



**OXFORD
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OXFORD
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UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH REPORTER

2020-2021

**RESEARCHING
CURRENT AND FUTURE
CHALLENGES THROUGH:**
Innovation, Resilience and Connectivity

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HELLO AND WELCOME...

...to this edition of Research Reporter, highlighting some of the latest research from Oxford Brookes Business School.



We are going through extraordinary times. The COVID-19 crisis has brought to the fore the importance of research in addressing challenges to our health, the economy and society. This edition focus on three themes of crucial importance in adapting to the 'brave new world' we find ourselves in: Innovation, Resilience and Connectivity.

Innovation is at the centre of economic recovery and to this end, the UK government has published a Research and Development Road Map. The ambition is for the country to become a "science superpower" and to inspire and enable "people from all backgrounds and experiences to engage and contribute to research and innovation." But current research at Oxford Brookes Business School shows that the UK's innovation ecosystem is disconnected and missing out on diverse talent as women scientists continue to be significantly under-represented in the commercialisation of research and creation of 'spinout' companies. New insights gained from this work have shaped recommendations to develop a more gender-inclusive innovation ecosystem to support the government's ambitions.

The resilience of recent graduates facing an uncertain labour market is being investigated by our researchers with experience of assessing "shocks" to labour markets and their impact on young people.

Research conducted for the Royal College of Nursing has highlighted the gendered construction of nursing as a devalued caring profession, as reflected by its inadequate level of remuneration. The findings from this work are especially relevant at a time when the pandemic has shown the true value of care and the need to re-think how these key workers are rewarded.

The health-crisis has also highlighted the importance for people to stay connected, particularly older generations, at a time when lockdowns and social distance measures have been necessary to protect public health. Business School research, undertaken by Sarah Quinton, is examining the impact of new technologies on social connectivity. Our research has attracted government funding to develop solutions to address COVID-related challenges. This includes work to develop technology to respond to individuals' mental and emotional well-being during online learning and training. These, and other examples of our research outlined in this edition, demonstrate the relevance of our work and the new insights we provide to tackling major problems and contributing to positive change.

As the new world order emerges, we remain committed to developing and nurturing future research talent as our PhD programmes demonstrate. Our doctoral students, some of whom are featured in this edition, bring new research interests and perspectives to enrich and refresh our community of scholars.

Finally, I am delighted to introduce our readers to our new Pro-Vice Chancellor and Dean Professor Tim Vorley. His expertise on entrepreneurship and regional development will add to the breadth of our research base and ensure that Oxford Brookes Business School plays a key role in the recovery and growth of our regional economy.

I hope you will enjoy reading this edition and please get in touch if you would like to know more about what we do.

PROFESSOR SIMONETTA MANFREDI
Associate Dean for Research and
Knowledge Exchange

INTRODUCTION

...from our new Pro-Vice Chancellor and Dean, Professor Tim Vorley



One of the most exciting things about taking up a new role in an institution is finding out more about the work and interests of colleagues. Since taking up my post at Oxford Brookes Business School, in summer 2020, I've been impressed by the breadth of innovative research being undertaken in the different research centres, as well as academics' commitment to finding new ways of working. Colleagues have exciting plans for future projects, and an enthusiasm for sharing their findings, not only with academic peers, but also with wider society. And, in the current climate, that understanding and motivation is important.

The COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to set new challenges for everyone working in higher education. Investments in research face greater scrutiny, and universities will need to be more accountable and demonstrate their wider public value. Colleagues in the Business School are already engaged in research to understand and respond to the economic and societal impacts of the pandemic, and this will inevitably inform the focus of future research for many.

The need for high quality academic research is arguably greater than ever, but our ability to undertake research is constrained.

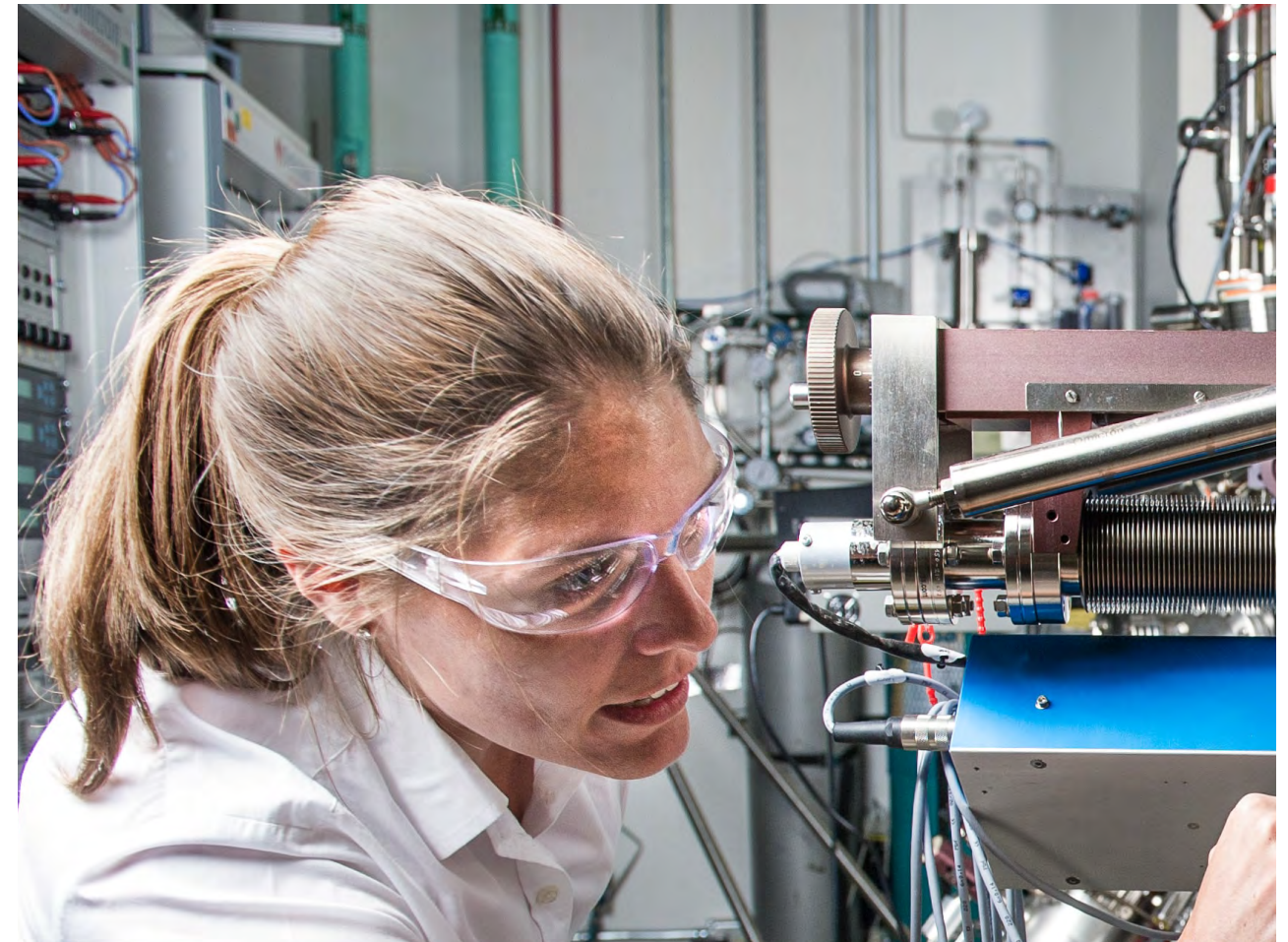
The pursuit of remote research, online methods, and digital engagement, while working from home, serves to demonstrate the resilience and response of researchers in the Business School. Colleagues have shown great commitment and the ability to adapt in challenging circumstances.

Looking beyond the pandemic, business schools have an important role to play in terms of their teaching and research. We need to continue to engage with communities beyond the University, and forge new partnerships and collaborations. I would like to see Oxford Brookes Business School serve as a hub to convene even more interdisciplinary research through our research centres.

As an engaged researcher I understand the benefits of collaboration, and how academic research can inform national debate and make a difference to society. My own current research projects look at the impact of the pandemic on entrepreneurs and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). I continue to work with national and regional government departments and agencies to inform policy responses and interventions. I also see a real opportunity to engage more with businesses and policymakers across Oxfordshire and beyond, as they adapt to the new realities of a post-Covid world.

The Research Reporter is really valuable in highlighting the range of ongoing research in the Business School. It is one of the key ways we communicate what we do to colleagues across the School and the University, as well as to external partners and the general public. There is a lot to discover about research at Oxford Brookes Business School: this edition showcases just some of our recent research projects and Knowledge Exchange activities. I hope you enjoy learning about them.

PROFESSOR TIM VORLEY
Pro Vice-Chancellor and
Dean of Oxford Brookes Business School



INNOVATION

Catastrophe and global 'shock' - such as a pandemic - can cause economic and social instability. Old systems need to adapt swiftly to accommodate change and new behaviours, and individuals and organisations need to develop new approaches to challenges.

Innovation in thinking, creation and organisation is key to building a fair new economic and social order. Business School research is helping take new ideas from Universities in Europe and Africa into the business arena, with equitable benefits. We're furnishing deprived communities in remote areas of Asia with entrepreneurial skills. And we're helping tackle health and logistical problems in travel and tourism.



AVOIDING THE TOURIST TRAP



Sustainability in tourism was the original focus of work undertaken by Dr Kate Ji in 2018. More than 12%

of the city's economy relies on attracting visitors, and congestion is a major problem. But, since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, her research has taken on a new urgency, as she explains:

'Over the last few years, we'd produced research showing that to reduce city centre congestion - meaning traffic and overcrowding at the major sights - economic interests needed to be aligned with the political agenda and tourism funding. Since the pandemic overcrowding

has become an even more pressing concern. For a city like Oxford to continue to benefit from tourism, it needs to understand how to manage issues of overcrowding - not least for public health reasons - and how to disperse tourists, develop 'staycations' and promote new attractions.'

With funding from the British Academy, Kate is exploring the driving forces in Chinese tourism to Oxford (the seventh most visited city in the UK). The research investigates why Chinese package travel itineraries are largely identical.

Kate says, 'The cliché of Chinese tourists disembarking from buses for short visits to photograph well-known sights is based on a shocking reality - the itineraries of travel companies are largely the same because only a few players are informing the choices.'

By interviewing senior managers at

major travel agencies in China, and UK ground tour operators, Kate has identified the 'vendor structure' whereby only a small number of travel agencies develop packages - and resell them to thousands of other travel agencies. The vendor structure is driven by factors including cost limitation and minimal local knowledge by those planning tours. But Kate's research shows there is visitor demand for different and diversified packages, and that new factors, including, COVID-19, can reshape the way the city is enjoyed by foreign visitors for decades.

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CHARACTER OR CONTEXT?



Global crises, such as COVID-19, throw up the possibility and necessity of new businesses. But, what does

it take to start a new, successful business venture, and does this change during periods of crisis? Are successful entrepreneurs particular types of people or personalities? Or are there other factors at play? Dr Jeremy Zwiegelaar is investigating the issue.

'Not all entrepreneurs are trying to do the same thing, so the relationship between personality and other contextual factors is important to examine. I study whether it takes a certain type of person to succeed,

or whether business performance is contingent on other issues. I am particularly interested in what happens when 'shocks' occur in the system - like the current pandemic. My research suggests behaviours, rather than characteristics, are key.'

By examining Start-ups in manufacturing, an under-investigated sector, Jeremy's research builds on work undertaken during the Global Financial Crisis, another period of global economic 'shock'. Jeremy analyses the interplay between the characteristics, experiences and knowledge of individual entrepreneurs (for example their educational qualifications), alongside the environment in which businesses emerge.

Jeremy says, 'In 'normal' times, an entrepreneur may spot a gap in the market - say in the food or beverage area - and be able to launch a business very successfully,

based largely on their own abilities and following established routes of business development. But during periods of rapid flux and change, like now, we see that social capital - the shared links, values and knowledge of teams involved in a business as well as entrepreneurs' ability to adapt quickly to meet customers' expectations - plays a central role to success. It's about the way in which Start-ups tell their story to others and the connections between people, which will determine their success.

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SUPPORTING FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS



Rebuilding economic output in the post-COVID-19 world presents challenges in different areas.

For businesses reliant on tourism, a sector severely affected by the pandemic, the urgency is acute. Over the last 3 years Professor Levent Altinay has been working with female entrepreneurs in the Hill Tribes of Thailand, who are reliant on tourism for much of their income.

He explains, ‘Thailand’s Hill Tribes are amongst the region’s most disadvantaged people, and they face high levels of poverty. Working with colleagues at Royal Holloway, London and the Thai Chamber of Commerce, I have been researching how women supplement the main household

agricultural incomes by producing traditional textile arts and crafts which are sold as souvenirs to tourists. Supporting this entrepreneurship can improve women’s autonomy and independence, as well as ensuring social and political stability.’

In South East Asia alone, there are 61 million female entrepreneurs, and in Thailand they outnumber their male counterparts. Many are from the Northern and Western high mountain regions. Levent’s research established the Thai Hill Tribes Exchange, a unique collaboration between researchers, practitioners and stakeholders in the UK and Thailand, to support women using arts and crafts to make a living.

‘These artisans often come from very poor backgrounds. They often sell their handicrafts in an informal and unstructured way, so it has been important to work with them on production techniques, and skills to help increase income. For example, we have looked at promotion and marketing, and started analysis of how men and women collaborate in producing and selling handicrafts,’

says Professor Sameer Hosany, from Royal Holloway, one of Levent’s research colleagues.

The arrival of COVID-19 has impacted both production, and the research into potential improvements. ‘The pandemic has dramatically reduced international travel and tourism for the time-being,’ Levent explains. ‘Clearly that has had a detrimental impact on the Hill Tribes. It has also affected how we have been able to conduct research. For example, social distancing meant we couldn’t collect primary data into tourists and souvenir buying in the way we had planned. We have had to reschedule and, to a certain extent, redesign the research, but it remains important. The Thai Government remains keen to regulate and encourage social enterprises nationally, and we believe this project will contribute to improving women’s lives as tourism returns to the region.’

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WHY WE NEED GENDER INCLUSIVE INNOVATION



The Government’s Industrial Strategy sets an ambitious goal for the UK to become the most innovative economy in the world by 2030. Investments and business growth will play a key role in helping the UK economy to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. But the innovation ecosystem is dominated by men, with 83% of UK venture capital deals going to all-male teams. Professor Simonetta Manfredi leads a team of researchers looking at the causes of these gender imbalances.

‘The lack of gender diversity means the actual and potential talent of women researchers in STEM subjects - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics - is under-utilised. A historical example shows this: the three-point car seat belt was invented in 1959, but it was designed by, and for, men. It took more than four decades for a female engineer

to redesign it to ensure the safety of pregnant women and their unborn children. Failure to invest in women means their perspective is lost.’

Universities make an important contribution to the innovation ecosystem through the commercialisation of research and the creation of ‘spinout’ companies.

But research undertaken by Simonetta and her team found that nationally only 13% of university spinout companies are founded, or co-founded, by women researchers. Interviews with women and men who have successfully founded spinout companies highlighted some of the barriers women face. These include a male dominated investment community; sexism and stereotyping (often around women’s appearance); and racial profiling, which exacerbates difficulties for women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Even when measures are introduced to try to support women – for instance through mentoring programmes – further problems can arise. For example, although formal mentors often have significant commercial experience, as such, they are likely to be (older) men, sometimes with sexist views.

These relationships could create unequal power dynamics between mentors and mentees. Furthermore, mentees reported feeling a lack of relatable role models. There were also concerns that prioritising commercial interests might damage academic careers. Perhaps more positively, younger women and men who took part in the research were beginning to challenge the established convention that business comes before everything else.



Dr Heather Griffiths, a member of the research team says,

'We concluded the study with

recommendations for Universities, ensuring that entrepreneurship development programmes are gender sensitive and helping women researchers in the process of 'spinning out' to network and connect with other women role models both inside, and beyond, academia. Diversity – both in race, age and career paths is important, which means Higher Education Institutions need flexible career pathways.

Women entrepreneurs are an exciting and largely untapped resource – one which Universities, business and society can really benefit from.'

The research team comprised Dr Heather Griffiths, Dr Anne Laure Humbert, Professor Simonetta Manfredi (Project Director), Alexis Still and Dr Charoula Tzanakou with Professor Linda King and in collaboration with Professor Helen Byrne at the University of Oxford.

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<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/women-and-spinouts/>



**Engineering and
Physical Sciences
Research Council**



NIGERIAN SPINOUTS



Dr Sola Adesola is also working on the issue of women, innovation and spinouts – in Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa.

According to the 2019 Global Innovation Index, Nigeria ranked 123 out of 130 countries on University/ Industry research collaboration, despite the Nigerian Government's desire to foster prosperity through Science, Technology and Innovation.

Sola is leading a two year project, funded by the British Academy, to find out what universities in Nigeria are doing to address the gender gap in academic entrepreneurship.

By focusing on spinouts at selected institutions, and researching male and female experiences in science and engineering disciplines, the research will assist Nigerian Universities and industries in their interactions. Sola hopes it will contribute to improving the pathways for women researchers to 'spinout', and advance collaboration between Higher Education and Science and Technology, allowing for improved innovation and sustainable development.

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RESILIENCE

The capacity of individuals, organisations and nations to recover from adversity has been tested by recent global events. Research at the Business School has been tracking resilience at different levels - whether in direct response to COVID-19, or indirectly through new forms of collaboration. Research covers diverse topics, including younger generations and mental health, frontline health workers, the charitable sector and entrepreneurs.



EMPLOYMENT, ASPIRATIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH IN LIGHT OF COVID-19



COVID-19 and the UK government's response has had a significant impact on students in higher education

and recent graduates. Medicine and health care students were called to support the NHS under emergency legislation. Others face disruption as employment opportunities dwindle. In spite of the dire outlook, job market entrants may be highly resilient, and be motivated to respond in innovative ways. For example, the situation may offer opportunities for entrepreneurship through the use of technology.

Some may switch career pathways or take on temporary jobs. Some may pursue further education. For many, the scale and extent of the situation may cause anxiety, emotional overload, and low motivation, with immediate and longer-term negative impacts.

Working with colleagues in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Dr Rozana Himaz is leading a project to identify in real-time, spatial, demographic and sectoral patterns in graduate employment, aspirations and mental health over the 12 months following the outbreak of the virus in the UK. The project is intended to help government, Higher Education Institutions, and other stakeholders address emerging issues.

This research into graduate employment, aspirations and mental health in the current context of COVID-19 is a collaborative affair, drawing on knowledge from Youth Employment UK, the

National Union of Students and the College of Paramedics, to increase the capabilities, motivation and opportunities for students and recent graduates.

Rozana explains, 'We've heard so much about the younger generation bearing the long-term brunt of the pandemic – not least in terms of the economic impact. This research is intended to contribute to the assessment and understanding of this impact, especially in these crucial early months. We're concerned for people who have invested so much into their studies, who have particular expectations about the world into which they were going to emerge. We're interested in their flexibility, and we're concerned about how they respond mentally and emotionally to the dramatic changes. We hope the research will inform them of potential sources of support in the longer term.'

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CHARITY COLLABORATION



How can charities ensure they don't compete, but collaborate efficiently to achieve their aims?

Dr Sarah-Louise Mitchell is researching the phenomenon of Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) working together.

'As charities take on more significant roles in society, they often successfully collaborate with one another to address complex issues or problems. One example is the Disasters Emergency Committee, where a number of charities combine efforts in the face of major crises to avoid replicating work, to share resources and to fundraise collectively. By coming together in this way, they create a new 'brand' which can often be more effective than operating separately.'

Collaboration between NPOs and government, or with the private sector, has been the subject of previous research, but Sarah-Louise's work tackles collaboration between charities – a new area of enquiry, and one which has attracted funding from the British Academy and The Leverhulme Trust.

Charities, like other sectors, are undergoing significant shifts in how they operate. During the COVID-19 pandemic there was an upturn in mission-based collaborations. For example, the fundraising efforts of Captain Tom, which attracted headlines and widespread national support, benefitted a number of charities through a collaboration 'NHS Charities Together'.

'There are clearly benefits for charities working together, and the research will identify those. But I will examine any negative consequences too. For example, individual organisations may lose their own individual 'brand identity', and that may impact on future

public engagement or fundraising. The purpose of this research is to help practitioners plan well before they enter into collaborations.'

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LEVERHULME TRUST

The British Academy



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGH GROWTH ENTREPRENEURS



Understanding the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on high-growth commercial and social

entrepreneurs in the UK is the subject of research being undertaken by Professor Tim Vorley.

'The team and I are looking at the short and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on entrepreneurial survival, growth, and innovation. We are interested in understanding how entrepreneurs are reacting to the crisis to both preserve their firms, and reorient them to new market conditions.

To do this, we are carrying out repeat interviews with individuals over a period of 18 months to examine their responses and strategies as the effects of the crisis change over time'.

The research explores the use of resources, and how geographies, backgrounds, and sectors affect different entrepreneurs. The goal is to identify best practice and develop

support, as well as to provide recommendations to local and national policymakers about the needs of high growth entrepreneurs.

For more information visit
[https://www.ericcproject.uk\[WJJ1\]](https://www.ericcproject.uk[WJJ1])

or contact

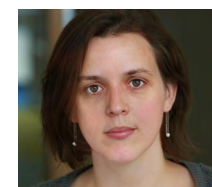
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UK Research and Innovation



NURSING - PAYING THE PRICE OF CARE



Within days of the arrival of coronavirus in the UK, the value of frontline health staff came to

dominate headlines. The importance of nurses became apparent – against a backdrop of 40,000 vacancies and ongoing debates about recruitment, retention, pay and inequality. For Dr Anne Laure Humbert, the spotlight emphasised the issues she, and colleagues at the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice, had been researching.

'Just before the pandemic hit, we published a report, produced in conjunction with the Royal College of Nursing, about inequalities and the gender pay gap in nursing. Our research showed that on average, across all health professions, women earn 30% less than men, and nursing is at the lower end of those professions. Our research uncovered

the fact that BAME nurses earn 10% less than their white colleagues when controlling for other factors such as working hours – something of great concern, not least in the context of COVID-19, which has disproportionately affected BAME healthcare professionals. We also analysed the extent to which the gender gap in earnings is due to structural factors, such as working hours, or the result of sex-based discrimination. The most surprising thing we found was that for nurses, unlike for other health professionals, there is no evidence of discrimination on the basis of sex. Rather, it is the gendered construction of nursing – the way it is devalued as a feminised, caring profession – that accounts for the suppression of wages. In other words, nurses are paid equally – but badly.'

The launch of the research coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act: in the UK the difference between women and men's pay is still significantly higher than the average across EU countries. The report contributes to the debate on how and why certain types of work are (de)valued and remunerated.

The arrival of the pandemic shifted

the significance of the report up the agenda. Although nurses were identified as critical workers, and the nation showed their appreciation through weekly claps for 'key workers', the Government suspended gender pay gap reporting. As Anne explains, more research is critical to ensuring that the detrimental economic impact of the health crisis does not fall disproportionately on women. 'We know that during and after pandemics, women often fare worse economically, for many reasons. Understanding what work we value as a society – including 'caring' professions like nursing – can help us to avoid this. At the Business School, we intend to continue our research in this area, applying more refined analysis, a wider range of measures and creating evaluation tools. It is important that in the post-COVID-19 world we improve transparency and fairness.'

The research team included colleagues from the Oxford School of Nursing and midwifery.

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Royal College of Nursing



BANKING: CORRUPTION, REGULATION AND STABILITY



The performance and stability of Banks during periods of crises has a major impact on economic and social recovery. Dr Dimitrios Asteriou is researching how the European banking sector has been afflicted by two major crises since the turn of the century: the 2007-10 global financial crisis; followed by further losses and problems for banks exposed in the Eurozone (Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain). These events sparked concerns about the

functioning of the capitalist system and how to tackle problems including corruption and the lack of transparency. Improvements were introduced, including greater regulation, the requirement for more transparency in reporting, greater scrutiny of banks' risk exposures via stress tests, and greater monitoring of banking activities and products.

Dimitrios is analysing the factors that influence bank profitability and stability in the Eurozone banking system:

'The two European banking crises took place in mainly market-oriented economies which exhibit significant differences - in their degrees of economic freedom, regulatory frameworks (of both the banking and non-banking sectors), levels of corruption and degrees of banking sector transparency.

By examining these, I hope the research will contribute to better policy design.'

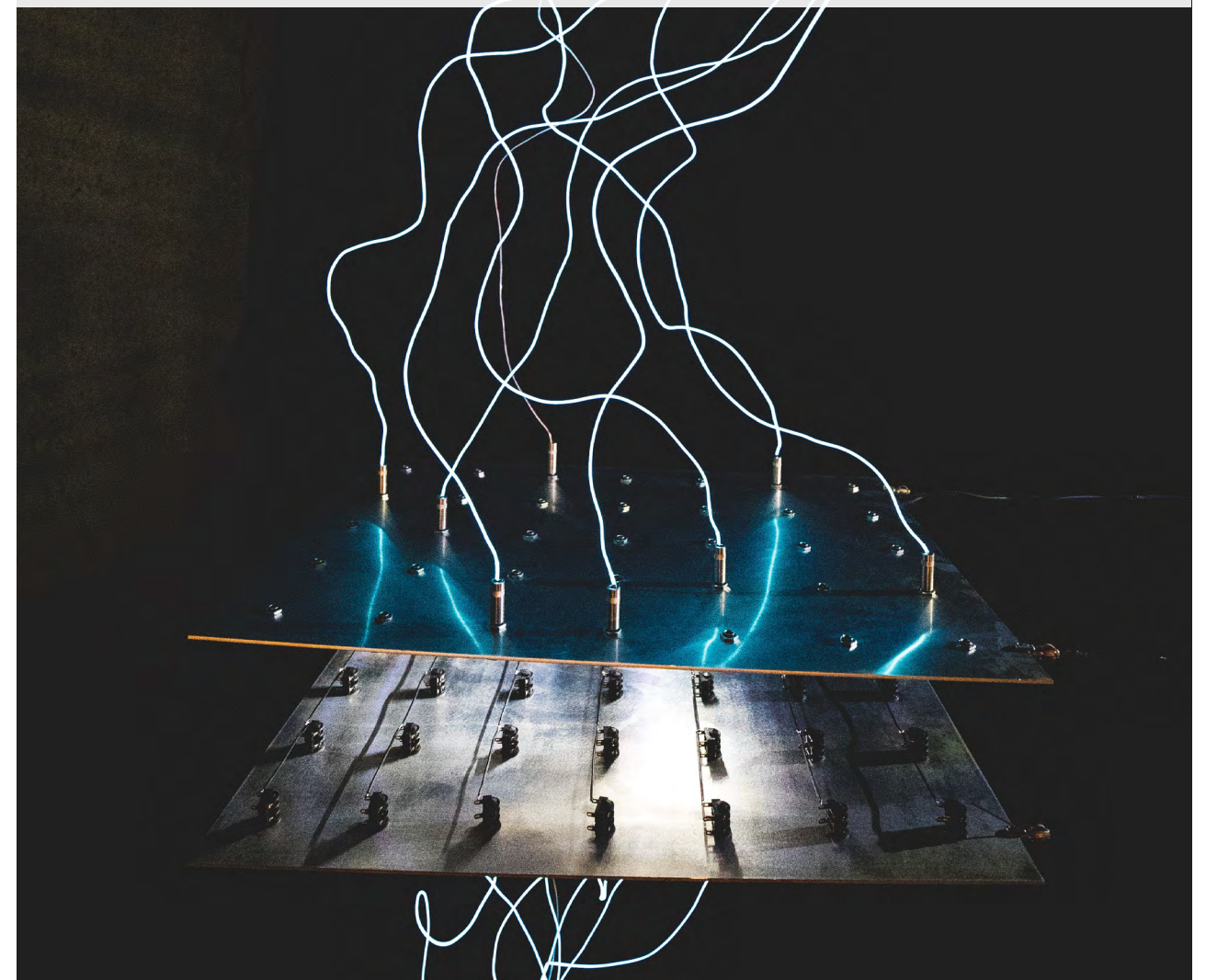
Dimitrios suggests that it is not only policy-makers who should be interested in the topic:

'To some extent the survival of the Euro currency is tied up with the health of the Eurozone banking system. We know that when banks need to be bailed out, the general public can often end up 'footing the bill', and suffering considerably. Furthermore, there are lessons to be learnt in the context of the recent economic/financial crisis caused by the COVID-19 outbreak which, in conjunction with Brexit decisions, might lead to greater financial uncertainty and therefore to a further destabilisation of the Banking system.'

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CONNECTIVITY

Physical travel may have reduced, but collaboration and communication have increased through different forms of connectivity. Technologies and social media have developed to respond to changed needs and behaviours – through group chats and meetings – and traditional modes of connecting have been 'replaced' by new ways of working. Our research is highlighting how different communities and disciplines are forging new connections – from tackling isolation, to enhancing individual development.





OLDER GENERATIONS AND CONNECTIVITY



The pandemic has heightened awareness of an ageing population across Europe and the need to maintain contact and community,

including through the use of digital tools. But little research has been conducted with older people and their use of technology for connectivity. Dr Sarah Quinton, and colleagues from the School of Arts and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, have conducted research into the role of digital technologies in reducing social isolation and loneliness for older people.

The community-based research project involved creative workshops with people, aged between 60-90 years old. Participants shared personal photos via smart mobile phones, tablets and also in hard copy. They discussed what these images meant to them, and how they connected with others through sharing images on various platforms.

Powerful stories emerged about people's past lives, including stories of migrations, tales of nostalgia from the Windrush Generation, and experiences of Oxford from decades ago.

'The need to connect with others is a powerful human motivation, even via social media and digital platforms,' Sarah explains. 'We found that sharing photos and being able to see other people and their images enabled older people to feel 'part of life' and improved their feelings of wellbeing and reduced perceptions of loneliness – even when they were doing this in a distant way. Whilst a physical hug offers comfort, seeing images of

friends and families, and life events, even when in 'distant socialising' can provide the same connectivity. One participant described it as "like a virtual hug".'

Participants were invited to curate an exhibition of a selection of the images and photographs at Oxford Brookes Lab Exhibition Space and also at East Oxford Community centre.

The research is an example of how Business School academics work well with researchers from other Faculties. In recognition of this, the team has been awarded a Research Excellence grant from the University to develop a virtual network of good practice for inter-disciplinary research with older people across the UK, Italy and Ireland.

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MENTORING AND COACHING PROVISION IN A PANDEMIC



Mentoring and coaching have been widely used in recent years to help alleviate disadvantage and inequality, but Dr Judie Gannon's ongoing research at the Business School highlights the challenges of providing these supportive relationships amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

An interim report, published in 2019, identified the variety of causes which mentoring initiatives seek to address including poor educational attainment across different sectors of society; gender inequality in professions; and access to employment opportunities for migrants and ex-offenders.

At the time, while respondents highlighted their services relied mainly on face-to-face interactions, several schemes had developed innovations to incorporate features of coaching and offer support more flexibly, via remote interfaces. Whilst these innovations helped engage participants, they also raised challenges. They required revised training protocols and practice guidelines, squeezed resource-deprived programme teams, and raised concerns about funding, sustainability, service quality and effective evaluation.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 changed things. Social distancing created difficulties for programme managers in mentoring and coaching, as Judie explains:

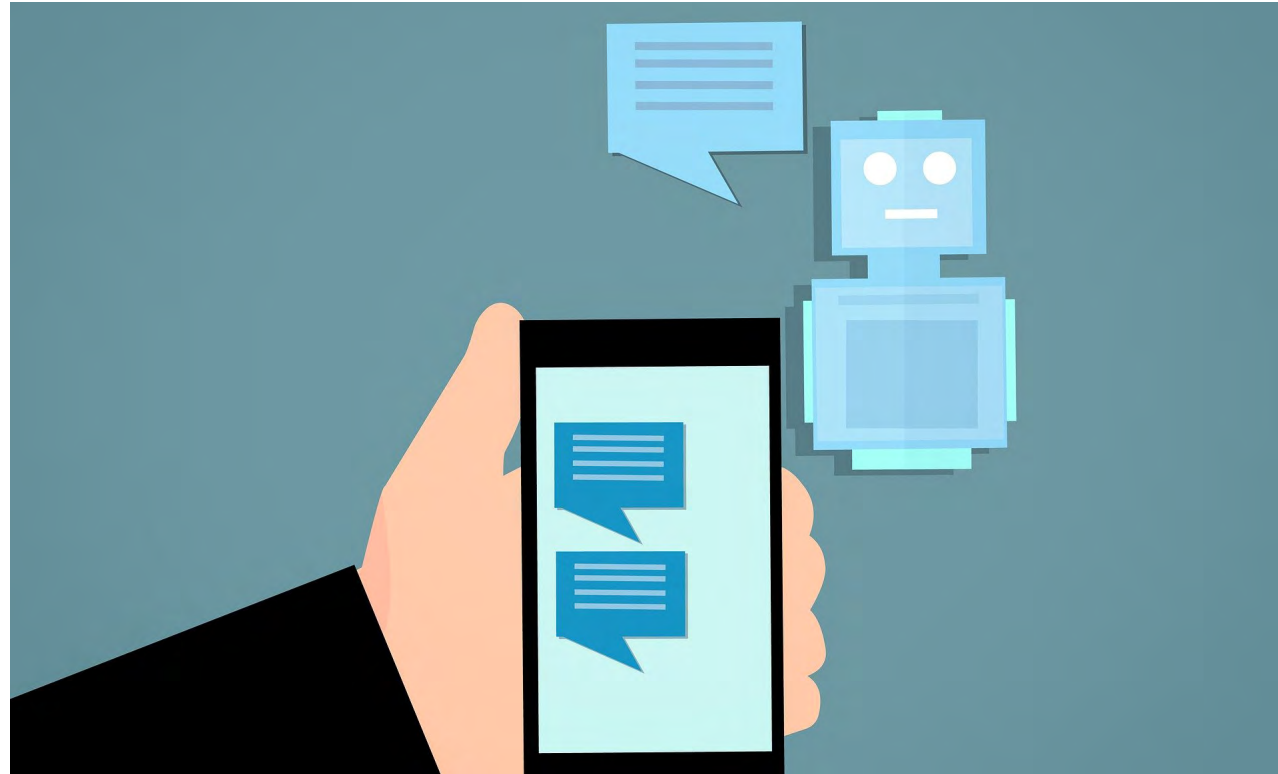
'The virus has changed practice in coaching and mentoring in different ways. Many mentoring schemes have had to suspend provision to their vulnerable mentees, which is devastating for programme

managers and commissioners, as well as for those they seek to help. But some initiatives have been able to shift online, disregarding their previous face-to-face or mixed provision. This has worked where there had been previous investments in training. Those mentors feel confident, and need limited support, to switch to virtual interactions.

In contrast, the response of the coaching world has been more skewed towards the formation of formal and informal networks to proffer services 'pro bono' to support leaders and the wider general public.'

Judie believes that these diverging approaches highlight differences in skills between coaching and mentoring and the way technologies and connectivity can be mobilised by both to address issues of social disadvantage and inequality.

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DIGITAL WELL-BEING AND CHATBOTS



The arrival of the Coronavirus pandemic caused massive disruption to many ways of life – institutions

‘closed down’, people socially distanced, and many businesses and activities resorted to online interactions and practices. The impact on individuals’ mental health became of acute concern.

For Dr Christian Ehrlich - who works on issues of wellbeing in the workplace and who has developed an online course to share his findings – the pandemic provided an opportunity to extend his research. In conjunction with Syndeo, a software company that develops artificial intelligence enabled customer communication solutions, he has been awarded funds by Innovate UK for a Digital Wellbeing Coach project.

It is ground-breaking research into

mental health, digital learning and artificial intelligence.

‘I’ve worked on happiness and people’s goals for years, and developed workshops and an online course so I could immediately see the relevance of my work amidst the dramatic social changes brought about by the pandemic’, Christian says.

The grant from Innovate UK was awarded in a highly competitive process: only 719 projects from across the nation were funded, from a field of over 8,600 applications.

The Digital Wellbeing Coach is an artificial intelligence-based software tool that aims to enrich the learning experience of online training courses through the use of a chatbot. It is being developed, in the first instance, to enrich the learning experience of a Brookes online training course.

The chatbot will guide people through course materials, whilst monitoring their emotional reactions and prompting them to utilise specific goal-setting activities. With integration into Moodle, an established online learning system, it will allow course moderators to tailor content to the specific needs of course participants.

According to Christian, the Digital Wellbeing Coach promises to add great value to Brookes’ course participants’ experience. But it also has great potential for much wider applications - particularly for students participating in distance learning but also those working from home.

‘It’s clear that many institutions, Universities and businesses are going to provide more services, courses and training online from now on. There are many issues to consider as that process evolves, not least, the welfare of recipients. The Digital Wellbeing Coach will contribute to our understanding of how that is best done – to ensure the mental and emotional health of people as they continue to learn and work in the post-COVID world.’

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PHD STUDENTS’ RESEARCH

The Business School prides itself on supporting emerging researchers through our Doctoral Programmes. Students from all around the world choose to undertake doctoral research at the Business School across a broad range of subjects as well as having the opportunity to study for a professional doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring. Their studies contribute to a wide and varied knowledge-bank, and bring new interests and perspectives to all the School’s centres. Whilst honing their research skills under the supervision of more established academics, they are contributing to discussions in diverse areas – including leadership, emerging business models, the environment and refugees. Their research addresses some of the major challenges of the 21st century and contributes to better understanding of global responses. These selected summaries provide a small taster of the range of PhD research undertaken in the Business School.



ABBIE MUCHECHETI



Abbie Muchecheti's PhD research speaks directly to national current concerns about racism and inequality in the UK. She is focusing on the under-representation in leadership roles of women who identify as black and ethnic minorities (BAME) in Higher Education Institutions, particularly those in non-academic roles.

'My early findings show that organisational, societal, historical and political factors - for example Brexit and the Windrush scandal - combine with individual experiences to create barriers in career progression. For example, the experience of being 'othered' whilst lacking representatives in positions of power, can mean these women's interests and concerns aren't even considered when decisions are made.'

Abbie hopes her research will encourage informed introspection in Higher Education Institutions and contribute to positive policy changes. And her ambitions go further:

'I hope my work will help any organisation which is serious about equality, and which wants to remove racism in the work environment.'

TUSHAR BANERJEE



'Social enterprises, organisations that aim to solve social problems and create a positive social impact, while sustaining themselves financially, often experience tensions in meeting their combined social, economic, and environmental objectives. How should resources, which are often limited, be distributed? Tushar Banerjee's research which is the first joint PhD between the Business School and BIMTECH, one of India's prestigious institutes, addresses this conflict.

'Previous research has looked at the pressures of achieving different objectives simultaneously, and the mitigations needed to avoid mission-drift or failure, but this has often been around the social and economic objectives in social enterprises. I am analysing tensions caused by environmental objectives which have drawn less attention from scholars so far. More and more social enterprises are recognising that the environment can't be ignored if you want to promote social wellbeing.'

Tushar is studying how resources are distributed, and the impact that context has on decisions. The research is being conducted in a developed economy (UK) and an emerging economy (India), countries which provide differing backdrops for entrepreneurial activity.

TIM HUGHES



Across the world, initiatives led by community-based Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working with businesses are an essential part of improving refugee resettlement outcomes. Such partnerships provide crucial support that is appropriately tailored to local contexts, enabling refugees to participate in the labour markets. However, without understanding of the characteristics and practices of effective and sustainable refugee employment partnerships, it is difficult to evaluate and plan such initiatives.

This is where Tim Hughes' research comes in. His research seeks to examine how NGO teams working directly with refugees evaluate and reflect on their organisational practices. The core purpose is to investigate how continuous, developmental self-evaluation can improve organisational practices.

Tim believes his research will provide valuable new perspectives and offer useful ideas for refining the practices of organisations working with refugees.

Tim explains, 'My work contributes to the debate about refugees' agencies and how host societies shape their opportunities. I hope my work will illuminate the ways for NGOs and businesses to work together to increase refugees' labour market participation.'

ANDREA KILPATRICK



Making the transition to senior leadership can be challenging for individuals' confidence. Whilst providing Executive Coaching, Andrea Kilpatrick noticed a lack of coaching literature around the issue. Her research tackles this, and includes interviews with recently promoted individuals, as well as the perspectives of Executive Coaches who have worked with those making the transition.

Andrea's work examines the issue of confidence: 'a sense of ease, clarity, congruence with oneself and the ability to show vulnerability.'

She identifies three key areas which impact confidence: the relational aspect (including expectations from others, scrutiny, loneliness, and differences); feeling 'out of control' (newness, lack of expertise, the need to be careful with language and behaviours); and identity (in particular the process of adapting identity and its impact on authenticity).

'It's been a privilege to understand first-hand how these people's confidence has been affected as they step into leadership roles, and how important they have found the support of executive coaching. By understanding confidence more, particularly at this transition point, the research will enable coaches to be more effective and help organisations better support leaders at this critical point.'

RUTH SIMPSON



Good leadership, and how it is acquired and developed, has never been more important. However, despite all the time, money and resources devoted to leadership talent, reports suggest that 30-50% of leaders fail, or underperform, within the first 18 months of starting a new role. When the move is into a senior leadership position, the costs to organisations of failed transitions, financially and in terms of performance, are magnified. The issue of 'coaching for leadership transitions' is the subject of very few empirical studies: Ruth Simpson is attempting to redress the balance.

She explains, 'Leadership is not isolated. I am exploring group coaching for those making the transition to senior leadership roles. Group coaching places individual development within the context of an organisation. It addresses the relational nature of leadership and can lead to the development of new ways of acting and being, improving decision-making and the ability to influence others in the face of uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.'

For further information on doctoral programmes please contact Dr David Bowen, Head of Doctoral Programmes, dbowen@brookes.ac.uk



BUSINESS SCHOOL:
BOOKS AND
JOURNAL SPECIAL
ISSUES

Sharing Business School Research beyond the confines of the University is important: much of our work relies on collaboration with other Higher Education Institutions, organisations and businesses. Publishing research findings in books or through 'Guest Editorships' of leading academic journals helps bring our expertise to new audiences, shape conversations and evolve new research agenda.





DOING COACHING RESEARCH - EDITED BY DR PETER JACKSON AND DR ELAINE COX, PUBLISHED BY SAGE



Life does not always go as planned: part of the discipline of good academic research is the ability to adapt to

the unforeseen and mitigate against or compensate for the unexpected. When Dr Peter Jackson undertook his PhD in coaching, he found, like many doctoral students, that nothing was quite as simple as some textbook approaches would suggest. So, Peter decided to publish a book which would address the problems of research in his field.

'When I was doing my doctorate, there was a lot of library searching - and a lot of soul searching. Coaching is, by necessity, a complex 'relationship'. I used my own frustrations, questions and experiences as a student as an inspiration in editing this book on how to do research into coaching. This is probably the book I would have wanted in front of me when I was doing that initial research.'



Peter's book edited in conjunction with Dr Elaine Cox explores the real practicalities of doing research in this complex field.

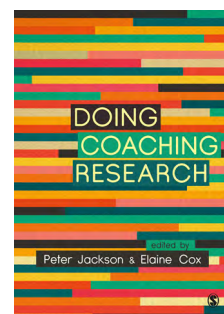
It addresses the very individual nature of the practice being investigated, issues of confidentiality, and the significant influence of the context in which the coaching takes place.

Contributors from around the world give first-hand accounts of different methodological approaches and experiences. All the contributed chapters are co-written with recent doctoral graduates and include first-hand accounts of some of the challenges overcome. There are

chapters exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research, as well as contributions addressing the practical logistics of organising research projects. Routes to sharing research knowledge with professional practice are examined, as is the issue of how doctoral researchers use their research in their ongoing careers and practice.

Peter says, 'This is not just another regurgitated collection of received wisdom. It is intended to work as a genuine companion - much like a coach does - to help researchers get the best out of their experience.'

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'ORGANIZATION STUDIES' - SPECIAL ISSUE CO-EDITOR, PROFESSOR JULIETTE KONING



A Special Issue of 'Organization Studies', co-edited by Professor Juliette Koning, challenges

intellectual paradigms and self-referential theoretical academic approaches, to examine the ways in which spirituality, symbolism and storytelling can make a difference in management and organisation studies.

The Special Issue engages with the multiple crises we face - economic, financial, food, water,

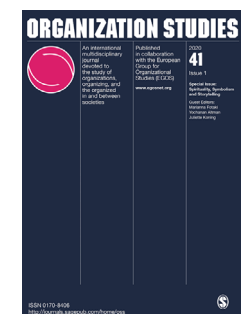
energy, climate, migration and security and argues that there is an absence of shared understanding of their causes and of ways to address them.

These crises, the special issue editors argue in the introduction, have called into question extant institutional and organisational paradigms, as well as the theoretical frames we rely on in our teaching and research. The articles highlight that a turn to ecological visions, cultural myths and spiritual narratives, as well as to philosophy, theology and anthropology as foundational disciplines, and to ethnography and storytelling as base methodologies, is an important starting point to re-think, re-imagine, re-write and re-examine the role of organisations, organising and managing in society - past, present and future.

Juliette says 'The articles included in the Special Issue discuss the role of archetypes in leadership (Julian

Assange and Mark Zuckerberg), the performative myth of Santa Claus in Finland, spiritually charged sensemaking of Canadian entrepreneurs, storytelling in a Buddhist Non-Governmental Organisation in Taiwan as a means to share a worldview, and a contemplation on the future of power and management.'

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'SERVICE INDUSTRIES JOURNAL' - SPECIAL ISSUE CO-EDITOR, PROFESSOR JANINE DERMODY



The magnitude of environmental problems facing humans and the planet is beginning to reach crisis

point. While attention has historically attributed this to manufacturing, the impact of services production and consumption is equally damaging. Organisational and individual behaviour must change to become more sustainable. Recognising how difficult it is to achieve this change, this Special Issue, edited by Professor Janine Dermody, brings

together contributions that offer innovative ideas and practices to encourage sustainability behaviours within the service industries. Emphasis is placed on 'thinking differently' to stimulate change.

The resulting collection of papers explores how organisations (should) think about sustainability, and how (and why) consumers connect with sustainability through the services they buy.

The papers provide vital interconnected propositions on the ecological, human and economic sustainability of services, producers, and consumers. For example, using retail greenery to restore environmental and health well-being to shoppers. Utilising a proactive type of corporate social responsibility to strengthen the economically sustainable financial performance of service providers in emerging economies. Using digital 'nudging' to overcome consumers resistance to buying an electric car. Improving understanding of what consumers are willing to give up in choosing banking and healthcare brands they perceive as ethical, and under what circumstances.

Questioning what makes people improve the sustainability of their health behaviour through their continued use of fitness-tracker wearable devices. In summary, this collection offers a viable starting point for innovative research to increase sustainability behaviours in the services industry.

Janine and her co-editors also propose thought-provoking ideas for future research, with the expectation that a new generation of inspiring studies will emerge.

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WORKING WITH BUSINESS



Knowledge Transfer Partnerships

In summer 2020, Oxford Brookes began work on an Artificial Intelligence (AI) project with Blenheim Palace. Funding is supported by the Economic and Social Research Council and Innovate UK as part of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP). The work is led by a cross university team involving Dr Paul Jackson of the Oxford Brookes Business School and Dr Matthias Rolf from the School of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics. The KTP will help Blenheim develop innovative approaches to smart tourism and heritage management through AI-enabled real-time data. This will build on existing and new sources of data to produce algorithms for predicting visitor numbers and profiles, as well as understanding live visitor flows on site. AI will also be used to enable better planning and management of staff, logistics, supplies, maintenance and hospitality and is being conducted by Dr Yayoi Teramoto, the KTP associate for the project. The project is expected to run for 32 months and will also engage with a range of partners from across the heritage and visitor attraction sector.

For more information about Knowledge Transfer Partnerships see: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/business/research/knowledge-transfer-partnership/>

Overcoming Challenges in 2020 with the Business and External Engagement Team

Like for all organisations, the pandemic in the Spring of 2020 created challenges for the Business and External Engagement unit and its customers. It was encouraging to note that many of our partners and individual clients wanted to continue and expand their activities with us as new approaches to survival and growth were being sought.

We responded swiftly by adapting services. Alongside undergraduate and postgraduate courses, our shorter, executive class-based education courses were postponed until social distancing measures could be introduced or transitioned online.

OBBS Bitesize

We provided a series "Business School Bitesize" live webinars on topics of relevance including: business and personal resilience; team working; and leadership in times of severe disruption. Over 500 people registered for the first 6 events in the series. A large number were from local businesses – many of whom expressed a desire to stay in touch with the Business School and take part in subsequent webinars, engage with the research or get specific help through consultancy or other support.

Our regular, mainstream work also continued, offering coaching qualifications to individuals, management training to organisations, economic impact analyses and other consultancy projects.



Looking Ahead

The Business and External Engagement team has been working with local businesses to develop plans for 2021, capitalising on some of the new skills developed during the pandemic period. This has included researching and delivering an overview of the support services available for 'Scale Up' organisations in Oxfordshire (Scale Up is a distinct phase of company growth. It's a company that has achieved a lot, had some impressive success and is ready to take it to the next level).

Pre-COVID-19, Oxfordshire had the highest number of growing businesses per head in the UK. Our Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) wants to build on this and become globally recognised as a hub where businesses can move from 'Start-up' to 'Scale up'. Working with OxLEP, we found that:

- Most growing businesses are 'cornerstone', providing everyday services and products
- There is wide ranging support for Start-ups but relatively little for Scale-ups
- Scale-ups need different support to Start-ups
- Identifying available support is difficult
- Facilitated networking helps collaboration and benchmarking

We made recommendations and mapped current support in the county. The report is available here: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/business/employers/scale-up/>

Resulting from our research, we are expecting to grow our support for business organisations through the expansion of our Scale Up Network.

Scale Up Network

Feedback from participants in the first year of our Scale Up Network has been very positive. With support from the European Regional Development Programme, via OxLEP, we are expanding and improving to provide support for local, growing businesses.

The Network is made up of around 10 senior leaders from different businesses with 10-30 employees, none competitors. It meets regularly over the course of a year and is a combination of action-learning and expert input from Business School colleagues.

Businesses can apply to join the next cohort at <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/business/employers/scale-up/>

For further information on any of these examples of our work, or if you want to know how the Business and External Engagement team can help your organisation, please email:
OBBS-ExternalEngagement@brookes.ac.uk

HOW CAN THE OXFORD BROOKES BUSINESS SCHOOL HELP YOU WITH YOUR CHALLENGES?

Oxford Brookes Business School helps organisations develop and grow through research and practical support programmes, including:

- Research partnerships and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships
- Collaborative funding applications to Research Councils, Trusts and Foundations and Government-sponsored Knowledge Exchange Programmes
- Consultancy, where we act as independent partners providing insight and advice, based on our broad research experience and knowledge
- Bespoke training programmes, with Brookes Certification, drawing on our strengths across all business and management disciplines
- Development and support of workshops and symposia around key business development issues
- Senior Leader (MBA) Apprenticeships
- Open courses for individual participation and development

If you wish to receive information about our free programme of talks, open lectures, seminars and networking please contact
business-research-office@brookes.ac.uk

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