

# From critical to purposeful? Recent developments in UK business schools

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Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much, colleagues. Thank you. To those online. And of course, thank you to those in the room. It's my pleasure to visit Meiji University again, to see old friends, Katsuki, Masa, Hara-san, and meet some new friends as well. So, in his invitation, Masa asked me to say a little bit about critical management studies. But actually, I will say a short amount about this because I want to talk about how at least some people who would self-identify as critical management researchers, such as myself, have been actively looking to develop a new approach within business schools, in the UK, including our own business school in Cardiff University. So I'm going to say a little bit about how Cardiff University has been developing to establish a purposeful business school committed to contributing public value to society.

Okay. So, this is what I'm going to talk about.

## Overview

- The current state of CMS (Spicer & Alvesson)
- The limitations of this review: the need to move beyond critical sociology (Burawoy, Delbridge)
- Academic researchers escaping the 'theory cave'
- Impactful research and impacting the business school (Kitchener & Delbridge)
- Purposeful business schools: examples from the UK (Kitchener)
- Cardiff Business School's public value strategy



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I'm going to talk about a recent review article by Andre Spicer and Mats Alvesson. I think it's quite limited in some ways, but it provides a contemporary review of CMS scholarship. But I'm going to argue that actually, in some important ways, the review misses what I think are more important developments. And I'm going to use the work of Michael Burawoy, and his four types of sociology to explain how I think the review is a bit limited in terms of the significance of critical management studies or alternative thinking, in terms of business and management. And I'm going to put this in a context of the idea that at least some academic researchers are looking to escape the

theory cage and be more practical and applied in their research activity.

So I'm going to talk a little bit about some of those ideas. And in particular, I'm going to talk about how notions of public value, have been adopted by ourselves in Cardiff. I'll summarize a little bit of the work that I've done with my friend and the former Dean of Cardiff Business School, Martin Kitchener. And then I'll summarize some more recent work that Martin's done, looking at how a number of different UK schools have adopted what he calls a 'purposeful' or 'purpose driven' model for their activities, and then to give a sense of the flavour of what this actually means, I will give some description of what happens at Cardiff Business School.

Although I say I want to leave the theory cave, because we are academics, we don't abandon theory. We don't ignore what's been written before. And I'm going to use a number of different pieces of work to underpin my argument. And as I said, the first key piece is the work of Michael Burawoy and his differentiation of four types of sociology. He differentiates those four types of sociology along two axes. A classic sociological two by two framing of the type of knowledge and the type of audience for which that sociological research and knowledge is created. He wrote the work in the late 1990s or early 2000s.

A similar argument, different but similar argument, was made by John Brewer in a book that was published in 2013, *The Public Value of the Social Sciences*. And I found the previous work very interesting and helpful. And I wrote a bit about critical management studies and public value, for the *Journal of Management Studies* about ten years ago. Time flies when you're having fun colleagues.

And then Martin and I, Martin in particular, picked up the ideas of public value as the dean and head of school in Cardiff and began to develop a new strategy around this notion of public value. And he and I wrote a paper for the Academy of Management Learning and Education journal, which describes that public value strategy, but in particular discusses the processes through which the school developed and understanding of what it meant to be a public value business school, and in the later part of this presentation I will update you on where the school is in that regard.

## Theoretical underpinnings

Michael Burawoy's types of sociology  
Instrumental and reflexive knowledge  
Academic and non-academic audiences

John Brewer's The Public Value of the Social Sciences

JMS 2014 paper: CMS, post-disciplinarity and the new public value of social science

Kitchener and Delbridge 2020 AMLE Paper



So first of all, a very recently published paper by Andre Spicer and Mats Alvesson, two academics I know well, but I overall, I felt the paper was a little bit underwhelming. This is a quote from the paper.

## Overview of developments in CMS

Despite the continued growth in the number of articles, complexity of concepts and range of empirical studies, we think that the recent CMS has not been as promising as one might hope. Despite all the work and resources, there is a pattern of predictable work, with modestly interesting studies leading to no major new ideas, empirical results or insights.

(Spicer & Alvesson, 2024)



So they acknowledge that there's been a continuing growth in the number of papers that are published under the label Critical Management Studies, but they feel the outcome has been somewhat limited, and they feel that there are patterns in the work, that are somewhat predictable, and only modestly interesting. How one defines notions of modestly interesting is left unclear, but they argue that there have been no major new ideas or empirical results. I think this is a rather debatable argument, but I don't choose to have a debate with them today. What I want to say is that their approach is very much grounded in what Burawoy would describe as 'professional sociology' and 'critical sociology'. And I think if they had deployed a public sociology perspective then they would have a wider grounding for understanding why critical management studies might still be important. So again, a quote from the paper, they identify ten themes in the research labeled critical management studies. They're listed here, but they argue it's largely based on the dimension of critique.

## Overview of developments in CMS

We... identify ten over-arching themes (Academia, alternatives organizations, control and resistance, discourse, Foucauldian studies, gender, identity, Marxism, post-colonialism, and psychoanalysis). We argue that CMS has largely relied on one-dimensional critique which focused on negation. This has made the field increasingly stale, focused on the usual suspects and predictable.

(Spicer & Alvesson, 2024)



And that, they say, has made the field, stale and focused on the usual suspects. And as say, I think there's a problem in the way they construct this argument, because they're operating in only one or two of Burawoy's sociological types. Let's take a closer look at these.

## Burawoy's sociologies

	Academic audience	Extra-academic audience	Burawoy is explicit about contradictions within and between each disciplinary quadrant of the model. He describes the dangers of one ideal type dominating another, but also a necessary 'antagonistic interdependence'. For example, 'The social sciences are at the crossroads of the humanities and the natural sciences since in their very definition they partake in both instrumental and reflective knowledge'
Instrumental knowledge	Professional	Policy	
Reflexive knowledge	Critical	Public	



Okay. So, for a start, I think they're presenting their argument to an academic audience. And I think they're largely deploying this notion of critical or reflexive knowledge. But, for me, this means there's a limitation in the way in which they're engaging with the potential significance and value of CMS. So I'm going to argue that, in fact, the work has been impactful and it's being impactful. But you need to engage with notions of public sociology. And you need to think about the ways in which critical management scholars have been using their ideas. And, of course, a very prominent example of where critical management scholars used their ideas to impact the real world and their own practice was at Leicester University, where Gibson Burrell and colleagues led the creation of a critical management business school. Now that school at least in its critical guise eventually was effectively destroyed by the senior university leaders at Leicester University, so these are not unchallenging approaches to deliver. So while the business management school at Leicester was performing well on many measures, Leicester University decided they wanted to change direction. And so many of the critical management researchers at Leicester have left. But it's this idea of how

the knowledge created by critical management studies can be impactful that I want to give prominence to.

So, moving to the work of John Brewer. Brewer in his book, *The Public Value of Social Science*, argues for us to understand what social science scholarship offers in ways that are broader than here and now, use of price value.

## The Public Value of Social Science

- Beyond here-and-now use and price value
- *Public value* is defined in terms of humanitarian futures and societal good
- This public normative value comes from, and reproduces, two qualities of the social sciences:
  - they generate knowledge about society and
  - they are a medium for society's reproduction



In other words, he advocates extending beyond and instrumentally rational understanding of the creation of social science knowledge to understand what he describes here as public value. And he defines that in terms of influencing humanitarian futures and producing societal good. Hence the idea that social science has public value. And he argues in a way that is quite normative. He's quite keen to prosecute this vision. He argues that the characteristic of this public value comes from and reproduces two qualities of the social sciences. First, that they generate knowledge about society, but second, they are a medium through which society is reproduced. So we are embedded within the societal context that we're researching and the way we do research and the findings that we produce from that research actually contribute to how society is reproduced. And he argues this, in ways that are not identical but somewhat consistent to Brewer's idea of public sociology. So let's have a little look at what Brewer says. This is a lengthy quote from his book.

### Brewer's Public Value of Social Science

The ethical commitments of the new public social sciences make it normative and partisan. These ethical values are explicit. They are its point. Its focus on the big issues facing the 21st century is motivated by concern over humanitarian future we are bequeathing our grandchildren; its public value is to garner moral sentiment & sympathetic imagination towards other social beings with whom we share dwindling resources & space...its research and teaching agendas are designed to engage with... all stakeholders affected by the 'wicked problems' we are experiencing. (2013: 21-22)



As I said, he's quite comfortable with making normative and what he describes as partisan comments

because he says that is part of our ethical commitment as social scientists, and we need to make these ethical issues, ethical values explicit. And we need to use that ethical commitment in this notion of producing new humanitarian futures, so that we focus on the big issues that the 20th century faces. So public value was intended to try and influence positively, the circumstances that our future generations will inhabit. And this, he suggests, and which I agree with him, is quite distinctive and relatively less common, as a research agenda, particularly, I would argue, in business schools, which is part of the reason why I wrote a piece in *Journal of Management Studies* about the implications of the concept of public value from Brewer for critical management studies.

Critical Management Studies argues that it wants to challenge the taken for granted nature of capitalism and of management. But the question is how impactful has that agenda been? So, I'll say a little bit about the work of Bill Harley and Peter Fleming in a moment, who did a review of the leading academic generals in business and management and found, of course, that virtually no work was published in those leading journals, addresses these major societal challenges.

Okay, so my argument then in thinking about what Alvesson and Spicer did is that I think we will benefit from embracing the principle, and moving to an understanding of the public sociology perspective. And this is an interesting comment, I think, which again, speaks to what is part of the difference? So Brewer says traditional normative social scientists may well dislike the idea of public social science because it challenges their preference for the naysayer role of critique. If we're going to make a difference to people's lives, we need to engage with external stakeholders public, private, third sector of society. We need to engage with the powerful in society. We need to talk to the bosses, to the government. Otherwise we will remain somewhat lacking in influence. And, I think Brewer correctly says this is also too uncomfortable for many critical social scientists.

## From critical to public

'Traditional normative social scientists may well dislike the idea of public social science because it challenges their preference for the naysayer role of critic, since they know that in order to make a difference to people's lives they will have to engage upwards to powerful publics. Traditional science affirmers in social science, conversely, may well dislike it because the focus on 'wicked problems' risks their detachment and threatens to get them engaged with issues that have clear moral dimensions. (Brewer, 2013, p. 200)

Brewer is explicit in recognizing that this will mean working with governments, big business, and other elites as well as marginalized groups, NGOs, charities, and local community groups' (Delbridge, 2013)



So on the other hand, he says, traditional science affirmers, as he puts it in social science, may well dislike the idea of public value because it requires a focus on wicked problems or societal challenges, and that threatens them with the need to engage where there are clear moral



dilemmas. Those more 'scientific' researchers, those who ascribe to a more objective sense of social science, may be uncomfortable with the idea that they have to take sides as my PhD supervisor and good friend the late Barry Wilkinson once put it.

Brewer is explicit in recognizing that we need to work with governments with big business and other elites, as well as marginalized groups, NGOs and so on. So if we're going to be impactful, we need to engage with a broad range of actors. And in fact, of course, that's part of the aspiration of critical management scholars in terms of giving voice to the marginalized. But I think we also need to ensure that we're talking to the powerful if this is work that is to be influential.

And I suppose, including myself in this, a number of more senior academics since they've come towards the end of the career Nicole Biggart, Jerry Davis, amongst others, have begun to contemplate the consequences and the substance of their academic career and whether while their work was extremely well respected and regarded influential in academic terms. has their work has been as influential on real world policy in practice as they might have liked. And this again introduces this idea that there should be more of a focus on the grand societal challenges of our time, and I mentioned this paper by good friends of mine, Bill Harley and Peter Fleming, which found that the top management journals basically aren't publishing work that addresses these major societal challenges. Academics in business and management just don't appear to be writing about these issues. Now I think that's changing a little, but I think a lot of the literature on grand cycle challenges is about these challenges as theoretical and conceptual ideas, not about rolling one's sleeves up and trying to address some of these things in practice.

### Management scholars beyond the theory cave

- Biggart, Davis, Tsui...
- 'Grand societal challenges...'
- Not even trying to change the world: Why do elite management journals ignore the major problems facing humanity? by Harley & Fleming
- Answering the crisis with intellectual activism: Making a difference as business schools scholars by Contu



And there is a branch of work, of course, around corporate social responsibility, that has its own journals. So I'm not suggesting that there's no work done on things like the climate crisis, but they tend to be positioned to the side of the so-called 'world-leading' journals. There's another piece of work which I think is interesting, a piece by a colleague and friend last year, Alessia Contu in *Human Relations*. She makes an interesting argument through the concepts of intellectual activism and argues that academics should be much more engaged in trying to

make a difference and that's an argument that's consistent with the position that I'm advocating here. So if we leave the theory cave, does that mean we abandon theory? No, because we're academics. We're not journalists, as she puts it. We're intellectual activists, not activists without a grounding in theory in the literature. But there are questions of what types of theory and what is the role of theory?

### The role of theory?

Why theory? (Suddaby 2014)

Knowledge accumulation (empiricists)

Knowledge abstraction (rationalists)

Normative value of theory – to create new reality

Legitimate knowledge – jurisdictional role

The case for grand, normative theory...



So we're accumulating knowledge. We're abstracting that knowledge and interpreting the knowledge. But here is where we find Brewer's argument for a normative value of theory, a theory that seeks to *create* new realities. We also need, as I said, to engage with theory on an ongoing basis, because that is the basis of these debates. So in this case, one might argue in favour of grand normative theory when we want to try and address societal challenges. And that is precisely, of course, the argument I make with colleagues, Matt Vidal and Paul Adler, a little while ago in *Organization Studies*, where we edited, a section on the potential contribution of Marxist grand theory in addressing these societal challenges.

### Marxist grand theory

- Societal problems are shaped by history
- Requires historical depth
- Marxist thought is interdisciplinary, linking the sociological, economic and political dimensions
- Marxist theory integrates assumptions and propositions regarding broad historical tendencies (in its theory of modes of production and their evolution), macro societal structures (in its theory of political economy) and micro organizational dynamics (in its study of the production process)

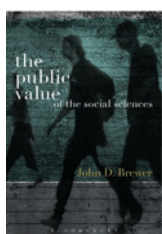


Marxist theory is one of a number of theories that has potential value, because it's a holistic and systemic take on the nature of society, the nature of economy, the nature of actors and their social worlds. So, we argue in the introduction to that special issue that we need an historically grounded approach to understanding the

nature of our problems because they are shaped by our histories. We need an historical depth to our research. And I think it's clear that we need to draw on a range of different disciplines in seeking to understand and influence societal challenges, hence the recognition of interdisciplinary, what Brewer actually calls 'post disciplinary'. Interdisciplinary research, I think, is increasingly acknowledged in science circles and in universities. In Cardiff University, we've created our own social science park, which houses a variety of different social science research centres so they can talk to each other and talk to external organizations which are also part of the building as well. So we need to take an interdisciplinary approach if we're going to tackle the sociological, economic, political features of our contemporary world. And finally, we need, as I've said, this kind of systemic view that looks across levels and layers, engages with the macro societal structures of political economy, but also understands the organizational dynamics of operating, for example, in firms in the capitalist political economy alongside understanding of the labour processes and production processes and locates those in their historical circumstances. So, as I say, I was advocating escaping the theory cave but I'm not abandoning theory. My point is we need to put these theories to work. We need to think about how we can produce change through the application of these theories.

So now I'm going to turn specifically to the example of how we've put John Brewer's public value to work in thinking about the role of business schools and in thinking about our own business school in particular. So this is public value concept of Brewer that I mentioned a few minutes ago. And in that work, he advanced his ideas around challenge led, challenge focused scholarship. He uses the notion of post disciplinary scholarship and then in the JMS piece in 2014 I also use post disciplinary, but I would prefer now to refer to interdisciplinary. I think post disciplinary suggests we've moved past disciplines and that's not what I'm arguing. But I'm saying we need those disciplinary foundations from various different disciplines to come together in ways that can unpack these wicked problems, these societal challenges.

## Bringing Brewer's Public Value to the Business School



Challenge-led & post-disciplinary scholarship with wide engagement as basis for economic & social improvement:

1. Economic value, to parent universities & economy
2. Normative value – three forms:
  - (a) Generating information about society, the market & the State, and acting as a medium for their reproduction;
  - (b) Promoting moral sentiments & capacities for economic & social improvement; and
  - (c) Operating progressive forms of governance, as role models



Now, business schools do produce value with a number of forms. I suspect this is also the case in Japan.

Certainly in British universities, business schools generate revenues that are very much required by their universities. I imagine similar arrangements here. So it's not to suggest that economic value is not part of the picture for these business schools, but it's one part of the picture. And we should not, Martin and Kitchener and I argue, we should not focus only on that form of value when we think about what business schools are for and how business schools should be organized. We can think about at least three forms of normative value. The nature of information that's generated about society, the market, the state, the context within which we are operating, and as noted earlier, the characteristics of social science: we generate knowledge about society and we're a medium through which that society is reproduced. Again, building from Brewer, there's value that we can encourage that promotes moral sentiments, ethical commitments towards economic and social improvement. So we can undertake research that tries to make the world better for our citizens.

And also, and I think perhaps this is less commonly discussed, there are implications directly for how our schools are organized and managed, themselves. So what progressive forms of governance might we want to adopt if we bring this notion of public value to the business school, including our own? In the paper in *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Martin and I draw on a paper by Nicole Biggart and myself on systems of exchange (SoE), published in *Academy of Management Review*. In that paper we look at the nature of rationality that would inform a public value approach and the nature of social relations that would be consistent with a public value approach.

## Public Value Business Schools' SoE

### Substantive Rationality

Business schools are social institutions whose purpose is not simply to solve today's business problems, but to deliver public value, and envision possible societal futures unconsidered under the conventional instrumental rationality

### Social Relations

Wider engagement with partners across the public, private and third sectors including: NGOs, charities, social enterprises, and local community groups. In contrast to narrower/instrumental conceptions of impact (e.g., REF), engagement would be achieved through local, national and global activities in order to create, persuade and prompt publics to civic action aimed at improving social and economic conditions



Martin has written a number of pieces particularly looking at this question of how conventional business schools have been quite instrumentally rational in understanding what they are for. In the AMLE paper, we argue that business schools need to be much more about the challenges of society than just focusing on business problems. And they need to move past an instrumental rationality understanding that's based around quantitative measures, generating revenues, journal league tables, very individualized performance. This means moving towards a more community type of understanding of what actually informs action. And along with that alternative mode of

action, shall we say, a more substantively rational way of acting, we have this wider engagement, this sense of a wide range of social relations that are important to the business school, public, private, third sector charities, social enterprises, local community groups. Again, we contrast this in our work with a much narrower and more instrumental conception of impact including that which is sometimes used in UK government funding arrangements. Engagement needs to be achieved through national and local activities. We need to operate at different levels in order to engage our publics and help shape civic action in trying to improve social and economic conditions. So, a broader, more complex or sophisticated understanding of what impact would actually look like.

Okay, so now I'll turn to how Martin, in a recent piece in *Journal of Management Studies*, is looking to further develop the notion of the public value business school, that we've created in Cardiff. Before I return back to describing that in more detail, I'll talk a little bit more about what Martin's been doing, researching what other business schools in the UK have looked at. Martin in the *Journal of Management Studies* paper, talks about purposeful business schools. And this is consistent with an emerging interest, I would say in corporate governance circles around the purpose of the corporation. And a number of people have written about businesses that are seeking to do good, and indeed have described such corporations as 'purposeful corporations'. So for Martin, the definition they use is that organizational purpose is a societal logic of public good enhancement. And the purpose of the business school has a field logic of public good enhancement for management scholarship and business school operations. So it's the sense that the purpose of the school is to generate public good, public value and that informs both the scholarship that's undertaken in the school and the way the school is run.

There are four spheres of activity of the business school we want to talk about. In a recent piece, Martin initially described what he calls the 'de-purposed business school', not a term I would choose to use myself, but this is the description of what I've seen as the conventional, perhaps most obviously, North American business school. There are four criticisms that map on to these four operational areas or functions. And, we want to talk about each in terms of how they might need to change: teaching and learning, research, engagement and governance.

## The 'de-purposed' business school

Function	Criticism
Teaching and Learning	Disciplinary based, lack of professional practice.
Research	Single discipline, academic focus, market driven.
Engagement	Elite corporate partnerships.
Governance	Outcome and profit driven.

(adapted from Kitchener 2021)



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Martin argues that these conventional business schools are criticized in terms of teaching and learning because it tends to be very disciplinary based, very siloed, very limited. So accounting students learn about accounting, economics students learn about economics, business and management students learn about managing in businesses. But there may be a limitation in the extent to which those different disciplinary perspectives are brought together. And there's often a lack of attention to professional practice. The MBA programme that funds so many universities often has a fairly weak connection to practice. Similarly, as we have discussed, the characteristics in terms of the single siloed disciplinary nature of the research that's conducted. So contrary to the expectation that interdisciplinary research will be helpful for addressing societal challenges. Much research is also very narrow, very academic in focus. And Martin argues this is informed by an instrumental rationality driven by a market, the market competition for places in the 'top journals', and that in itself, that notion of 'top journal' is itself an instrumentally rational concept driven by citation scores, journal league tables and rankings. And as we know from reading papers that appear in those journals, they often make very, very small incremental contributions to knowledge in ways that have got very little to do with the real world.

Thirdly, engagement is often narrowly focused on corporate partnerships, particularly partnerships with big businesses. This, I think, is a particular characteristic of North American schools. It may be true in schools of Japan, I don't know. In the UK probably perhaps not quite so much. And then governance, a very instrumentally rational notion of what the business school is for: to teach students, bringing revenues from student fees, give some of that revenue to the university, try and increase the value of the resources that are drawn in, and grow profits or grow revenues so that there's more money to distribute. So again, quite an instrumental and rational approach. So Martin sets up this notion of the de-purposed school. These are business schools that have lost their way, forgotten what they're for, forgotten that they're part of societies and should be contributing to the improvement of society. That's the argument.

Okay. And then, let's take, for example, the specifics of research. Remember I said the work of Harley and



Fleming identified that there were relatively few contributions that might be understood as addressing questions of public good in these major journals. So, relatively little work trying to contribute to public good, relatively little multidisciplinary study evidence, and a lack of focus on these societal grand challenges. Kitchener says that actually, there's a reason for that, and it's partly because of the nature of the business schools as institutions that has currently been formed. So business school research is hampered by this concern for outputs, journal rankings, accreditation, which encourages this very narrowly focused single discipline and instrumental work. And so we have a kind of self-fulfilling cycle, that reproduces this very narrow conception of scholarship in business and management. Kitchener reviews these four domains of activity and identifies the characteristics of what he is calling a 'purpose-driven' business school.

## The characteristics of a purpose-driven business school



Starting with Governance: there is a focus on the purpose of public good, public value, and that's stated, delivered and reported on as how the organization is managed and run. Then Teaching: teaching is intended to prepare students for purposeful careers in purposeful organization. The purpose-driven school trains and educates students in and about the society that they are part of, prepares them to be part of organizations that are trying to make a difference. I'm going to give examples of what this means in Cardiff Business School a little like this, so don't worry if this sounds a bit abstract at the moment. Next Engagement: purpose-driven business schools engage with a wide range of partners, not just the powerful elite, from the public, private and third sectors and indeed, civic society and citizens themselves. Finally, Research: research has a strong interdisciplinary focus and an intention to generate knowledge that might contribute to societal improvement and these humanitarian futures that Brewer talks about. These are the contrasts between the de-purposed and purpose-driven business schools.

Now, there are a couple of bits of work that have looked at some of what's happening in the UK, this is why I'm able to talk at least a little bit about UK business schools more generally, not just Cardiff Business School. First, a study that was undertaken by the British Academy, and this was led by Colin Mayer, and he also did some work on the future of the corporation and the purpose of

corporation. He looked at what types of teaching were being undertaken in UK business schools, and his argument was that, to generate this notion of purposeful teaching, we need to put problem solving at the heart of what's taught. And we need to have this notion of purpose as an agenda when business schools develop their teaching and assist students in developing the capacity to learn and develop through problem solving skills, in particular. And the report goes on to argue that purpose should be built into the institutions of business education, which are of course, at least in the UK, primarily if not exclusively, business schools. This was a bit of work done by the British Academy and published in 2022.

Argues that business schools can support the purpose agenda by putting problem solving at their heart. Addresses three areas for business school to consider:

- Putting purpose at the heart of what business schools teach
- Problem solving underpinning how students learn and develop
- Building purpose into the institutions of business education



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Martin also did his own study with colleagues sponsored by the Chartered Association of Business Schools looking at evidence for where what he described as 'P-schools', these purpose-driven schools were emerging in the UK setting. And he described these P-schools as having a clear statement of purpose, in terms of their strategy, and that purpose is centred around making a positive contribution to public good. They're clear on how they will deliver that purpose to generate new ways of teaching, researching, governing, and engaging, and they report on that progress. So, the notion of good governance in this argument includes reporting of what's been happening in regards to delivering public good.

## Purpose-Driven Business Schools: A Manifesto

### Emergent P-Schools

- (a) **State** their reason for being within a 'statement of purpose' that defines the positive contribution to public good that they will make,
- (b) **Deliver** - purpose function to inspire & coordinate innovations in teaching, research, governance & engagement, and
- (c) **Report** progress towards purpose.



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The report by the Chartered Association of Business

Schools identified seven UK schools that were displaying these characteristics of being purposeful, purpose driven. Birmingham Business School, Cardiff Business School, Queen's Belfast, Queen Mary in London, Glasgow Caledonian, the London Fashion Business School, which I confess was a new one on me, and Manchester Business School. Now, seven is not many out of, I don't know how many were actually in the study, but there are well over 100 business schools in the UK. I'm not sure how many participated in the study, but you're looking at a quite a small percentage of the total number of schools in the UK. That said, there are some quite big, significant schools in this list. Birmingham, Cardiff, and Manchester in particular amongst the bigger business schools in the UK and each part of large city-based universities in the UK. And notice, they have slightly different emphases within their stated approach. Birmingham talks particularly about responsible business. As you've heard, and you'll hear a little more. Cardiff talks about public value. Queen Mary in London talks about social justice. Manchester talks about social responsibility. Queen's Belfast talks about ethics, responsibility and sustainability. Glasgow Caledonia talks about the common good. London Fashion Business School references education for sustainable transformation. So there are some variations in how the purpose of these schools is presented and characterized, but they all meet these definitions that Martin sets up as I just run through.

### Purpose-Driven Business Schools: UK Examples

Birmingham Business School	Responsible Business
Cardiff Business School	Public Value
Queens Belfast Business School	Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability
Queen Mary Business School	Social Justice
Glasgow Caledonian Business School	Common Good
London Fashion Business School	Education for Sustainable Transformation
Manchester Business School	Social Responsibility



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So the last part of the presentation will be to talk in a little bit more detail, in terms of what's happening at Cardiff, and so as we make clear in the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* paper, navigating a course towards public value was not straightforward. It wasn't clear what it should be, what it would look like, but its value commitments were ones we thought we could articulate and communicate to colleagues. And then there's been an evolution of practices and approaches in each of these four domains of activity since then. So the paper in 2020 describes a set of circumstances up to the point, really, when Martin completed being the dean. We've then since then had Rachel Ashworth as our head of school, and she's overseen the school for seven years, and she's about to finish. So what I'm describing in the presentation today is different from what we described in the AMLE paper

because this is an evolving approach, it doesn't remain static. Whoever becomes the next dean of the school, I strongly expect that they will retain a commitment to public value of some form, but I would also expect they would have some ideas of how the approach will continue to change under their tenure, under their leadership. But what's important is that this is a public value approach that is influential across all four of these areas of operational activity: governance, teaching, research and engagement. And I'm going to give some brief examples in each of those four areas so you get a flavour of what we're doing and what I'm talking about.

First off, some of these signposts that indicate that a school like Cardiff is purpose-driven. So is there a statement of the purpose of the organization? Is there what we might recognize as progressive governance and participative decision making? Are there other progressive practices such as is procurement managed in ways that are sustainable? I'll give some examples of how that happens shortly. How does teaching contribute to the development of students who are able to make a difference in social and economic terms? How is the research that we do organized? What are its focuses? What are its objectives? What are the ways in which knowledge is created with the research we undertake and who do we engage with? What range of partners do we engage with? Do we include less obvious contributors to the business school, such as social enterprises, charities, the public sector? Now, I should say that the approach to governance needs to be consistent and coherent, but there will continue to be a range of different approaches to teaching and research within Cardiff Business School. Not all research has to fit these exact criteria. Not all teaching would necessarily fit exactly into this box. So I think it's important, as I said, we describe this kind of complex process of evolution of the approach. It's important that it remains inclusive and people can see themselves in it and identify with the approach as something that they want to be part of. So it's not authoritarian or too restrictive in the nature of how research is undertaken or how teaching is delivered.

### Cardiff as a Purpose-Driven Business School

Function	Purpose signposts
Governance	Statement of purpose Progressive governance Participative decision making Progressive HR Sustainable Procurement
Teaching	Develops students to contribute to economic and social improvement
Research	Interdisciplinary research that creates knowledge about society
Engagement	Range of partners including social enterprises, not-for-profit and public sectors organizations.



Cardiff Business School  
Ysgol Business Caerdydd



Centre for Innovation  
Policy Research  
Cardiffian Arloes  
Ynyswlad Polisi

So here are some examples that we think represent Cardiff as a purpose-driven business school. Some of these slides are taken from the presentation of a colleague of mine, Carolyn Strong, who has a role overseeing quite a



lot of the kind of public value activity that I am talking about.

### Cardiff as a Purpose-Driven Business School

Sustainable Procurement - estates	Progressive HR - wellbeing, work life balance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Sofas with recycled fabric made by Merthyr Tydfil Institute for the Blind</li> <li>•Table frames repurposed from Cardiff Business School's cafeteria</li> <li>•Flooring supplied and laid by social enterprise who employ the long-term unemployed</li> <li>•Remanufactured desks and chairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Progressive approach to academic career paths and promotion</li> <li>•Wellbeing days</li> <li>•Family and friend's community day</li> </ul>



This was a presentation made to other business schools, International Business Schools. I've used some of her slides because her information is more up to date about what's happening in the school. So take sustainability, when it comes to procurement, we used recycled fabric for sofas made by Merthyr Tydfil Institute for the Blind. We used repurposed table frames in the cafeteria. We used flooring supplied by a social enterprise who employ people who've been long term unemployed. And we've been reworking, remanufacturing desks and chairs. This is a form of circular economy which we promote through the procurement policy of the school. And I should say that these are things the school has done, but the university also has made commitments to a more sustainable approach to procurement and more circular economy approach.

### Cardiff as a Purpose-Driven Business School: Sustainable Procurement



And the school likes to think of itself as relatively progressive when it comes to wellbeing or work life balance. So certainly our dean, Rachel, displays a very high level of caring and collegiality in the way in which she works with colleagues and deals with colleagues, and the school is keen to promote things like wellbeing days, where people are encouraged to take time for themselves, we have family and friend community days where family and friends come to the business school meet and share a tea or glass of lemonade.

When it comes to managing people, we are signatories to something called DORA, which is the Declaration on Research Assessment, which argues that you should not interpret the quality of research on the basis of where it's published or how many times it's cited. So when we conduct assessments for career progression, for promotion, when we write to external assessors for their views on colleagues' performance, we tell them explicitly, please do not refer to journal league tables, please do not refer to citations. We don't consider that a good metric upon which to evaluate the quality of research.

What about teaching? Here are a couple of examples of the sorts of work we do. And my good friend Marcus Gomes has been very influential with other colleagues in designing the Society in Economy module, for example. So let me say a little bit about that one.

### Cardiff as a Purpose-Driven Business School: Public Value Teaching

The Society and Economy module, delivered to all first-year Business Management (BSc) students, teaches value-led leadership and looks at how grand challenges can improve our local community.

The module incorporates the Public Value Leadership sessions which takes learning out of the classroom with students engaging with and taking action on local community issues.

Student led actions as part of this module have resulted in social change within the Cardiff community.



This is delivered to all first-year students in the school. And that means there are several hundred students on this course, and it teaches value-led leadership and looks at how addressing key societal ground challenges can actually help produce improvements for the local community. The university and the business school are located in a part of Cardiff called Cathays. Now a lot of students live in Cathays, but it's not a wealthy or particularly healthy area of the city. And so there's quite a lot of engagement that we undertake with community groups and with citizens in that area. Through these student projects, the students themselves undertake projects which involves them going out and talking to the local community about their needs and about things that they may be able to help the local community do differently and better. So this notion of public value leadership or a value-led approach that Marcus and some other colleagues have been teaching the students is then brought out of the classroom and into the community where the students meet with community leaders and with citizens and talk about the possibilities of some changes that they might be able to help with.

In terms of research, like I said, the business school is large. We have maybe 250 academics and almost all of those will be active research, so there are many projects, and as I said, it's not the suggestion that all projects should have these characteristics. But here's just a few examples of the sorts of work that is consistent with this notion of

public value and the ideas of John Brewer. So we've got researchers looking at modern slavery, child labour and workers' rights in global supply chains. There's another project somewhat similar in its nature on industrial relations in the international clothing sector. We've done work closer to home on the impacts of Covid on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, and that has actually led to a report being presented to Welsh Government that's begun to change some policy angles in Wales. We've had a long-standing role through Dave Nash and other colleagues in promoting the Living Wage campaign in Wales, in the UK. We've done research on the gender pay gap and we've done work which is trying to influence the fashion industry, so it's more sustainable and more equitable in terms of its employment relations. That's just a small number of the projects that we've done as a school. These are not personally my projects.

### Cardiff as a Purpose-Driven Business School: Research



In fact, a project that is one I'm involved in, along with Endo and Marcus, has been led by Endo in Japan looking at how labour standards and environmental standards interact in the Japanese fishing industry and the tensions there are between delivering more sustainably in terms of the oceans and retaining good working practices when cost pressures are brought to bear by the supply chain and the retailers. So there are many examples of how our research seeks to make a difference.

Last few slides. Engagement: we engage with society in a variety of different ways and we engage with a variety of different actors. And what we try to do is not just spend time in the local community but also, where appropriate, bring parts of the community into the school so that we try and break down what can be seen as the kind of ivory tower of the university where it's in the city, but people don't know what's behind the door. So we try and break down some of that distance between ourselves and the community. And we also try and ensure that some of the expertise that the school has is put to benefit. For example, supporting refugees in entrepreneurial activities and new startups. And of course, as I've mentioned, having some of our students work with the community to try and generate improvements. So it's a flow of people in and out of the school, in and out of the physical space of the school. So again, examples here where we've had, school children visit the school or where we hosted, some chess

championships or we've had a community finance network, an ethnic minority finance community spent time in the school. This is just a small number of examples of how we encouraged people into the school and they get a sense of who we are.

### Cardiff as a Purpose-Driven Business School: Use of Spaces



Another example of how we do these things is where people actually spend time on secondment, working with organizations. So, the school introduced, as part of this notion of progressive practice, some project funding and an allocation of workload to support some of the staff activities, giving staff the opportunity to inform and collaborate external partners. For example, one of the professional services team has worked with a charity that helps schools in rural Nepal. And we have a number of practitioners who are what we call 'public value fellows' who spend time in the school sharing their ideas, meeting students. And there's some information about some of those people on the website. So if anybody's interested in this, you can get a copy and the recording. There's a podcast here that gives you a flavor of some of what we call the power of public value.

### Cardiff as a Purpose-Driven Business School

The University sector, including Business Schools, are facing questions about what we offer to society.

Cardiff Business School contributes to society through our public value strategy.

See the Power of Public Value podcast

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/business-school/about-us/public-value/the-power-of-public-value-podcast>



So, as I was saying when briefly discussing the paper by Spicer and Alvesson, I think focusing only on the academic and using only the critical sociological sphere of Burawoy's framework misses the extra academic audiences that are important to universities. Certainly in the UK over the last ten years, universities have come

under some considerable threat or challenge by our right-wing government and by some of the populist press who feel that universities are not delivering what they would like to see them deliver for society. So the very purpose, as it were, of business schools and universities is called into question. And so we're quite clear that we are making a contribution to society, and these are the ways that we're seeking to do so.

And the last couple of slides. This I thought is important to note. The UK government evaluates the quality of research every few years, and major amounts of funding are allocated to the results. Only two business schools have received 100% top rating for research environment in the last two exercises, ourselves and the Lancaster School of Management. And what's interesting, these are quotes from the environment statements that were evaluated by the assessors. Look that they both have these characteristics of the sort of research that I've been describing. Lancaster talks about inclusive, interdisciplinary research that engages with society's grand challenges and engages across public, private, and third sector with local and regional collaborations and extensive work with SMEs. Cardiff, of course, we talk about a public value strategy. It's oriented around our five challenges and we were awarded the best large responsible business in Wales in 2019. Now, I think this is important because this is the peer assessors in business and management in the UK saying that this is legitimate, appropriate, this is the highest quality environments we can find in the UK for business schools. And so there was a clear endorsement of this approach. It's come from our own peers. And that's why I say, you know, interpretation of how influential new ideas have been in business and management needs to engage beyond purely what's published in the academic journals.

## Top REF Rating for Research Environment

**Lancaster:** 'inclusive interdisciplinary research that engages with society's Grand Challenges'; strategic approach to engagement across private, public and third sectors; local and regional collaborations as a civic university including extensive work with SMEs

**Cardiff:** Public Value strategy 'oriented towards our five flagship Grand Challenges - Decent Work, Fair and Sustainable Economies, Future Organisations, Good Governance and Responsible Innovation'; awarded the Best Large Responsible Business in Wales 2019 by Business in the Community



So the last slide, what might be the future for business school impact? I mean, I'm an optimistic kind of guy, but I'm not necessarily predicting these things. I'm advocating these things. But I think we can anticipate perhaps an increasing recognition of business school societal responsibilities in the ways I've been describing. I think it's true to say, there is increasing dissatisfaction with business as usual, particularly amongst our early career researchers for whom environmental crisis, and many

other societal problems are much more, I think, prominent in their mind than perhaps, those of us who are the other end of our careers. So I think we can perhaps anticipate further moves towards these variations on public good, public value, and purpose that embraces this substantively rational mode of action rather than a very instrumental, economic transactional approach to what we do and indeed how we do what we do. But we must acknowledge that the institutional context within which we're operating can present quite considerable barriers and constraints to moving in these ways, not least the continuing pressure to generate revenues for our universities.

## The Future of Business School Impact?

- Increasing recognition of Business Schools' societal responsibilities
- Increasing dissatisfaction with 'business-as-usual', especially on the part of ECRs
- Moves toward variations on 'public good', 'public value' and 'purpose' embracing substantively rational action
- But institutional contexts present considerable barriers and constraints



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