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Reach

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Welcome to the fourth edition of Reach, the annual magazine that gives a snapshot of the research delivered by academics from Newcastle University Business School.

Research is at the heart of everything we do and plays a vital role in how we engage with organisations and policy makers on a regional, national and international platform. It provides the foundation for teaching at all levels, and helps to ensure that the School’s students are exposed to knowledge and approaches that reflect the latest business thinking.

Our research is world-leading and the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) ranked Newcastle University Business School 14th for Research Power in the UK, with 97% of outputs recognised worldwide. While being recognised on that international scale is a tremendous achievement, our vision and ambition will drive us further. We, at Newcastle University Business School, continue to expand fields of research and academic excellence.

We are on a journey and attract world-leading researchers from across the globe who are ready for change, eager for challenges, and keen to take leadership in their research domains. This ensures that we will continue to leave our mark on unchartered territory and will continue to shape the landscape for theory builders and practitioners.

By pushing conventional thinking, we will help to redefine the future of society and business.

In this edition we highlight research that is having an impact on a global scale: showing how our research has helped over 3,000 South Africans enter the job market and how a new five year project will look at ways of increasing the effectiveness of EU agricultural food policy.

Don’t miss our featured pull-out magazine which celebrates 10 years of the Centre for Knowledge, Innovation, Technology and Entrepreneurship (KITE).
Impact has many forms but in its most fundamental, it’s about influencing change and behaviours. It’s at the core of Newcastle University’s principle of being a ‘Civic University’ and is the focus of the teaching, research and engagement at Newcastle University Business School. Increasingly prevalent across the Higher Education sector in recent years, particularly since its first-time inclusion as an assessment criterion in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, Impact could be perceived as driving academia. University staff are now explicitly encouraged to work towards ‘making a difference’ to stakeholders outside academia, policy, business, consumers and public opinion. Newcastle University Business School’s Director of Impact, Professor Christof Backhaus, sees the increasing emphasis on Impact as a positive sign, as there is a clear link between influencing change and the type of research that is carried out at the Business School. Professor Backhaus is working to support academics at Newcastle University Business School as they develop pathways to impact into their research projects, ensuring their research has an even greater influence outside academia on multiple platforms.

Outcomes from academic research projects carried out at Newcastle University Business School can affect diverse areas, including economy, society, culture, health or the multiple facets of business. With sustainability a key underlying theme for the Business School and given the proliferation of the sustainability agenda among both businesses and policymakers, Professor Backhaus believes there is an opportunity for theories and solutions being developed by Newcastle academics to be translated into practice.

In the REF 2014, the system for assessing the quality of research within Higher Education institutions, Impact beyond academic circles was weighted at 20%, and this is expected to increase with the next REF in 2020. Professor Backhaus says this will influence and generate new and exciting opportunities for businesses and academia to work together collaboratively. He states: “The broad portfolio of projects currently being conducted at Newcastle University Business School shows that business practice and research can effectively go hand-in-hand. Such collaborations not only lead to relevant and rigorous solutions to important business problems; they also bring about new opportunities for taking research projects to the next level.”

Projects featured in this issue highlight the diversity of stakeholders and areas in which academic research at Newcastle University Business School can make a difference and demonstrate Impact, both in the UK and on a global scale:

- Dr Jingxin Dong’s research on container shipping and Dr Luca Sabini’s project on sustainable project management both affect global businesses through money-saving innovations;
- Building on her research in the pensions industry, Dr Anna Tilba is engaging in a community-building initiative for greater transparency in the financial sector;
- Policy makers in the area of entrepreneurship are primary stakeholders of Dr Elina Meliou’s work with women who run their own businesses and Dr Jonathan Kimmitt’s research on microfinancing, contributing to impact on sustainability;
- Projects led by Dr Michael Brookes on employment and Dr Andreas Giazioglu on social mobility provide examples of societally-oriented impact.

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Professor Christof Backhaus, Director of Impact
FROM FARM TO FORK
THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS AND FOOD PROCUREMENT IN THE EU
FROM FARM TO FORK: THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS AND FOOD PROCUREMENT IN THE EU

Research conducted in 14 countries
Project results disseminated to 47,000 health professionals, educators and food chain actors
Findings to be published in 12 languages
Public debates organised in 7 European countries

Food has become a much-talked-about subject in recent years. The public is more aware of the provenance of what they eat, the quality of food and the process which it goes through, from farm to fork. Alongside this, however, sits a plethora of problems: growing obesity; increasing food waste; and unfair trading practices between suppliers and retailers.

A recent report by the European Commission in particular noted that more still needed to be done by some Member States about unbalanced trading between certain businesses within the food supply chain. It fell short of recommending greater legislative measures, but the common view is that further action should be taken.

Much research has been done into the social, economic, nutritional and environmental impacts of food supply chains. To date, very little of the research has quantified or assessed the impact different types of food supply chains have on a community. However, a team from Newcastle University Business School, led by Dr Matthew Gorton, aims to address this void. They recently secured funding from the European Union to carry out a five-year research project called Strength2Food. With 6.9 million Euros of funding behind the project, it aims to look at ways of increasing the effectiveness of EU agricultural food policy.

Dr Gorton explains: “Over the next five years, we will be carrying out research across the EU and beyond which will look at a number of different issues associated with short food supply chains, procurement, and improving the way agricultural policy is applied within a variety of Member States. We hope to identify examples of good practice which can be shared and applied elsewhere. But we also want to understand why certain practices might not work in certain economies, particularly those more disadvantaged, such as some of the newer Member States, and how we can overcome these barriers.”

The Strength2Food project brings together a total of 30 partners, including 13 European academic organisations, teams in Vietnam and Thailand, as both countries are looking at ways to improve their own food supply chain systems; and three communications and training firms. In addition, there are 12 national and international stakeholders, ranging from Italy’s largest farmers’ co-operative, a grocery retailer and producer groups, through to NGOs and a local authority. “It was really important that we had a mixture of both academic and non-academic partners involved throughout the whole process of our research so that we can ensure all aspects of the supply chain are covered,” comments Dr Gorton.

Much of the research will be carried out through six pilot projects which will look at different aspects of supply chain and food procurement practice. These include: evaluating producer co-operatives and local labels and considering why some work well when others do not; provision of school meals in Serbia; the role of farmers’ markets and food fairs; and food quality schemes in Poland.

One pilot that will be of particular interest to Newcastle University Business School is that of the fish quay at North Shields in Tyne and Wear. Dr Gorton explains: “The fish quay at North Shields is one of the largest in the UK, yet most of the produce that comes through it at present is exported – for example, langoustines go to France and Spain. We hope that the pilot we are undertaking here in conjunction with Food Nation, a local social enterprise, will enable us to develop a short supply chain where much of the produce is used in restaurants in and around Newcastle instead of going overseas.”

There is clearly huge benefit from developing such strategies. Encouraging the adoption of short supply chains reduces the environmental impact of transporting produce; ensures it is fresher, and means consumers have a much sounder knowledge of provenance.

With all the pilot projects it is hoped that the research will provide evidence of best practice that can be used more broadly across the EU in food policy. But crucial to the success of this, and therefore at the heart of the Strength2Food project, is fully understanding local supply and demand; and how implementation can be managed in different societies. Dr Gorton cautions about applying a one-size-fits-all approach: “There are huge variations across EU Member States in terms of their economies, lifestyles and approaches to food supply. For example, many producer co-operatives in Italy and France work exceptionally well. If you take Parma Ham, the manufacturers work together co-operatively to ensure the supply chain to retailers is effective and profitable for them. The same is also true of Champagne in France. However, when similar schemes have been tried in the past in some of the newer Member States, these have not worked so well. There has been no added value for the producers and they simply end up with a registered label and little else. We want to look at why that is, and what can be done to change it.”

Within the EU there are certain countries that manage their supply chain and procurement practices extremely well, with producers and retailers working effectively and fairly together. As the recent European Commission report showed, however, this is not widespread. It is hoped that the Strength2Food project will ensure a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of what does and doesn’t work, how best practice can be successfully replicated; and ultimately how better functioning of short supply chains and food procurement in all parts of the EU can ensure that producers, consumers and retailers all benefit.

The project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no 647024.

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THE VOLKSWAGEN GROUP: THE EVOLUTION OF A SCANDAL

The Volkswagen Group emissions scandal in 2015 affected an estimated 11 million cars worldwide and may have irreparably damaged the reputation of one of the world’s biggest and well-known car manufacturers. But what can other organisations learn from Volkswagen’s experience?

The story is well known. On the 18 September 2015 the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a Notice of Violation of the Clean Air Act to German car manufacturer Volkswagen Group. The Notice was triggered by an experiment done by scientists at West Virginia University, who carried out road tests on two VWs and a BMW X5 as part of testing for the International Council on Clean Transportation. They found that nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions recorded during laboratory tests were lower than those that had been measured during road tests. This discrepancy led to Volkswagen being accused of cheating emissions tests.

Although the firm had spent a year arguing that the discrepancies found in other tests were technical glitches, when confronted by the EPA it backed down and changed its rhetoric. Three days after the scandal broke, Volkswagen Group announced plans to spend $7.3 billion on rectifying the emissions issue and refitting affected vehicles as part of a recall campaign; although four months later, in January 2016, it continues to maintain that the issue was the result of bad behaviour by individuals not systemic problems. The company’s initial response appears to have been based on a strategy of “toughing it out and not acknowledging liability”, according to Professor Stewart Clegg, who uses the scandal as a case study in his work on codifying the way in which organisations respond to events.

External factors also contributed to the development of the scandal, including the general public’s increased awareness of environmental issues and the need for companies to have a responsible and ethical image. Volkswagen Group’s strategy changed as a result of this increased awareness.

Professor Clegg’s research also explores the way in which the internal culture shaped the company’s response. Volkswagen Group’s statements that only a small circle of engineers were involved in the fraud and that they kept the secret because they feared for their jobs are likely to have been exaggerated. In fact, Volkswagen Group’s emissions scandal may have been the result of a culture of fear that permeated the company. Professor Clegg comments: “Given we now know that Bosch warned the company about the potential misuse of this software as far back as 2007, we might conclude that the management of Volkswagen Group decided to ignore fraudulent use of the software for eight years.” As a result of the good fuel economy and low emissions results produced by the software, the company received green car subsidies and tax exemptions in the US and other countries.

The Volkswagen Group scandal has entered a new phase in its history, in which evidence will be presented as legal testimony, says Professor Clegg. “This culture of fear”, Professor Clegg explains, “might explain evanescent behaviours.” He says the engineers in charge would have known that the objectives of simultaneously reducing gas consumption and emissions while increasing the power of engines were unachievable without significantly modifying the engines. However, this reality may have been excluded from internal discussions at Volkswagen Group if the engineers believed their jobs were at risk. Internal discussions at Volkswagen Group if the engineers believed their jobs were at risk. Professor Clegg notes that while a culture of fear may have helped Volkswagen Group remain stable while acquiring and restructuring a number of other automakers, namely Audi, Seat and Skoda, it will also have fragmented the group and driven ingenuity away from outside the system that threatened assigned objectives. This means it would have been difficult for staff to discuss what would have been seen as mutually unassailable objectives. In a culture of fear, exposing the inability to reach objectives would have been a significant event, while cheating the test control would have been considered a non-event for the organisation,” he says.

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One of the main problems resulting from this increased complexity is that of empty containers. The problem, says Dr Jingxin Dong, could be costing the shipping industry up to $30 billion a year. It’s a problem he is intent on solving; and using the application of mathematical and technological solutions to operations management, Dr Dong believes an algorithm he has devised could provide the answer.

Currently, once a container reaches its destination, often having travelled great distances such as from Shanghai to Southampton, it is emptied. The containers are then left empty for periods of up to two weeks before being returned to their port of origin, a journey which often takes weeks. Dr Dong believes that if shipping companies use the algorithm he has devised to better manage container flow, this could not only result in a huge cost saving for the industry but could help reduce the 1000 million tonnes of CO2 emitted annually which results in the shipping industry being responsible for 2.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The industry’s focus is on maximising the profit and customer satisfaction from full containers, but not on minimising the cost and environmental outputs of the empty ones. This is because maximising the routes of the laden containers has a direct impact on customer service levels, as the shipments take less time and therefore cost the customer less. There is little consideration of the environmental and economic impact of sending an empty container from Southampton to Shanghai, if it is travelling with valuable full containers.

Research around this issue suggests there are a number of key assumptions which must be considered before a solution to the problem can be found. These include the assumption that shipping vessels follow fixed routes and schedules which cannot be changed, and the assumption that decisions about unloading empty vessels are made when the vessel arrives at the port or when they are loaded onto the vessel. There are therefore two solutions which could be used by shipping companies in order to determine the best course of action for the company’s empty containers, both from a cost and a sustainability perspective. Firstly, a shipping company could change its routes according to consumer demands. Secondly, a company could consider the dynamic distribution of laden containers across its shipping routes.

The first solution would improve the existing shipping routes by determining the shortest path to be taken by liner ships; this is known as the two-stage shortest-path based integer programming solution method. This solution could be used at the planning stage and links together two customer service demands to enable ships to make the shortest journeys possible. However, in order to use this model efficiently the routes would have to be programmed on a daily basis and therefore from an operations perspective this is not the most time and cost effective solution.

The second solution, which is provided by Dr Dong’s research, is for shipping companies to apply an optimisation algorithm to tackle large scale planning problems. This solution is called the heuristic-rules based method and considers a much greater range of variables than just the convenience to customers. Whereas the first solution is only concerned with making changes to the physical route based on customer demands, the second solution is concerned with assigning the laden containers over the shipping network dynamically according to route plans. The first solution also only allows decisions to be made based on the full containers and not on empty container repositioning. The second solution enables the shipping company to devise the most economical and sustainable routes and, according to Dr Dong’s models, could result in an overall improvement in the performance of large scale shipping operations of 89.3% on average, and a cost reduction of between 5% and 10%. This algorithm also considers the use of other methods of transportation such as rail to move the empty container to where it is most needed if more appropriate.

The algorithm is currently a one size fits all solution and Dr Dong hopes to work with shipping companies to tailor it to their specific needs. Dr Dong would use the algorithm to create a computer programme, enabling individual shipping companies to manage their operations to the greatest efficiency. By applying the algorithm in this way, Dr Dong hopes that the industry could save billions of dollars and reduce its emissions, which are predicted to increase by between 50% and 250% by 2050, helping the industry to become more profitable and more sustainable.
Dr Jonathan Kimmitt, Lecturer in Entrepreneurship

The role of foreign aid to developing nations has changed significantly over the past 50 years. To alleviate poverty, we historically think of developed countries such as the UK and the US providing big cash sums to developing nations or perhaps of organisations in the voluntary sector that have locally specific projects. However, alternative methods of development have emerged in recent times such as financial assistance to budding entrepreneurs in the form of microfinance. As developed countries seek to ensure a more sustainable form of development which will help developing nations play a bigger role on the world stage, microfinance is now at the forefront of the policy agenda.

The concept of microfinance is not that different from more traditional forms of finance. But the big multinational, commercial banks and financial institutions have little interest in investing in entrepreneurs who live below or near the poverty line. Traditionally, banks have only lent to people who they expect to get a big return on their investment from; they don’t see the entrepreneurial poor as financially viable. Microfinance institutions tend to be more localised and lend out much smaller amounts of money, increasing the likelihood of repayment. As the poorest people in developing countries lack the assets usually used as collateral for loans, such as houses and cars, money is borrowed by a group. If one member of the group struggles to pay back the money, another member acts as the guarantor.

Dr Jonathan Kimmitt has spent the last three years conducting a study into entrepreneurs enrolled in microfinance programmes in Ghana, and is now planning to expand his research into other developing countries. He says there is a clear need for innovative business models that adapt to local conditions in developing economies, provide mechanisms for sustained development and simultaneously yield a financial return.

However, although Dr Kimmitt believes there is a clear need for microfinance to stimulate entrepreneurial activity, its management and structure are not without their problems. One challenge is the assumption that all entrepreneurs will be successful when provided with a small amount of capital. Given that most start-ups fail across the world for numerous reasons, he questions whether entrepreneurship is truly the critical ingredient for development.

There has been a marked progression from the traditional view of Western nations providing finance to fund poverty reduction in developing countries. The amount of interest which Microfinance Institutions charge on loans can also be problematic. While NGOs and charities tend to offer favourable interest rates, smaller institutions sometimes charge rates similar to those used by controversial payday lenders. So the industry is currently at a crossroads; how do such organisations balance their poverty alleviation mission with the need to be financially sustainable?

Which type of entrepreneurial activity should the industry be supporting if society is to yield the wider benefits? As such, Dr Kimmitt is also interested in the trend towards microfinance institutions delivering more holistic approaches to their clients that see their needs beyond a simple loan.

As Dr Kimmitt extends his work beyond Sub-Saharan Africa, he hopes his research will play a part in extending the narrative to include other developing nations which could benefit, or are already benefitting, from microfinance projects. Dr Kimmitt will also examine the need to incorporate new technologies into the businesses being developed. An excellent example of this is mobile banking service M-Pesa which started in Kenya and Tanzania and has its own microfinance offering. The service allows users to deposit, withdraw and transfer money, and pay for goods and services, and has already expanded to Afghanistan, South Africa, India and countries in Eastern Europe. The service is branchless and users can access all the services on their mobile phones, depositing at any shops which accept M-Pesa.

Dr Kimmitt is, however, keen to point out where new technologies have failed in developing countries. He cites the case of Playpumps as an example, whose inventor believed water pumps designed as playground equipment would cure the water shortages of all developing countries but failed to consider the differing cultural and social norms and each country’s unique geographical layout. Playpumps, Dr Kimmitt explains, are a way of using a staple of children’s playgrounds, a round-a-bout, to power a water pump. The idea is that children in a village will play on the round-a-bout, having fun and drawing water at the same time. The pumps were initially successful but once they were rolled out more widely, they soon ran into trouble. In one village, it was found that the pumps would have had to be in operation for 27 hours a day in order to meet local water needs; and in others, social norms meant that the woman of the village, who took on all the domestic tasks, had to power the pumps instead of the children.

Dr Kimmitt hopes to address these and other challenges to microfinance for entrepreneurs in his research. He intends to produce a framework which Microfinance Institutions will be able to use to adapt their lending methods according to the varying aspirations of their clients. This will allow organisations to ensure their funds are used correctly and that they are providing a fair deal for entrepreneurs which will further development across a range of contexts.

He hopes that his work will also address the way in which the field of social entrepreneurship has been framed and examined, and become part of the ongoing debate around international development and social justice.

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Pensions, once something that the majority did not worry about until approaching retirement, have now become much more mainstream as a ‘must have’ financial product. As we are living longer the pension ‘pot’ we have, and the money it will provide when we retire, has become increasingly important.

With returns on alternative savings products such as ISAs so low, more people are looking into how they can gain better returns on their savings and pension schemes. Unlike some countries, such as the Netherlands and Australia, where only a handful of big pension providers exist, in the UK there are over 3,000 pension funds, which manage assets on behalf of fund members. The multitude of pension providers is further complicated by increasingly complex investment management structures and products. And this is where the challenge begins.

With so many investment fund managers and products to choose from, consumers, including pension fund trustees are often baffled by the options presented to them; the fees they must pay for different products; and the clauses included in the small print they sign up to when agreeing to a fund manager mandate. The lack of transparency that currently exists means that fund managers can hide the true cost of an investment to the consumer, which ultimately costs the individual in terms of the value of their pot of money when they come to draw their retirement income.

Dr Anna Tilba has spent much of the past decade looking at the investment practices of pension funds and their asset managers. She says: “Costs associated with pension funds affect each and every one of us. The fees attached to the fund have a direct impact on the retirement income and hence the quality of life at retirement an individual will have. Through her own research and the work of the Transparency Taskforce, we have realised just how great the lack of data available is around pension funds, and much of this is down to the fact that there are currently no reporting guidelines on transactions and other costs that trustees can refer to when they negotiate with their investment fund managers.”

The work that Dr Tilba is carrying out considers the need for greater transparency around the underlying, and often hidden, costs associated with running pension funds. She comments: “At present there is no legal obligation for clarity on costs, and there is a real lack of motivation for fund managers to provide more information. This, coupled with a lack of knowledge and understanding by those investing their money, means that low transparency is the status quo. Alongside this sits ongoing consumer mistrust in the financial services sector. Greater transparency will not only help rebuild this trust, but will also ultimately lead to a better and more competitive financial market.”

Along with her colleagues on the Taskforce, Dr Tilba is developing a cost template for the UK. This may be similar to that which is applied in the Netherlands, where all pension funds are required to report an annual, as well as portfolio turnover, in a simplified format. She explains: “If there were a cost template and reporting guidelines for UK pension funds then it would be easier to see costs and compare different investment products. Arguably, there is an impetus for fund managers to adhere to such self-regulation in order to better differentiate themselves on the market and be more attractive to the investor. The Dutch system operates in this way and is very effective.”

In fact, Dr Tilba notes, the West Midlands Pension Fund recently started piloting such a template. With the adoption of the new voluntary accounting standard, developed by the Chartered Institute for Public Financial and Accountants(CIPFA), more disclosure meant that trustees could see that their investment costs were not £10 million per annum as previously reported but actually £81 million per annum. Understanding the actual transaction costs is essential for getting fair value for money. For Local Government Pension Schemes, greater transparency is vitally important and they are crucial early adopters of more transparent reporting models. Naturally, there is resistance from fund managers who are reluctant to see any reduction in the amount of profit their funds could generate. This could in turn lead to more consolidation in the market, which Dr Tilba believes is not necessarily a bad thing. However, by involving the industry in the discussions around greater transparency through the Transparency Taskforce Symposium, it is hoped that a system of self-regulation, rather than legislation, will bring about the necessary changes. Essentially, a substantial commitment within financial services is needed to push transparency forward, collaboratively.

Dr Tilba concludes: “Pensions are so important in the context of financial instability, progressing pension fund maturity and greater human longevity. I hope that the collaborative work we are undertaking through academic research in Newcastle University Business School and industry initiatives such as the Transparency Taskforce, will lead to the adoption of a more simplified and transparent pension scheme model, similar to the one used in the Netherlands. This will be hugely beneficial to the investor, but also in the long term to the fund and asset managers, and the financial services industry as a whole, as it will build greater consumer confidence and trust in what they do.”

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Sustainability has acquired a growing importance in recent years, becoming central to both the political and economic agenda. With the establishment of the 17 initiatives known as the Sustainable Development Goals at the Sustainable Innovation Forum in 2015, dubbed COP21, the spotlight is very much on countries and corporations doing their bit on sustainability. However, while much emphasis has been placed on larger issues such as climate change, holes in the ozone layer and the consumption of fossil fuels, there has been much less emphasis on more practical concerns. These include the role of professional and knowledge workers who are essential for building a sustainable economy at ground level.

It is this level of sustainability that Dr Luca Sabini aims to explore in a new research project, funded through the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions - Research Fellowship Programme. This grant is awarded by the European Union to support excellent research across all disciplines. It also seeks to break down the barriers between academia and other sectors and promote the contribution of academic research to empirical policy and business decisions. It is this which most appealed to Dr Sabini, who is currently researching the role of project managers and sustainability professionals such as project managers to the understanding of the importance of sustainability within project management practices. Although there has been very little research which addresses how they ensure their projects are sustainable, Dr Sabini comments: “As sustainability becomes more integrated at an individual project level, project managers are developing a number of new methodologies, tools and techniques in order to ensure that sustainability is integrated at all points of the project’s development.”

One example that Dr Sabini will be examining in his research is the development of the new Urban Sciences Building at Newcastle University. This building had a sustainability framework built in from the very earliest planning stages and includes plans for the reduction of energy, water and waste, and the monitoring of pollutants from the construction process to the day-to-day running of the building. Dr Sabini’s findings will be theoretical in terms of understanding the institutionalisation of sustainability within project management practices. But they will also be practical in terms of ensuring the implementation of projects will benefit wider stakeholders. This will include the businesses to which the project managers will be providing guidance.

The Marie Curie Fellowship is governed by the framework established in the Horizon 2020 innovation programme. Horizon 2020 is the largest ever EU Research and Innovation programme with nearly €80 billion of funding available from 2014-2020. The framework aims to secure Europe’s global competitiveness through nine work programmes: excellent science; industrial leadership; societal challenges; spreading excellence and widening participation; science with and for society; cross-cutting activities; fast track to innovation; European Institute of Innovation and Technology; and Euratom.

Dr Sabini’s research fits within the societal challenge programme of the Horizon 2020 framework, and is particularly focused on how to develop inclusive, innovative and reflective societies. In his research into the role of project managers and sustainability professionals, he will explore how societal wellbeing is generated and sustained over time. Dr Sabini applied to do his research in the UK so his findings could be applied elsewhere: “Besides the US, this is the country where project management is the most established and advanced, so lessons learnt here can help other countries where the profession is still in the early stages of development.”

He hopes that his research will contribute to the understanding of the importance of professionals such as project managers to improving sustainability. Although there have been previous studies which highlight the important role project managers play, there has been very little research which addresses how they ensure their projects are sustainable. Dr Sabini comments: “As sustainability becomes more integrated at an individual project level, project managers are developing a number of new methodologies, tools and techniques in order to ensure that sustainability is integrated at all points of the project’s development.”

One example that Dr Sabini will be examining in his research is the development of the new Urban Sciences Building at Newcastle University. This building had a sustainability framework built in from the very earliest planning stages and includes plans for the reduction of energy, water and waste, and the monitoring of pollutants from the construction process to the day-to-day running of the building. Dr Sabini’s findings will be theoretical in terms of understanding the institutionalisation of sustainability within project management practices. But they will also be practical in terms of ensuring the implementation of projects will benefit wider stakeholders. This will include the businesses to which he will provide a best practice framework, the communities who will benefit from the research and the policymakers who can learn from the examples of best practice grassroots sustainability when developing new policies and legislation.

Though the introduction of the sustainable development goals at COP21 has reinforced sustainability as a prominent overarching theme for governments and corporations, there is still very little guidance on how it should be integrated at a grassroots business level. Through examining the role of project managers, Dr Sabini aims to ensure the integration of sustainability into individual projects in order to develop a more sustainable society and economy.
CSR IN THE MINING INDUSTRY

WHAT’S NEXT FOR THE ONE OF THE WORLD’S RICHEST INDUSTRIES?

Dr Natalia Yakovleva, Senior Lecturer in International Business Strategy

The mining industry has long struggled with a reputation tarnished by accusations of corruption, safety accidents and poor ecological record. Coupled with this is a problematic concern for operations of companies working in some of the poorest countries and its impact on development.

The local environmental impact of mines can be damaging, not just in terms of pollution but also through impact on the lives of people living near them. The mining industry supplies much needed resources for a variety of industries from phosphorus for fertilisers in the agriculture industry to iron for steel in construction, and lithium for batteries used in electric vehicles.

One of the central concerns about operations of the mining industry is its input into the regional development. There are often tensions between large mining firms, local communities and indigenous people on issues of environmental impact, public participation, consultation and compensation for damage. Societal demands to improve business accountability for negative impacts on the society and the environment has triggered the emergence of corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR is seen as a business approach to respond to demands and expectations of corporate stakeholders. Mining industry is recognising the need to improve its environmental and social conduct and developing CSR programmes.

A model focussing on the professionalisation of community issue

Large mining companies currently tend to use one of three different models of community engagement, says Dr Natalia Yakovleva. The first model is the in-house CSR department. This department could be delivering community development initiatives themselves from supporting local community projects in education, health and biodiversity to sponsoring scholarships for local youth and developing training and employment programmes for local communities.

Secondly, there is CSR outsourcing. This normally involves a mining company setting up a community development foundation, which is a separate legal entity. Dr Yakovleva explains: “This model focuses on the professionalisation of community issues. Setting up a foundation is very efficient for the company as it is run with its own budget and by its own staff. Because of this independence, it can continue long after the mine has gone.” For instance, Namib Diamond Company established the Nambed Foundation in Namibia to address social needs in mining-affected communities.

Thirdly, there is the establishment of a partnership between a mining company and a Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) so they can work together in whatever way they think will be most beneficial for the community.

Dr Yakovleva, who has studied CSR in the mining sector for over a decade, says that in recent years there has been a transition towards mining companies incorporating at least one of these three models of CSR. This is largely the result of increased pressure on mining companies following significant volumes of public pressure around their environmental impact, and an increase in CSR related legislation more generally. However, Dr Yakovleva explains, every country with a strong mining industry has its own challenges and therefore needs its own CSR solutions. Dr Yakovleva’s research has particularly focused on mining in Ghana. She comments: “Mining in Ghana has existed for thousands of years. Large scale mining was introduced when Ghana was colonized by Britain and was later nationalised. But throughout all of this change, traditional small-scale mining, governed by chieftains and ancient territorial agreements, has persisted.” From the end of the 1980s to the mid-2000s the Government tried unsuccessfullly to register all informal miners in the country, but current estimates suggest there are up to 500,000 informal miners in Ghana. In the mid-2000s, the Ghanaian Government and the large mining companies realised the companies were not effectively engaging informal miners who often operate on the land concessions assigned to larger companies by the state. While some mining companies are changing their perception towards informal miners, allowing them to work on sections of concessions awarded to them. As informal miners are not ruled by the laws of the formal state but by traditional and customary rules, large companies find it incredibly difficult to interact with them. “In the case of Ghana”, comments Dr Yakovleva, “it has taken years to get to a level where both informal and large scale mining can sometimes co-exist.” Small-scale miners require further support from the state in terms of technical assistance, improvement of health and safety and environmental conditions as well as accrediting of this activity that brings income and employment to the rural poor.

The mining industry is complex and has a multi-faceted relationship with its many stakeholders, and especially local communities in the areas in which it operates. Countries with developed mining industries face a range of different problems. For instance, several provinces in Argentina have banned the practice of open-pit mining with the use of hazardous chemicals after local community protests due to its potential ecological impact, effects on livelihood and local developmental path. As European countries such as Finland look to expand their mining capabilities, there will be new challenges to address – regional development and employment and - new CSR solutions needed to solve them. By learning from the experiences of others and exploring a variety of community engagement programmes, Dr Yakovleva examines the dynamics of CSR practice in international business.

With the current slump in metal prices, the industry is experiencing troubles. Share prices of major mining companies are falling and several companies are downsizing, laying off workers. The next challenge for the industry is how it can address global mines closures, corporate restructures, staff redundancies and the impact it will have on local communities.
WIKILEAKS AND WHISTLE BLOWERS: A WORLDWIDE COMMUNICATIONS PHENOMENON

WikiLeaks has become a worldwide communications phenomenon. With its users exposing some of the biggest and most controversial cover-ups, illegal and sometimes life-threatening activities by the world's largest organisations and governments, it is little wonder that it has become one of the world's most controversial organisations. Leaks by the organisation have included the Iraq and Afghanistan war logs, corruption in the Icelandic banking system, the facilitation of tax evasion by the Swiss bank Julius Baier, and the dumping of toxic waste by the British oil company Trafigura, among other corporate scandals.

WikiLeaks is just one of the organisations which Professor Iain Munro has investigated in his work on the rise of “information warfare”. His research is based on the idea that information is not simply an economic tool but is increasingly being used as a weapon in its own right. He has investigated the use of information warfare in a diverse range of organisations including in companies such as ExxonMobil and the banking industry, by social movement organisations like Greenpeace, and hacktivist groups such as WikiLeaks and Anonymous. His most recent work focusing on WikiLeaks presents a unique case study. Describing itself as “an uncensorable system for untraceable mass document leaking”, WikiLeaks has used a combination of military grade encryptions and multiple server locations around the world to ensure the protection of its contributors.

As part of his work on information warfare in business, Professor Munro has researched the way in which WikiLeaks has changed the game in terms of the militarisation and securitisation of information, and the weaponisation of information by both corporations and the State. WikiLeaks has been able to exert power and influence from the periphery of existing networks by exploiting its deterritorialised nature. It is the first stateless news outlet and this, Professor Munro believes, has resulted in a new power dynamic, allowing a role reversal whereby the general population can gain insider knowledge of the secret operations of powerful corporations and the State.

WikiLeaks does not appear to conform to any traditional organisational structures. Professor Munro says: “It has been called a hacker organisation, a whistle-blowing organisation, a publisher of last resort and a human rights organisation. It has also collaborated with a number of other organisations including hacker groups, media organisations and social movement organisations in order to spread its message. WikiLeaks is part of a deterritorialised flow of information, and in particular, information that corporations and States have taken steps to ensure is kept secret.”

Being located in cyberspace, WikiLeaks has been able to exploit favourable national laws of different countries in an attempt to protect itself from censorship and persecution. However the protection offered by cyberspace does not apply to whistle blowers like Chelsea Manning, who has been imprisoned, or to Edward Snowden and Julian Assange, who have sought political asylum in order to escape judicial proceedings that have been set in motion against them.

As part of a larger body of work on social movement organisations and the informational tactics of open source communities, Professor Munro will continue to investigate the development of WikiLeaks, considering how it has allowed a network of whistle-blowers, journalists and hackers to expose some of the world’s biggest scandals, arguing that we are in the early days of an “information war” and are likely to see much more of these kinds of strategies from both businesses and social movement organisations in the future.

“Just as the large corporations exploit the lack of laws for their own gain, WikiLeaks uses the same lack of laws to highlight practices of corporations and governments which would be considered immoral, if not illegal, in other countries.”

Professor Iain Munro, Professor of Leadership and Organisational Change

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Unemployment issues have become a widely discussed topic in recent years, with policy makers and business leaders around the world debating how to make best use of the human capital available. Even in the UK, where unemployment rates are declining, there is still a clear need for services that connect the unemployed with employers. Thousands of miles away in South Africa, the situation is even worse; in 2013, a quarter of the adult population was unemployed. As a nation without an established job centre programme or careers service, South Africa has a very low level of engagement between those in need of a job and those able to provide them.

It was this situation that led Dr Michael Brookes to initiate a project in collaboration with Siya Sebenza - ‘We are working’ in Xhosa. Following a research project in which he examined employment relations within South Africa, Dr Brookes saw a need to connect job seekers with businesses, as well as teaching entrepreneurial skills to enable people to work their way out of poverty. The organisation now has more than 40 centres across the country and trains job seekers in key areas of employment to prepare them to enter the jobs market.

The initial research project found that a lack of coordination between employers and job seekers meant that both sides were losing out and South African businesses were failing to employ the workers they desperately needed, even though many were readily available. Following Dr Brookes’ initial report, a pilot scheme was set up in 2007, funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and managed by the British Council. The pilot scheme ran for 18 months and saw more than 600 out of its 700 original trainees move into work or training. Since then, Siya Sebenza has gone on to enable over 3000 South Africans to enter the jobs market following training in skills development and entrepreneurship.

Initially associated with the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the organisation has since established partnerships with the Western Cape and Johannesburg Universities. Dr Brookes and Siya Sebenza are mid-way through a national roll-out programme that by the end of 2016 will lead to 72 centres up and running across South Africa and is currently bidding for another three years of funding.

By collecting data from Siya Sebenza’s Work4aLiving programme, Dr Brookes has been able to identify the key drivers of the improved labour market outcomes resulting from the programme. He says the main factor “was the need to change mindsets, both of the potential employees and the businesses they were working with”. His research shows that as well as providing training on practical skills and in entrepreneurship, Siya Sebenza also needs programmes which enable a more realistic world view and a heightened work ethic.

The situation, says Dr Brookes, is not unique to South Africa. There is often a disconnect between employees and employers, resulting in both sides losing out. He warns that although the UK presents a very different case to South Africa, it could face a similar employment situation, with inadequate methods of connecting the unemployed with employers. Dr Brookes comments: “With the Government cutting services such as Connexions it is likely that charities and NGOs will have to fill the gap to help get the UK’s unemployed into jobs; and projects like Siya Sebenza could provide a helpful example of a complete training package provided by an NGO in partnership with businesses and universities.”

The project was developed in collaboration with Mrs Ena Richards, the founder of Siya Sebenza a non-profit training foundation based in Port Elizabeth.
The rise of events such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the World Social Forum (WSF) has led to an increase in global discussions around these issues, but also a challenge in the way global actors respond to sustainability and equality. The way world leaders act at these and similar forums determines how sustainability and equality are viewed at a global level. The views held by those who speak on the global stage trickle down into how the general population view these issues - a select group of individuals are able to define how the world works (or responds to sustainability and equality issues). The fact that these global actors can shape the world view means that it is essential to recognise how they understand and act to improve sustainability and equality: what shapes the views these individual actors share in global forums? And how effective are they at influencing policy?

It is these questions that Dr Victoria Pagan sought to answer through her research. Dr Pagan interviewed global actors at both the WEF and the WSF whose job it is to shape sustainability and equality policy. This included key representatives in large corporations, civil society and politicians. Through discussions Dr Pagan hoped to gain a better understanding of how certain individuals' behaviours can affect the interests of millions of people around the world.

Dr Pagan’s research found that a strong influencer on how an individual acts at such world forums is their own views on and experience of sustainability and equality, alongside their company’s or organisation’s policies. Dr Pagan comments that “There is now an acknowledgment by big businesses and countries that sustainability must be at the heart of their development but there are big differences in what this may look like in practice. There is often a well-founded perception by the general public that states or corporations are merely paying lip service to general aims like those set out in the sustainability goals.”

The individuals responsible for implementing sustainability or equality policy have a sense of self-belief that what they are doing is the right thing. However, Dr Pagan states: “There is often a conflict between what these individuals believe is the right thing to do and addressing global concerns in practice. This is why forums such as the WEF and the WSF are essential, as they permit individuals from around the world to argue from their own perspectives, and for confrontation to exist.”

Dr Pagan believes that recognition of forums such as the WEF and WSF as places where “Multiple viewpoints from around the world will facilitate a more far-reaching depiction of the current global situation with regards to inequality and sustainability than homogenous voices.” And this is evident at a recent WSF meeting in Tunisia where key USA and Canadian representatives, versed in the issues of fracking, shared their experiences with other global actors faced with increased fracking activities in their home countries. They exchanged views on the conflict between environmental and economic interests within a sustainability framework. One attendee commented: “I think that’s a very, very valuable piece and facet of the Social Forum process, is that learning across geographies, across continents. And across sectors.”

The WEF and the WSF have allowed for greater discussion on the topics of sustainability and equality. Through the inclusion of differing perspectives and opinions from around the world, the members of the Forums’ confrontations and arguments could lead to the best outcomes and ultimately, the best policy decisions to improve sustainability and equality across the world.
Being a skilled communicator is frequently cited as the most important soft skill. However, in seeking to enhance communication skills there is often an emphasis on developing people’s ability to express ideas, present persuasively and inform others. This narrow focus on transmitting messages, says Dr Clare Butler, neglects another important aspect of communication: listening.

She comments: “During conversations, the role of listener is typically portrayed as one of absorbing information and seeking to understand what is being said. This can be seen as passive, and even mundane. But listening is far from passive. When we listen we act on the message – decoding and re-presenting what we hear according to our own experiences, views, culture and values. As a result of this inevitable process, all communication is co-authored, by both speaker and listener. The original intent of the speaker’s message may be completely altered when the listener’s meaning is added, and this affects the degree of shared understanding that is achieved.”

Dr Butler is particularly interested in the impact this has in an organisational context. She notes that employees may act upon a changed message, presenting challenges for customer relations, teamwork, project management and all other collaborative endeavours. Given the importance of collaboration for organisational success, Dr Butler developed the Probability Evaluation Game (PEG) as an innovative training tool to help develop players’ communication skills.

The game is designed to highlight the importance of skilled listening and present a forum where the potential impact of miscommunication can be discussed. It emphasises the intricacies of skilful listening by asking participants to evaluate a series of terms of probability and then listen to, and compare, their answers with others. This exercise demonstrates how one person’s evaluation can differ from another’s.

Dr Butler explains: “We’ve seen a fascinating variation amongst colleagues. In one PEG session someone evaluated ‘certain’ as 60%, when his colleague’s evaluation was 95%. We’ve had teams engage in heated discussions about whether ‘probably’ should be considered as 60% or 80%, and, most importantly, the impact the difference in evaluation might have if these team members were to discuss future work plans and were coordinating their work to meet a deadline. There’s a lot of laughter, but the game has a serious message. It highlights the importance of developing effective listening skills for successful collaboration, which is critical for many aspects of business management, including accounting, human resources, operations strategy and project management.”

The PEG project was funded by the Higher Education Academy and has been used with University students across a range of disciplines, support staff in Higher Education institutions and employees at professional services firms. Dr Butler notes the value of the game to a wide range of organisations including businesses and Higher Education institutions, as well as trainers who deliver communication skills workshops, team-building sessions or management development programmes, and has made the game available via www.peggame.wordpress.com.

**LISTENING NOT SPEAKING**

**HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BY FOCUSING ON LISTENING NOT SPEAKING**

We often hear that ‘soft skills’ are a must-have for employees. Defined as personal qualities that help people work well with others and enable them to make a positive contribution to their organisations, it’s clear to see why soft skills are so valuable to employers, employees, clients and customers.

Dr Clare Butler, Lecturer in Work and Employment

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“Listening is far from passive. When we listen we act on the message – decoding and re-presenting what we hear according to our own experiences, views, culture and values.”
In the UK there were over 600,000 start-ups launched in 2015. Women account for less than 1/3 of those in self-employment. Although 10% of the female population report a desire to start their own business, just 17% of businesses are owned by women and men are twice as likely to be entrepreneurially active as women.

Evidence from the European Commission suggests there are still a number of barriers and structural inequalities which prevent more women from starting their own businesses in the UK. Familial responsibilities such as pregnancy or childcare commitments can lead to women having a disrupted career path. Women turn to entrepreneurship because of the barriers resulting from rigid organisational structures regarding glass ceiling constraints and accommodating work-family responsibilities.

Traditional thinking around successful entrepreneurs is that they choose to start a business in order to exploit gaps in the market or to provide a new product or service. These are impersonal decisions based on economic benefits. Recent noteworthy examples have been the overwhelming popularity of apps such as Uber and Deliveroo, both of which were founded by male entrepreneurs.

Female entrepreneurship, Dr Elina Meliou suggests, often arises in the context of family and household. It is often a reaction to or mediation of a woman’s personal relationships and circumstances, and can frequently be an extension of the familial roles which women take.

Dr Meliou’s research focuses on the different motivations which women have for becoming entrepreneurs. She interviewed a group of award-winning female entrepreneurs with different familial relationships and concerns, but who all started their own business in order to adapt to changing circumstances in the household by building on existing relationships, mediating a familial separation or responding to a need to maintain relationships.

One response from Dr Meliou’s participants was as a result of leveraging an existing romantic relationship. This commonly takes place when a woman steps in to assist their partner when they are in need, providing new opportunities for the household and the family. In her research, Dr Meliou found that women saw problems in their partner’s career as an opportunity to create a joint business, through working together, and develop a satisfying career for both partners whilst sustaining the household and family.

This kind of entrepreneurship can also arise as the result of a significant change in circumstances, such as a woman becoming pregnant, and working together with her partner to maintain her career. Dr Meliou gives the example of a woman who set up a design business with her husband, an architect, whilst pregnant. Her husband supported her on her first freelance project and this joint action allowed them to use their common interests and work together to create a new business.

Female entrepreneurs can also form start-ups as a result of needing to repair relationships. This too involves an extension of a role within the family. One of Dr Meliou’s case studies was worried when her daughter took her car to university as she was concerned that her daughter would struggle with the practical upkeep of the car. As a result she set up an automobile support business designed to provide practical support to young women in her daughter’s situation, thus continuing the parental role and easing her own emotional strain.

In turn, female entrepreneurship can arise from a need to consolidate relationships. When the requirements of a current role do not fit with their personal life, women sometimes respond by making different working arrangements and setting up their own business. In Dr Meliou’s interviews, she spoke to a woman who believed she had gone as far as she could in her current role and was told the best thing for her to do would be to move abroad. Not wanting to leave her friends and family, she decided instead to set up her own business. Similarly, a single mother Dr Meliou interviewed placed utmost value on maintaining a relationship with her child. Shortly after the child was born, the father left and this required the mother to adapt her career to the new situation in which she found herself. In order to establish a strong bond between herself and her new child she set up her own business so she could control her own hours and look after the child.

Dr Meliou’s research shows that female entrepreneurship frequently works as an extension of familial and household roles by building on existing partnerships, mediating a familial separation or responding to a need to maintain relationships. It is derived not only through seeing a gap in the market or an opportunity to make money, but as a way to respond to external events or even to strengthen household relationships.

As such, in order to encourage more women to establish their own business it is essential to also consider alternative ways that may lead to entrepreneurship and have a variety of outcomes, such as social cohesion. The support required by female entrepreneurs needs to go beyond mere financial assistance and legal advice, and instead respond to the personal nature of their motivation.
SOCIAL MOBILITY
AND THE RISKS OF TAKING THE PATH UNTRODDEN

Dr Andreas Giazitzoglu, Lecturer in Entrepreneurship

Social mobility is inherently thought of as being a good thing. If someone can ‘better themselves’ and take a step into a higher social grouping, then that can only be a positive transition. How we measure such a phenomenon seems like a pretty straightforward exercise. Good academic achievement, better career prospects and inevitably, higher financial reward. Ultimately, a move from a lower income bracket into a higher one equates to being upwardly socially mobile. Individuals are given aspirations to work hard and enable a better quality of life for themselves and their families. The UK is currently said to have the lowest levels of social mobility in the developed world, so more focus is being given to creating an environment in which individuals can rise from one social grouping to another. We live in a world where what you are able to earn should not be linked to, or inhibited by, what your parents earned.

Yet should social mobility simply be measured in material values: wealth, possessions or residence? And do these more materialistic measures actually bring greater happiness and wellbeing? More subtle, qualitative indicators are just as important, says Dr Andreas Giazitzoglu, who has done much research into the experience of social mobility. He comments: “Traditionally, research into social mobility has focused on quantitative measures – materialistic gain, financial security, employment. What is often neglected is the actual experience of an individual who becomes upwardly socially mobile. What are the repercussions for their wellbeing and their actual place in society?”

For many young people, the demise of traditional manual industries coupled with higher education opportunities has meant the chance to take a different path to that trodden by several generations before. Yet with so many positives – a progressive career path, job security, and financial certainty – it is easy to forget that taking the path unexplored means there is no-one to offer guidance along the way. During the course of his research, Dr Giazitzoglu noticed that for many young people experiencing upward social mobility, the media became a vital source of guidance. It taught them how to cultivate a new image, the behaviours expected within their new social grouping, and the measures of success they should hold. He recalls: “Their new images and personas came from role models viewed on television, in magazines and films: what they wore; the cars they drove; the physique they developed. These young people led a life they thought they should be leading, anxious of making mistakes and appearing as if they didn’t belong. Meanwhile, they severed most connections with their roots, in an attempt to embrace their new lifestyles, and became estranged from their families and ostracised from the communities in which they grew up.”

Dr Giazitzoglu hopes his research may lead to changes in how policymakers and others view social mobility and encourage a broader measurement of its impact, both positive and potentially negative. He cautions against the current encouragement of desire to belong to certain social groups, arguing that when social mobility leads to a rejection of past experiences and ties it creates more, not less, social tension.

Dr Giazitzoglu concludes: “It is important that people don’t feel constrained by where they come from and where their family roots might be. Individuals should always aspire to be what they want, and not be restricted by low expectations or limitations of the past. However, while being upwardly mobile in one’s education and career can bring with it huge material benefits, if these are not understood or guided by the right influences, they can in turn bring their own challenges. An improvement of social status and a move away from childhood roots can often lead to feelings of not being accepted as part of the new or former social group. This will ultimately have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of an individual in the longer term.”

The full research paper has been published in Sociological Research Online and the British Sociological Association (published by SAGE).
A strong research culture that exists within Newcastle University permeates the Doctoral Programme, is involved in all aspects of PhD activity, from applications and funding through to approving external examiners. Professor David Higgins, Director of Doctoral Programmes, is involved in all aspects of PhD activity, from applications and funding through to approving external examiners. He believes that the success of PhD students at the School owes a lot to its location in such an energetic, diverse and flourishing part of the country: “We are lucky enough to be able to entice those seeking an opportunity for PhD study. Students come to the School from both inside and outside of the European Union to further their academic studies, and competition for places is high.

A core part of the Doctoral programme is passing on knowledge to others. Students are encouraged to get involved in undergraduate teaching early on in their studies, and there is a mandatory requirement for all students to do a basic teaching qualification during the course of their doctorate if they wish to teach at Newcastle University Business School. The School’s discussions with organisations around the world show these requirements are important contributions to a curriculum vitae for any prospective employee. Professor Higgins explains: “We like our PhD students to take on teaching responsibilities with our undergraduates. It allows them to learn how to communicate their ideas successfully and express the passion they have for their chosen subject area. This experience is invaluable to their subsequent career. The practice is also beneficial for the undergraduates being taught, who tend to like younger, slightly more energetic teaching staff, and often relate better to people closer in age to them.”

Through what Higgins describes as a “very energetic teaching staff, and often relate better to people closer in age to them.”

The ethos, it goes without saying, is about academic excellence: giving students the skills to challenge academic content, enabling them to develop high levels of critical thinking, and enhancing their ability to reflect. It is also about providing PhD students with every opportunity possible to enhance their skill set beyond the status quo. A key goal for the Business School is to ensure that students leave not only with their doctorate, but as well-rounded, confident individuals ready to take the next step in their career, whether that be in academia or business.

The School’s discussions with organisations around the world show these requirements are important contributions to a curriculum vitae for any prospective employee. Professor Higgins explains: “We like our PhD students to take on teaching responsibilities with our undergraduates. It allows them to learn how to communicate their ideas successfully and express the passion they have for their chosen subject area. This experience is invaluable to their subsequent career. The practice is also beneficial for the undergraduates being taught, who tend to like younger, slightly more energetic teaching staff, and often relate better to people closer in age to them.”

Of course, financial assistance is crucial to most students, and PhD’s are no exception. The Business School, as part of the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) at Newcastle University, does its utmost to ensure that PhD students have access to, and knowledge of, a range of grants, funding streams and bursaries. These can enable them to further their research, attend conferences and events and take up speaking opportunities, all of which are essential to them achieving the success they want in their studies.

Newcastle University Business School does not operate in isolation when it comes to its doctoral programme. Its academic links throughout the North are also attractive to would-be students. Firstly, there is its membership of the Northern Advanced Research Training Initiative (NARTI), a group of research-led universities in the region. This supports students to hone their research and presentation skills and share knowledge and expertise. Events run through the network provide a platform where second and third year PhD students must present their work to peers and then have questions on it, a useful dry run ahead of their viva. In addition, the Business School is a member of the North East Doctoral Training Centre (NEDTC), one of the largest Economic and Social Research Council’s (ESRC) doctoral training centres in the country. These centres were set up by the ESRC to help direct its funding of research into social sciences, and to support PhD students in the first steps of their research careers. Assistance is not only financial, but also includes a series of training initiatives and specialist seminars.

“In the competitive worlds of business and academia, it is vital that students can show high levels of critical thought - the ability to reflect, evaluate and challenge academic thinking - and then get up and present, clearly and effectively, the conclusions that they have drawn. We actively encourage and support students to attend conferences, take up speaking opportunities and present their ideas to an audience as possible, and our memberships of both NARTI and NEDTC increase the chances for students to do this,” adds Professor Higgins.

In its state of the art building, located in the heart of the bustling Newcastle city centre, the Business School has much to offer PhD students than just a well-positioned, high-tech facility. It is at the cutting edge of research, with a long history of intensive academic research to draw on. Those leading the doctoral programme recognise the value and benefit that collaboration brings, and how that in turn can impact on the high level of achievement students enjoy. Most importantly, in the increasingly competitive world that those with doctorates will find themselves in, whether remaining in the academic field or stepping out into the corporate world, Newcastle University Business School knows that it must equip its students with the best all-round experience it can. It is this that sets them apart.

Previous PhD students have taken up academic posts at the Universities of Birmingham, Southampton and Queen Mary University London (QMUL), as well as Newcastle University Business School. Other students have moved into the non-academic sector and are employed as economists with the Ministry of Agriculture (Thailand) and as consultants to specialist research bodies.

The following two articles are examples of the type of research projects that PhD students at Newcastle University Business School embark on. Whilst both look at branding, they illustrate the breadth of research, with one project considering how to add value to large and established brands, whilst the other looks at how individuals associate with brands as an extension of their lifestyle.
Brand image and self-image have been intertwined ever since the concept of a brand came into existence. And yet, what is it about brands that make certain people identify with them?

Traditionally, people have identified with brands through use of particular products. A CEO, for example, might drive a BMW because they identify with that brand as one which manufactures cars that business leaders drive; while someone who sees themselves as eco-friendly would perhaps drive a Smart car because they identify with that brand as providing cars that are good for the environment.

However, this association with brands does not end at products. Increasingly, people associate themselves with service brands, such as banks, radio stations and restaurants. Radio 4 listeners and Waitrose shoppers are now established as representing a certain type of person. Through her work on self-congruence, the process of matching your self-image with a particular brand’s values, Ms Julija Dzenkovska, a PhD student at Newcastle University Business School, hopes to establish why it is that certain groups of people associate themselves with particular service brands.

Ms Dzenkovska finds, “people tend to choose brands which are consistent with their own symbolic meaning and self-image.” An example of this would be going to an independent coffee shop because it portrays itself as matching with a person’s belief that they are individualistic and original.

The symbols and values which come to be associated with certain brands often do so through customer experience. If a customer is treated well by a company, if they receive a service which is tailored to them, this can often lead to them identifying with that brand. Ms Dzenkovska highlights the example of multinational food company Pepsi Co, which has set up a new restaurant based on a ‘consumer-first approach’. By providing a unique experience to a small number of customers the firm hopes to attract a new audience, portraying itself as an independent brand with a one-off restaurant in the fashionable Meatpacking District in Manhattan.

Ms Dzenkovska also cites the examples of Aldi and Lidl, which have recently successfully attempted to bring in a new audience of shoppers by selling premium products at very low prices. While they usually first identify with the products the supermarkets sell, the shoppers eventually come to identify with the brand itself, which is now known not just for low prices but for quality products as well. Providing excellent customer service in terms of pricing has allowed for an entirely different audience to associate their own self-image with the shops in a positive way.

Through her research into how customers can come to identify with service brands through the use of tailored customer service, Ms Dzenkovska hopes to be able to provide brands with guidance in order to attract and keep the demographic of customers they feel would be the right fit for them. With previous customer experience traditionally measured through satisfaction surveys and net promoter scores, Ms Dzenkovska hopes her research will provide a deeper view into what makes a person return to a brand time and time again.

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Brand extensions, traditionally, were a way of using an established brand name on new product categories in order to increase sales. So Ford offers multiple versions of its popular Fiesta model, each with different features. But, increasingly, service industry brands are looking to extend into new areas, for example, Tesco is much more than a supermarket, they have moved into banking and insurance.

It’s these extensions which are of particular interest to Newcastle University Business School PhD student Charles Kemp, who hopes to examine why some brand extensions flourish while others flounder.

Kemp says: “My aim is to produce research that can help guide practitioners such as brand managers in terms of how they can offer better services and increase value, through improving communications between consumers and brands. There are a lot of perceived risks regarding extensions; companies worry that it could hurt the parent brand and dilute its message and image. It is therefore essential to provide practical guidance to brands who are thinking about extending their service offering into areas where they have little experience or are up against big competitors.”

Kemp is currently at the early stage of research but hopes his findings will provide service industry firms with a practical framework for their brand extensions, which areas they should expand into and how other brands have been successful.

This framework could prove hugely influential: approximately 80% of brand extensions in the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector fail (Ernst and Young and ACNielsen, 1999), despite that sector being much more advanced in brand extensions. The stakes are often higher with service extensions as the parent brand is extending into an entirely new area, so it is essential brands get this right and avoid making decisions which could ultimately harm the parent brand’s image and result in a loss of customer trust.

Charles Kemp, PhD Researcher

Tesco. Apple. Google. Sky. Brands we know; brands we trust. But what would happen if one of these tech giants or leading supermarkets decided to extend its brand to offer a whole new type of service? Customers would expect the usual qualities they associate with that brand, whether it’s good value, new innovation or rewards for loyalty. But how can businesses ensure they translate their brand effectively to an extended offering?
At Newcastle University Business School research is fundamental to how we work with organisations and policy makers across the world. Our team of world-leading academic researchers challenge conventional business thinking. As part of Newcastle University, we are a member of the Russell Group, which is the association of the leading research-intensive UK universities. We conduct our research with a commitment to excellence and a concern for the needs of both local society and global issues. This combination of being globally ambitious and regionally rooted underpins Newcastle University’s vision.

SOCIETAL CHALLENGE THEMES

We are committed to ensuring our research helps address some of the key global issues. The challenges at the forefront of our work are ageing, social renewal and sustainability. These three themes form part of our overall focus on excellence with a purpose.

Ageing

The Newcastle University Institute for Ageing brings together research expertise from across the University. Working with a variety of partners, we seek to use knowledge to better address the global challenges and opportunities of an ageing society. Research from the Business School has investigated:

- Implications of an ageing workforce
- Transparency in the pensions industry and its impact on the wider financial services industry
- Ageing and customer loyalty
- Inequalities in healthcare

Social Renewal

The University has significant strengths in research relating to how individuals, communities and organisations adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing and challenging environment. The Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal was created as a hub for research activity which is focused on asking the big questions facing our society. Our research expertise crosses many areas of Social Renewal, for example:

- The Living Wage
- Social entrepreneurship
- Investigating how to reduce unemployment
- Social mobility
- Information warfare in business
- Social accounting

Sustainability

We focus on the solutions that can be offered to the global challenge of sustainability. The Newcastle University Institute for Sustainability coordinates research across traditional discipline boundaries to deliver practical, engaged solutions to real-world issues. The Business School has investigated a number of global challenges in sustainability, such as:

- Sustainable operations management
- Supply chains in the food industry
- Sustainability and project management
- Crisis management
- The development of ‘Lean’ operations management

WORK WITH OUR ACADEMICS

Collaborative Research And Consultancy

Our academic faculty draws on theoretical expertise and methodological know-how to develop state-of-the-art solutions for real-world business challenges. By offering our knowledge and experience to the business community, we work with you to find innovative solutions on the latest business issues, from better understanding customer behaviour to improving business efficiency. By partnering with us, you can access the expertise of a world-class research team who will offer powerful insight to the latest business issues.

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships

A Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) brings together a company partner, an academic and a high calibre graduate (Research Associate) to embed the latest academic knowledge and help boost business performance. The KTP is a government funded programme that helps businesses to improve competitiveness and productivity through the better use of knowledge, technology and skills that reside within the UK Knowledge Base. Benefits of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership include:

- Access highly qualified people to spearhead new projects
- Access experts who can help take your business forward
- Develop innovative solutions to help your business grow
- Develop your company for growing markets
- Increase profitability

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS A RESEARCH CONSULTANCY PROJECT OR A KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIP, EMAIL: NUBSDIRECTOROFRESEARCH@NCL.AC.UK

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All details contained in this document are accurate at the time of printing but are subject to change, students are advised to consult with the relevant institution about course offerings and accommodation before making an application.