizations' teaching and research to address grand challenges such as sustainability (Wickert et al., 2021). That pattern of incremental adaptation has been accompanied by very few attempts at the transformational change (Laasch et al., 2022) required for business school leaders to re-purpose all four of their school's activities (Kitchener and Ashworth, 2023). With the pattern of incremental change to de-purposed business schools as it is motivating problem/phenomenon, this paper offers a pragmatic and research-informed 'perspective' (Suddaby et al., 2023a) on business school re-purposing. The primary aim is to broaden the 'scope of our thinking' (Gilson and Goldberg, 2015), and to prompt action. I do this by moving beyond critiques of business schools to introduce a conception of their re-purposing, review progress to date, and assess the potential for further development.

This perspective on business school re-purposing is elaborated through the four main sections of this paper. Section one builds from recent institutional analyses of purpose (Ocasio et al., 2023) to introduce my conceptions of organizational purpose as a normative societal logic of action towards public good enhancement, and the purpose of the business school as a field logic of public good enhancement from management scholarship and business school operations. Section two introduces the context of this perspective by explaining how the pattern of incremental change to de-purposed business schools restricts the creation of

public good from all four areas of business school operation. I then frame business school re-purposing as an endogenous transformational process through which leaders enact normative purpose logic to enhance their organizations' contribution to the public good, and draw from Selznick (1957, 2008) to indicate five features of re-purposing leadership.

Section four summarizes the structural changes and leadership practices emergent within early attempts to re-purpose business schools. These insights are drawn from my 'horizon scan' (Bussey, 2014) of three information sources: a study of the public good of United Kingdom (UK) business schools (Chartered Association of Business Schools [CABS], 2021), some 'learning from doing' (Pettigrew, 2005) that I gained trying to re-purpose Cardiff Business School (2012–2018), and insights gained from a visit to study re-purposing efforts at HEC Paris in 2023. In concluding this perspective, I present a critical assessment of three themes that emerged from early cases of business school re-purposing: a vocational approach to purposeful leadership, the implications for business schools' internal stakeholders and external partners, and the precarious (Selznick, 1957) nature of re-purposing within a field that is dominated by a countervailing logic of purpose, a conservative approach to management, and increasing financial pressures.

ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE AND THE PURPOSE OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL

The resurgence of interest in purpose among management researchers has produced a diverse literature that is fragmented along multiple dimensions (Chua et al., 2024). For example, some analysts frame purpose as a macro-societal phenomenon that applies at the level of 'the corporation' (George et al., 2021; Mayer, 2021). Others view purpose as particularistic and idiographic in nature, applying to a firm in its unique culture and history (Besharov and Mitzinneck, 2023; Morrison and Mota, 2023). While most recent studies have adopted an 'outside-in' perspective to consider corporate purpose in relation to external demands (Suddaby et al., 2023b), fewer have adopted an 'inside-out' approach to focus on the proactive role of leadership in enacting change (Almandoz, 2023). Researchers of purpose have also applied a wide variety of theoretical frames including institutional theory, corporate governance, and identity theory (George et al., 2021). The varied perspectives within this pluralistic research activity, and its concentration on corporate contexts, necessitate the following specification of my conceptions of organizational purpose, the purpose of the business school, and business school re-purposing.

Organizational Purpose

Building on recent institutional scholarship (Ocasio et al., 2023; Rindova and Martins, 2023), purpose is defined here as a normative societal logic of action about how leaders should enhance the public good. In contrast to the prevailing logic of purposeful action, which asserts that the public good is best served by leaders prioritizing the achievement of instrumental organizational outputs such as profit (Friedman, 1970), the normative purpose logic holds that organizational leaders should act vocationally to 're-purpose' organizations to, more directly, address societal grand challenges such as environmental degradation (Mayer, 2021).

While this characterization of a normative logic bears some resemblance to the depiction of professional logic (Thornton et al., 2012), it focuses on leaders' actions to advance the public good defined in terms of grand challenges, and it is applicable to professional and other fields, including commerce (Ocasio et al., 2023).

This conception of a normative logic of purposeful action rests on institutionalists' understanding that organizational leaders instantiate sets of beliefs and values that enable and constrain behaviour within 'fields' of organizations, such as business schools (Thornton et al., 2012). Earlier institutional analysis emphasized that a logic may come to dominate a field to the extent that it becomes taken-for-granted and resistant to transformational change (e.g., the instrumental logic in the business school field). This paper follows more recent institutional analyses to consider how alternative logics can emerge through combinations of (internal) agency and (external) societal shifts (Suddaby et al., 2023b).

My conceptualization of purpose as a normative logic links (but does not conflate) moral 'talk' of 'reasons for being' (raison d'être) with the pragmatic 'walk' of purpose-driven managerial practice (Kimsey et al., 2023). It also incorporates key 'facets' of three other conceptions of purpose by: expressing an overarching reason for being, offering an alternative to output maximization, and providing a catalyst for transformational change (Besharov and Mitzinneck, 2023). This definition of organizational purpose is, however, most closely aligned to the 'reason for being' perspective because it presents an 'inside-out view' of the origins of purpose as deriving, primarily, from the work of organizational leaders (Ocasio et al., 2023; Selznick, 1957).

The Purpose of the Business School: Enhancing the Public Good by Addressing Grand Challenges

With organizational purpose defined as a normative logic of action to enhance the public good, a conception of the purpose of the business school requires explication of its public good (Kitchener and Ashworth, 2023; Suddaby, 2024; Thomas and Starkey, 2019). To do this, I extend Brewer's (2013) manifesto for a new public social science to argue that the public good of business schools arises from the combination of management scholarship (teaching and research) that addresses (identifies, analyses, and ameliorates) grand challenges, purpose-driven internal governance, and broad engagement with civic society. As advocated by the Responsible Research for Business Management (RRBM) Network, the public good of business school research is enhanced through work that aims to benefit business and the broader society, is grand-challenge (not discipline) oriented, and involves collaboration across all branches of knowledge, not just traditional business school disciplines.

This type of business school research arises from syncretic endeavour (Suddaby, 2024) that not only seeks to objectively analyse the present state, but then to use the knowledge to enhance the public good by addressing grand challenges. Brewer (2013) argues that multi-disciplinarity forms the basis for this because addressing complex societal problems requires a variety of expertise and methodologies. Sustainability, and decent work, for example, require multi-disciplinarity because they demand complex treatments that go well beyond redistributive justice. They invoke moral and philosophical ideas about human dignity but also have technical dimensions that that are best understood by breaking down barriers between medicine, the natural sciences, and the social sciences (Baudoin et al., 2022).

To enhance the public good of business school teaching, the British Academy's ([BA], 2022) Future of the Corporation (FoC) project recommends that business schools put 'purpose at the heart' of their education activity. To achieve this, it is suggested that: (a) teaching should start with the question 'what is the purpose of' organizations?' and use the FoC Principles for Purposeful Business (or similar) as a guide to responses, and (b) business schools should encourage the use of existing, and the production of new, teaching resources that reflect purpose logic. The public good of business schools teaching would then be enhanced from the nurturing of purposeful students who are equipped and motivated to address grand challenges after graduating. A recent JMS point-counterpoint discusses approaches to addressing this in the area of strategy scholarship and climate change (Wickert and Muzio, 2024).

The public good of business schools' internal management stems from infusing purpose into their own organizations by creating governance arrangements that generate accountability for the public good (BA, 2022). The public good of business schools' external activity arises from engagement with a broad range of publics with whom the nature of problems are determined and addressed. As Brewer (2013, p. 200) notes, this may cause discomfort for some 'critical scholars' as it means them towards working with governments, corporations, and other elites as well as marginalized groups, non-governmental organizations, and local community groups.

Having conceived the purpose of business schools in terms of enhancing the public good, the next section introduces the two main concerns of this perspective (de-purposed business schools and incremental change), and the emergent transformational process of business school re-purposing.

DE-PURPOSED BUSINESS SCHOOLS, INCREMENTAL CHANGE, AND RE-PURPOSING

Despite some historical and contemporary heterogeneity among the world's 14,000 business schools (Kaplan, 2018; Spicer et al., 2021), the leadership of many has enacted instrumental logic to frame the purpose (and public good) of business school in terms of achieving organizational outputs such as financial contributions to (demanding) parent universities, rankings, and graduate salary premia (Alajoutsijarvi et al., 2018; Alajoutsijarvi and Siltaoju, 2015; Arielli et al., 2016). The intellectual roots of this approach can be traced to the work of North American business school economists such as Friedman (1970), and Jensen and Meckling (1976). From the mid-1970s, their instrument logic of enhancing the public good by prioritizing the achievement of organizational outputs came to dominate the operation of both corporations and business schools (Khurana, 2007; West, 2011). One lesson from that transformation is the powerful role played by a social movement, arising from the Mont Pelerin Society, that includes academics, corporate elites, foundations, media interests, and politicians (Fourcade and Khurana, 2013). The success of that movement's advocacy of instrumental purpose logic is reflected in, and reinforced through, varying local combinations of business schools leaders' managerialist practices, careerist faculty, and consumerist students (Fleming, 2020).

Critics have discussed various implications of business schools' enactment of instrumental purpose logic (Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020; Parker, 2018), and it has been debated whether the 'blame' lies more with the neo-liberal regimes of parent universities, or the business school academics and leaders who have taught, advocated, and enacted instrumental rationality within universities (Marinetto, 2019). Moving beyond those well-rehearsed debates, the primary concern of this paper is that business schools leaders' enactment of instrumental purpose logic has directed their 'attention' (Ocasio, 2011, p. 189) away from enhancing the public good in all four areas of business school operation.

In business school education, the potential to enhance the public good from the multi-disciplinary teaching of diverse perspectives is hamstrung by leaders' concern for outputs such as graduate salary premia. This encourages single-disciplinary teaching and a focus on the creation of (narrower) shareholder value over (broader) stakeholder value (Fotaki and Prasad, 2015; Rocha et al., 2021). As a result, the teaching of management disciplines fails to adequately address grand challenges such as climate change (Wickert and Muzio, 2024), and most business school graduates have viewed profit as the purpose of the corporation (West, 2011).

In business school research, contributions to public good through the multi-disciplinary study of grand challenges is hampered by a concern for outputs, such as journal rankings and accreditations, which encourages single-disciplinary and instrumental work (Harley and Fleming, 2021). The capacity for business schools to enhance public good through their own governance is impeded by recruitment, promotion, and performance management systems that focus on instrumental outputs (McCann et al., 2020; Parker, 2018). Business schools' external engagement activity conducted to enhance outputs (e.g., graduate salary premia) tends to focus on a narrow set of elite partners, such as large corporations. This reduces the scope for advancing the public good through interactions with a broader range of stakeholders (Kitchener et al., 2022). With business school leaders focussed on the achievement of outputs from all four areas of their schools' operations, their attention has been diverted away from enhancing the public good.

Although outputs-driven business schools are most evident closer to the source of their academic inspiration, they are prevalent in contexts such as Europe. Here, business schools have tended to display an earlier and stronger commitment to socially responsible and pluralistic management education, as stressed by the European Academy for Business in Society, the United Nation's Principles for Responsible Management Education (UMPRME), and the RRBM network. Despite such moderating influences in some regions, a focus on financial contributions and other outputs commands the attention of business school leaders globally. Transformational change has been rare (Laasch et al., 2022), despite proposals for new business school models (Currie et al., 2016; Ferlie et al., 2010) and calls for reform from some senior academics (Parker, 2018; Rocha et al., 2021) and journal editors (George et al., 2016). The transformational change required for business school to realize their potential to enhance the public good remains uncommon despite incremental changes to business school rankings, accreditation criteria, and the increased weighting for impact case studies in governmental research assessment exercises (Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020).

Instrumental and Conservative Business School Leadership

Some senior members of the business school community have recently pointed to the role that instrumental and conservative business school leadership has played in maintaining the pattern of incremental change described above. Davies et al. (2023, p. 29) argue that there has been 'a deficit of strategic leadership in business schools with many leaders having [only] muddled through and made incremental, minor changes' to the instrumental scripts handed to them by parent universities. Similarly, in Cornuel's (2022) anthology, the rector of an Eastern European business school reports a collective 'sin of convenient inertia', and the editor notes that most of his contributors 'refrain from attaching themselves to the doxa that a change in the system of management education is on the doorstep of our societies' (p. 4). Having acknowledged an historical pattern of 'typically impoverished' change among business schools, former deans, such as Peter Tufano of Said Business School, now implore their successors to 'experiment' as transformational change agents.

For some, the instrumentalism and conservatism of business school leadership is surprising given that innovation and change management are staples of their schools' teaching and research programmes. For others, instrumentalism and incremental change are to be expected because they align with the dominant logic of outputs-driven higher education (Marinetto and Dallyn, 2017). Under this view, inertia is explained by the constraints on business school leaders' strategic agency, for example, short tenures, and their 'squeezed' middle manager positions between faculty and neo-liberal university regimes. It could also be argued that the limited attempts to transform business schools is explained by their strong delivery of instrumental outputs. When assessed against certain measures, business schools have been heralded as the major success story of twentieth-century higher education (Thomas, 2017). By 2022, the global field of business schools had swelled to nearly 14,000 in number. It generates £400 billion in annual teaching revenues and supports lucrative academic careers (Parker, 2018). While some celebrate these outcomes, this paper is motivated by the growing acceptance that their pursuit has hampered business schools' potential to enhance public good from the value of management scholarship, and the way that they organize their activity. The next section introduces re-purposing as an emergent process of transformation change for business schools to better realize that potential.

Re-Purposing Business Schools

In contrast to the incremental changes that many business schools have adopted to enhance the public good (typically in teaching and or research), re-purposing is used here to refer to a transformational process through which leaders direct all four areas of business school operation to enhance the public good. Although talk of re-purposing business schools is relatively new, the term re-purposing first emerged in analyses of corporate responses to external stimuli. Key drivers include the Business Roundtables' re-statement of corporate governance (1997), and Chairman Fink's (2018) letter to his Blackrock investors stating that purpose is a prerequisite for an organization to 'achieve its full potential' (BA, 2022; Hollensbe et al., 2014; Quinn and Thakor, 2018; White et al., 2017).

While I use the same term (re-purposing) here, a key point of difference is that I frame business school re-purposing as an 'inside-out' attempt to better realize their potential for enhancing the public good.

The idea of business school re-purposing has clear linkages with some historical business school models (Spicer et al., 2021), and some earlier proposals for business school transformation (Currie et al., 2016; Ferlie et al., 2010). It is also informed by the scholarship of, what I term, the 'academic wing' of a nascent re-purposing movement (Almandoz, 2023). That includes Ghoshal's (2005) argument, contra instrumental logic, that the public good is best served by organizational action being coordinated by purpose (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1994). This assertion is supported by a growing body of research demonstrating that purpose-driven organizations enhance the public good through mechanisms of enhanced trust, autonomy, and commitment (Durand and Frerot, 2022; Jasinenko and Steuber, 2023). While this logic emphasizes that business school purpose needs to be pursued in a way that enhances the ultimate end (public good), it is equally clear that financial surpluses/profits are an important means to that end because they provide the resources necessary to achieve the purpose (Mayer, 2021, p. 887).

In adopting an inside-out view of purpose (Almandoz, 2023), this paper draws from Selznick (1957, 2008) to direct attention to five aspects of leadership required for business school re-purposing. First, it demands a form of leadership (whether collectively or individually performed) that views as a vocation, the building of purpose into social structures through the 'transformation of an engineered, technical, arrangement of building blocks into a social organism' (Selznick, 1957, p. 139). While it is understood that no business school leadership can (or should) avoid concern for the conditions of continued organizational existence, it is viewed as failing if it permits the achievement of outputs to become the sole criterion of success (Besharov and Khurana, 2015). This threat can be mitigated by leaders establishing 'integrating myths' that state, in inspiring language, what is distinctive about the purpose of the organization and using them as a basis for infusing purpose (Selznick, 1957 p. 151).

Second, Selznick (1957) is clear that the contextual nature of organizational purpose may limit the agency of leaders to formulate, articulate, enact, and maintain the integrity of purpose. However, they should begin by leveraging and reinterpreting their organization's history and community to craft a sense of purpose. The complexity of this task brings into focus, the *motivation* of business school leaders to break with existing practices, and their *capacity* for embedding changes that are consistent with purpose. Selznick's (1957) concern about leaders' capacity to maintain institutional integrity (by linking purpose with actions) is sharpened in the light of allegations of that not happening in cases of corporate 'purpose-washing' (Raghunandan and Rajgopal, 2022; Gulati and Wohlgezogen, 2023. Ocasio et al., 2023). This a critical concern because 'the defence of integrity is also a defence of the organization's distinctive competence' (Selznick, 1957, p. 139).

Third, as Selznick's (1949) study of the Tennessee Valley Authority showed, organizational purpose is precarious (fragile, difficult to sustain) against internal bureaucratic practices, and it is at risk of co-optation by external stakeholders who seek to impose countervailing logics (Ocasio et al., 2023). Illustrating the internal type of precarity, Kraatz et al.'s (2010) study of US liberal arts colleges shows how purpose can be displaced when

(even well-intentioned) leaders fail to appreciate how new administrative arrangements can undermine organizational purpose. The external form of purpose precarity underscores the need for business school leaders to adopt the role of acute, 'statesmen' who champion organizational purpose outwardly (Selznick, 1957).

Fourth Selznick (1957, p. 106) identifies the leadership task of nurturing an 'institutional core' of members whose own values reflect the purpose of the organization, and socializing members to 'create a unified group and give the organization a special identity'. Finally, preceding Harley's (2019) call for senior academics to be role models in transforming business schools, Selznick (1957, pp. 142–143) emphasizes the need for leaders to 'play the part' by enacting purpose in their own practices. This requires leaders who not only infuse purpose into the life of others, but who also internalize that meaning and represent it their own practice.

PROGRESS IN THE RE-PURPOSING OF BUSINESS SCHOOLS

To examine progress towards the re-purposing of business schools, this section draws from the CABS (2021) study of UK business schools, my experience of re-purposing a business school (Kitchener, 2021), and insights gained from my visit to study re-purposing efforts at HEC Paris in 2023. I summarize insights from these three sources in a discussion of first, the operational changes, and second, the leadership practices involved with early attempts to re-purpose business schools.

Re-Purposing Business School Operations

In 2019, CABS established a taskforce to investigate the public good of its 121 UK business school members. I took the role as academic lead of that initiative having just completed a post-deanship sabbatical at Said Business School, University of Oxford. Over the course of that year, my discussions with Colin Mayer (lead of the FoC project) inspired me to build on my experience of leading change at Cardiff Business School and think about business school purpose. The CABS Taskforce (itself) intrigued me as a possible indication of the growing legitimacy of normative purpose logic in the business school field, and it presented an opportunity to explore developments. To do this, we reviewed the SIP (Sharing Information on Progress) reports for UK business schools, which signatories have to lodge every two years to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to UNPRME principles, and we conducted a survey of UK business schools deans who were asked to respond to around 30 questions about their understanding of public good, where it stood in their priorities, and how it was delivered in each functional area of their schools.

The CABS Taskforce survey identified some indictors of purpose logic informing business school leaders' practice in the UK. Most responding deans provided illustrations of ways that their schools enhanced the public good, typically in the form of innovations in individual teaching modules or research projects. Twenty of the 161 examples provided were explored as case studies and presented as 'promising practices' for enhancing the public good of business schools (CABS, 2021). However, our work also found three indicators of the precarious nature of normative purpose logic in the UK business school field. First, the 28 per cent response rate to our survey was typical for CABS surveys, and

it likely reflects deans' 'busyness'. It did not, however, demonstrate that accounting for their school's public good purpose is a key priority of most business school deans. Second, during interviews with faculty who developed the promising practices, some expressed frustration that, despite their efforts having been under-resourced, their deans 'happily' reported them internally, and in external initiatives such as the CABS survey and accreditation reports. While the term 'purpose-washing' was not used, the sense was conveyed.

Third, beyond the examples of incremental change, only seven schools (Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow Caledonian, London Fashion, Manchester, Queen's Belfast, and Queen Mary) articulated a clear sense of purpose and demonstrated that they had started to use it to guide change in all four areas of business school activity. Inspired by learning from my time at Oxford, these organizations were labelled purpose-driven schools (P-Schools) in recognition of their transformational approach to change.

While local contexts provided a variety of approaches to re-purposing, some general patterns emerged that are consistent with the conception of the public good of business schools described earlier. In P-Schools, education systems are being re-designed to enhance public good through multi-disciplinary coverage of grand challenges to provide graduates with the skills necessary to better support purposeful careers in purpose-driven organizations. This often begins with curriculum reviews that are designed to enhance the public good of teaching, rather than (just) assign United Nations Sustainable Development Goal logos to course brochures. This commonly reported phenomenon (Weybrecht, 2022) could be viewed as a form of purpose-washing where it is not accompanied by significant changes to curricula. Each of the P-Schools evidenced that research and engagement is being coordinated towards enhancing the public good. Sometimes guided by RRBM principles, an emphasis is placed on addressing grand challenges with a strong commitment to both broader stakeholder involvement, and intellectual pluralism (Aguinis et al., 2014). Common approaches include targeted research funding schemes, and the establishment of multi-disciplinary research centres that address grand challenges.

The Leadership of Business School Re-Purposing

Following Selznick (1957), the leadership of business school re-purposing can be framed as a process of infusing commitments to enhance the public good into social structures. This section describes how the leaders of P-Schools are addressing this task by stating purpose, organizing it, and reporting progress towards it.

Stating purpose. In a similar vein to Selznick's (1957) argument about the important role of socially-integrating myths, corporate re-purposing research reports that, for purposeful governance to be effective, organizations must be clear about their raison d'être (reason for being) and articulate it within a stakeholder-inclusive 'statement of purpose' that defines the public good it will create (Eccles et al., 2020). This form of organizational statement of benefit for public good can be distinguished from statements of corporate attributes such as vision, mission, and values (Kenny, 2014). Earlier management scholarship holds that statements of organizational purpose should be distinctive and sufficiently inspiring to convince stakeholders of the trade-offs involved with making the stated contribution towards public good (Freeman, 1984).

All seven of CABS' P-Schools display leadership approaches based on inculcating in colleagues, a higher sense of their contribution to what the school does, and why and how they do it. Each school has developed an articulation of this within a purpose statement. Beyond this similarity, the purposes of the seven P-Schools vary in two main respects. First, the local conceptualization of purpose varies in each school. So, for example, while Manchester exists to promote 'Social Responsibility', Birmingham enhances 'Responsible Management', and Glasgow Caledonian promotes the 'Common Good'. Each of these purpose articulations reflect the school's unique context and history (Besharov and Mitzinneck, 2023; Selznick, 1957). At Glasgow, for example, the term 'common good' was derived from the University's original crest.

The second point of variation among P-Schools is the source of the local conception of purpose. In four P-Schools, leaders worked with colleagues to develop the conception of purpose internally (Birmingham, Cardiff, Queen's Belfast, and QMUL). In the other three cases, purpose was conceived by the parent university and then cascaded down into all departments, including the business school (Manchester, Glasgow Caledonian, and UAL). It will be interesting to observe whether internally derived purpose statements are more, or less, precarious than their corporate cousins.

While the CABS (2021) study says little about how the business school purpose statements emerged, one account is provided in my report of change at Cardiff Business School (Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020). In that process, the purpose statement and supporting 'directions for travel' in teaching, research, engagement, and self-governance were co-created with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. During many workshops and seminars over a five-year period, discussions of the school's purpose combined a *purposive* aspect of moving away from the dominant instrumental logic, and a *purposeful* element of a move towards a normative logic of enhancing the public good.

Organizing purpose. The early corporate re-purposing literature placed an emphasis on *the* senior leader as 'purpose champion' (EY Beacon Institute, 2016, p. 14). In an alternative approach, the business press reports the emergence of a specialized Chief Purpose Officer (CPO) role and suggests that it helps the development of purpose-driven organizations (Biderman-Gross, 2020). Common activities among CPOs include efforts to inspire purposeful innovation from colleagues and to report aligned activity upwards internally and to external audiences (Izzo and Vanderweillen, 2018). The CABS (2021) study reports that each of the P-Schools established some form of purpose function to co-ordinate aligned innovations across their four main activity areas. This often involves the Dean, or some combination of senior leaders, performing the CPO role. The main objective is to prompt purposeful innovation from colleagues, and to report purposeful activity upwards internally, and to external audiences. At most of the P-Schools, the CPO role operates in collaboration with a committee or board charged with purposeful strategy development, for example, Birmingham's Responsible Business Committee, Cardiff's Shadow Management Board, and Manchester's Social Responsibility Committee. Leaders of P-Schools reported that an effective means of infusing purpose within their schools was to incorporate discussions of contributions to purpose in hiring and promotion discussions. This

addresses Selznick's (1957) leadership tasks of recruiting and socializing members to create a unified sense of purpose, and it illustrates one of the ways that the 'relaxing of metrics' supports re-purposing (Kimsey et al., 2023).

I am conscious that so far in this account, an impression may have been given that the reported cases of re-purposing are quick, linear, and unproblematic. That is neither my belief, nor my intention. I have previously described some of the challenges from a dean's perspective (Kitchener and Delbridge, 2020). A very different view is offered by management academics who report their experience at an institution they call 'Civic', but which is widely believed to be one of the P-Schools mentioned earlier. Within an organization that espouses normative purpose logic, they describe 'neo-Stalinist organizing principles of targets and terror' that damage forms of public good including workplace democracy and freedom of speech (McCann et al., 2020, p. 431). Of course, this case can be interpreted in a number of ways. A more generous reader might feel that such tensions during re-purposing transitions are inevitable and 'you won't get it perfectly right for everyone all the time. The purity of your intention is what counts, along with the ferocity with which you pursue and manifest it' (Gulati, 2022, p. 52). A less sympathetic reader may conclude that the Civic case is far removed from the transitional or misguided forms of purpose subversion described by Kraatz et al. (2010), and that it may indicate 'purpose washing'.

I developed further insights into business school re-purposing during a recent study visit to HEC Paris. There, for nearly 15 years, Rodolphe Durand has combined his formal position of director of the School's Society and Organization (S&O) Institute with an informal CPO role to develop many features of the P-Schools described earlier. Durand began his change process with an outline for a business school that 'leads with purpose for an inclusive and sustainable world' in which faculty are encouraged to 'think, teach, and act' in a purposive way. When faced with limited internal resources to support his re-purposing project, Durand searched for support from the HEC Foundation and external allies. Success in the form of partnerships with major firms like Danone and Schneider Electric, senior business leaders including Best Buy's former CEO Hubert Joly, and social enterprises then helped develop the school's academic research on grand challenges such as inclusive economy, sustainability, and purpose. This body of work embodies RRBM principles and has inspired the enthusiastic engagement of colleagues across the schools' disciplines. I saw this first-hand while attending an annual 'Purpose-Day' held in the centre of Paris. This event showcased HEC's stream of empirical research demonstrating how the performance of purposeful firms improves through the mechanisms of enhanced trust, autonomy, and commitment (Durand and Frerot, 2022). The event attracted an impressive array of academic and commercial partners, including the leaders of large corporations such as Adecco and Veolia.

During my visit to HEC, I also witnessed how the school's research on purpose has inspired change in its educational offering under the direction of Cecile de Lisle, Executive Director of the S&O Institute. Many of the innovations use HEC's award-winning new teaching cases and publications on purposeful organizations. While helping to judge an MBA student presentation competition within a module led by a finance professor, I found that each project explored practical challenges associated with enacting the normative purpose logic. In my informal conversations with

students afterwards, most stated that they had been inspired by their study of purpose at HEC, and that it would inform their career choices. At the undergraduate level at HEC, all 400 students participate in a 3-year purposeful leadership programme designed to discover their sense of purpose with the help of field experiences, and human and social sciences. This process begins with a four-day outdoors retreat at a rural site. A week later, the students engage in four days of 'stepping back' debates and workshops involving major French figures and CEOs who share their personal discovery of purpose. They then experience 30 hours of community work and 3 weeks of blue-collar internship. From this, the students write a thesis on a topic concerned with implementing (what I term) the normative logic of leadership. When considered against the conception of the public good of business school teaching outlined earlier, HEC would appear to be making good progress towards nurturing purpose-driven students who are equipped and motivated to enhance the public good by addressing grand challenges.

Reporting progress on purpose. In recognition of the precarity of purpose, the corporate reform movement recommends that organizational performance should be measured and reported as 'progress towards purpose' (BA, 2019). This involves extending beyond standard financial reporting approaches to include the production and usage of a broad range of capitals including human, intellectual, natural, social, material, and financial (Mayer, 2018; Stroehle et al., 2018).

The CABS (2021) study found that among the P-Schools that have begun to address this challenge, the most common approach involves reporting to UNPRME principles, typically within SiP reports, and internal processes of curriculum auditing and review. Beyond that, however, Cardiff Business Schools' *Annual Public Value Report* was found to be one of the first attempts to measure and narrate a business schools' progress towards purpose against indicators of economic impact, sustainability, and staff attitudes (Kitchener, 2021). While demonstrating the school's economic contribution and colleagues' perception of progress towards purpose, the report found that the largest contributor to the school's carbon footprint is the travel of international students who are also its largest source of revenue. This finding surfaced a tension between the school's purpose, and the strategy of her corporate parent; a tension that has yet to be resolved. While a generous reader may view this as an example of purpose precarity, some colleagues viewed it to be a form of purpose washing that threatened the integrity of the school.

THE POTENTIAL AND PRECARITY OF BUSINESS SCHOOL RE-PURPOSING

With the pattern of incremental change to de-purposed business schools as it's motivating phenomenon, this paper offered a pragmatic and research-informed perspective on business school transformation through re-purposing. The primary aim was to broaden the scope of thinking and prompt action by introducing business school re-purposing, reviewing progress to date, and critically assessing the potential for further development.

To extend the scope of current thinking about organizational purpose (Chua et al., 2024), I built from institutional analyses (Ocasio et al., 2023) to introduce my understanding of organizational purpose as a normative societal logic of purposeful action towards grand challenges, and the purpose of the business school as a field logic of public good enhancement from management scholarship and business school operations. I then framed re-purposing as an endogenous transformation process to enact normative purpose logic across all four areas of business school operations (teaching, research, internal management, and external engagement). These conceptions are offered as a starting point for elaboration in future studies of business school re-purposing.

Throughout this paper, I have followed (Selznick, 1957) to frame purpose as deriving primarily from the work that is (or is not) done by organizational leaders. I began by arguing that an historical pattern of business schools leaders' (mere) incremental changes to an instrumental approach to achieving purpose prevented their organizations from realizing their potential to enhance public good from each of their four main functional areas. My 'horizon scan' (Bussey, 2014) of some early attempts to re-purpose business schools surfaced three themes that warrant critical appraisal: a vocational approach to purposeful leadership, the implications that re-purposing holds for internal stakeholders and external partners, and the precarious (Selznick, 1957) state of re-purposing within a context of countervailing logics of purposeful action and mounting financial pressures.

In the cases studied, it is clear that leaders'' attempts to re-purpose business schools are not motivated primarily by critiques of existing arrangements (Parker, 2018), or by changes in corporate governance (Mayer, 2018). Rather, the main impetus comes from leaders who view their role as a vocation (Weber, 1946) to realize the potential for business schools to operate in ways that better enhance the public good by addressing grand challenges through management scholarship and purposeful governance. This finding suggests that it is less likely (but not impossible) for re-purposing to emerge under leaders who believe that the purpose of business schools to enhance the public good is best served by them (restricting their activity) to overseeing the technical work of achieving outputs such as revenue generation and ranking performance (Besharov and Khurana, 2015). Re-purposing may also be unlikely to emerge under leaders who believe that there is no need for transformational change, given the reported 'success' of business schools' strategies based on the achievement of outputs (Thomas, 2017).

For those business schools leaders who see the need for transformation, but who feel that it is not possible within the current political economy of higher education, this perspective has fully acknowledged and illustrated the constraints placed on their strategic agency by universities. However, my cases of early re-purposing provide some evidence of the possibility for transformational change and they underscore the need for leaders to serve as 'statemen' (Selznick, 1957) to secure support among key stakeholders including parent universities. During such discussions in the case examples, it was helpful for leaders to stress: (a) their acceptance of the need to pursue their purpose profitably, and (b) the growing body of evidence demonstrating how the performance of purposeful organizations improves through the mechanisms of enhanced trust, autonomy, and

commitment (Durand and Frerot, 2022; Jasinenko and Steuber, 2023). This purposeful theory of change seems to have 'landed' well with those university leaders who have come to recognize the futility of neo-liberal 'strategies' for enhancing the public good by focusing on outputs such as accreditations and league table rankings.

Second, the case studies presented here indicate some of the implications of re-purposing for other participants in the business school field. For faculty looking to address the despair described by Fleming (2020), re-purposing aims for business education to become more jointly vocational and scientific, with enhancing the public good as the normative goal (Weber, 1946). The early experience of P-Schools suggests some potential for individual senses of academic purpose being inspired from re-purposing efforts. For faculty, this requires our activities not being oriented towards the immediate fulfilment of instrumental outputs (Marinetto, 2019). As Brewer (2013) argues, this requires us, instead, to advance the public good with vocational enthusiasm, sponsoring and advancing its interests, looking to its renewal and improvement, and continually refining and enhancing our understanding of it. As Selznick (1957) noted more generally, and Harley (2019) specified for academics, this requires good role models. It clearly does not accommodate the actions alleged at 'Civic' business school (McCann et al., 2020). It does involve re-thinking certain practices, such as air travel to international conferences (Gill, 2021), providing support to purposeful intellectual activism (Contu, 2020), and the purpose-driven scholarship of earlier career colleagues (Baudoin et al., 2022). This paper has highlighted some good examples from the UK and France.

The third insight to emerge from the cases of re-purposing suggests that despite the progress made, the normative logic of purposeful action is far from institutionalized in the field of business schools. Instead, it is precarious (Selznick, 1957). The cases illustrated internal and external aspects of this precarity, and I noted allegations of purpose-washing that threaten the integrity of the accused business schools. It is also important to recognize that the context for business school re-purposing is unlikely to become more stable with public finances challenged internationally, and increasing numbers of business schools' parent universities reporting financial pressures in many countries including the UK.

Recognition of the precarity of purpose in business schools underscores the need for further change among accreditation bodies, international conference organizers (Gill, 2021), research funders' evaluation processes, and the journals that have been slow to promote multi-disciplinary research designed to enhance public good (Harley and Fleming, 2021). History tells us that, just as the spread of the instrumental purpose logic gathered pace when it spread from the University of Rochester to the University of Chicago (Khurana, 2007), support for re-purposing business schools from elite institutions will be important. It is, therefore, encouraging that evidence presented in this perspective shows that the purpose movement (Almandoz, 2023) has already attracted participants from academic institutions such as the University of Oxford and HEC Paris, prestigious bodies such as the British Academy, and some major international corporations. Building from this foundation will require that re-purposing business schools and corporations extend their understanding of each other so that, for example, P-Schools prepare purposeful graduates, and corporations present receptive contexts for their creativity and commitment. This might require a

body to co-ordinate individual and collective efforts to support the re-purposing of business schools.

Of course, my vignette of HEC and illustrations from seven UK schools will prompt questions that could not be addressed here, and there are limits to the transferability of learning. When compared with most university-based business schools in the UK and elsewhere, HEC's elite (Grande Ecole) status and independent standing (outside of a university) offer the advantages of convening power and autonomy from the counter-vailing influence of a neo-liberal parent. Even so, HEC does signal the potential for re-purposing business schools to enhance multiple forms of public good including student experience, faculty motivation, and engagement with a wide range of partners including corporations and social enterprises.

The perspective outlined in this paper will clearly have greater relevance to schools that have a tradition of academic pluralism and a social scientific orientation, like many of the emergent P-Schools described here. Some of the innovate activities of P-Schools are closely aligned with academic traditions in participatory action research, indigenous meth-odologies, feminist studies, and decolonial approaches. Because some of those approaches emerged from the Global South (Wickert et al., 2024), this may provide fertile ground for business school re-purposing. My perspective, may, however, have less resonance in schools with a narrower focus, and/or those that have a North American orientation which is, traditionally, more closely wedded to the instrumental logic of purpose. Despite these limitations and the precarity of purpose, the perspective presented in this paper offers a pragmatic and research-informed approach to realize the potential for business schools to operate in ways that better advance their purpose of enhancing the public good.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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