##### Researcher

Okay. Great. So obviously I've had a look at your profile and we've liaised a bit over email, so I know a bit about you, but I guess kind of, in your own words, could you just sort of tell me about your background and your kind of career to date and your current role, please?

##### Participant 38

Yeah. I'd be very happy to do that. So I studied a PhD in [alternative discipline] at [PhD university] back in the very early 2000s. I joined [public organisation] after my PhD, and that's kind of where I spent my career. So I think of myself as really a [subject specialist] by training. So I initially worked on things like [major public sector projects]. And then I moved to the [department] of the institution, which kind of looks at risks to [organisations] and that sort of thing, just after the global financial crisis hit. So that was like 2007, 2008. And I guess the main thing I did there was after that crisis hit, we set up a new programme looking at [topic]. Our job was to kind of set that programme up, think about what tools were needed, what the decision making process should look like, what research was needed to underpin that. So, that was my career at [public organisation], really. And then I moved to [current institution] in [recent times] to kind of head up a new research centre focused on [topic]. And I can tell you a bit more about that if you like.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. And obviously doing your PhD back in the early 2000s, as you say, was that with a view for you to sort of move into academia from that, or did you not really know at that point what you wanted to do?

##### Participant 38

I certainly didn't know when I started. I think it's common for people who don't work before they do their PhD, at least a number of people I've spoken to, you know, I just went straight through my undergrad, master's and ended up falling into the PhD if I'm being kind of completely frank about it. And enjoyed it more than I expected it. It wasn't a set out plan. While I was doing my PhD, I spent two summers at [public sector organisation], like on their internship scheme. I found that really kind of gave me a bit of purpose to my work. So it took things out of the abstract world of [subject] sometimes. It showed me how I could kind of use this in a kind of a practical way, which I found very exciting. So on the back of that, I didn't think for a moment about staying in academia. I really wanted to spend some time at [public sector organisation]. And ended up being there almost 20 years in the end. Yeah.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. If you don't mind me asking, what was it that kind of inspired you to leave your position at [public sector organisation] and move into working in a business school?

##### Participant 38

No, you're very welcome to ask. There's a few different factors. I guess, a very frank one I'll be honest with you about is, when you work in a large organisation like [public sector organisation], there are kind of a certain number of promotions you can get... I'm going to put this in a very crude way... while your job can remain very interesting, haha. And you can have research components, and you have a certain degree of freedom in terms of how you're spending your time. I think I kind of got to that limit. So, like a head of division level at [public sector organisation], it's called, and to be promoted again would have been being promoted into a job which meant managing like hundreds of people, which wasn't my strength and wasn't my interest either. So I thought at that point I could either spend my career in that role I'd reached, which I was really enjoying, or try something else for a little while. So I left on a, they have, like, a sponsored career break scheme, so you can leave for five years and then kind of return, if you wish, during that period. So it felt a little bit like a no risk situation from that perspective. Try something for a few years, and if I like it, then wonderful. If I find myself missing that old world, I could kind of go back.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. So the door is open for you to sort of return as and when you would like to?

##### Participant 38

Yeah. It's kind of very generous that they offered me that.

##### Researcher

And at the moment, do you personally have any kind of indication of whether you are going to return or if you feel you probably are going to stick in academia? I'd be interested to know.

##### Participant 38

I think if you held a gun to my head, I'd probably say I'll stick in academia for a bit longer. Because I kind of am enjoying the... like one difference that was kind of highlighted, I feel my role is quite a lot broader than it was previously. Maybe it's not unique to me. I felt like I was kind of a cog in a machine there. So you have, like, a portfolio of things you're kind of allocated, and in charge of. And they're the kind of areas, that's, like, the main expertise you need to kind of develop and take forward. You're not a decision maker by yourself in terms of, you know, there's, like a [decision] that is set right at the top of the organisation. Whereas in academia, I feel like I have much more scope to have a broader perspective. I can talk a little bit about that if you're interested.

##### Researcher

Yeah, definitely.

##### Participant 38

One example, so this research centre we're building up, we're trying to kind of push quite a lot in the direction of climate change and its implication for the [system]. [Public sector organisations] are kind of getting into this as a new area, but there's kind of much more scope in a business school to say, okay, this is an area that's really important for the [system]. We should be doing research in this area. Whereas at [public sector organisation] there's a bit of a question about why are [public sector organisations] involved with this? Isn't it the job of governments? Don't you think we should stick to our kind of narrower mandates?

##### Researcher

So do you feel, because you mentioned being in a large organisation, there's only so many times you can sort of move up to keep the job kind of interesting and not letting it get boring. Do you feel like in your current role, you have perhaps more kind of autonomy and flexibility than you ever did in industry?

##### Participant 38

I would certainly say that. Yeah. Another example I could give you is my ability to kind of just write something, put it out in a blog, or do an interview on a piece. I wouldn't have been allowed to do that before. For instance, I wrote a piece recently on [topic]. And a journalist called me up afterwards and we kind of did a piece on this. There's no way I would have done that at [public sector organisation]. My level of... partly from a kind of a caution perspective, the kind of downside risks, I think are much greater. So people are quite conservative, but also I would have had to jump through 1000 hoops within the organisation, whereas in the business school, I get a sense there's almost a push to do such things or a freedom to do those things.

##### Researcher

Yeah, definitely. Okay. That's really interesting. So I guess moving on to talk about what you're doing at the moment, then. Your role, obviously, I've read a bit on the website, but could you just tell me what your kind of responsibilities are in your role related to research, admin, leadership and any other kind of responsibilities you may have?

##### Participant 38

Yeah, sure. So basically, my role is to, I'm the director of this research centre. It was funded by [foreign organisation]. Effectively, the relationship is they've given us kind of a gift of money and told us to use that money as we see fit, to deliver a research centre that is impactful and enhancing our understanding of the world, this sort of thing. My role as the director of the centre, I guess, to do three things really. So one is to define the research strategy of the centre. That's the thing that's kind of hardest, I'll be frank with you, because you can kind of write down a research strategy, which we have done, but it takes years to kind of, as you know, doing a PhD, start new research projects, time for them come to fruition, working with people who have like a legacy of projects that they've joined, including my own. But that's one thing anyway. So we've kind of hired some postdocs and PhDs to help us take this forward, this strategy. The second element, which I'm spending a lot more of my time on than I thought I would do, is events. The reason for that, which is kind of obvious in hindsight, is when you have a new research centre, the way to kind of generate publicity and impact is by doing stuff that has, like, a near term impact, which is, you know, organise a conference or a workshop or this sort of thing. So we seem to have a constant stream of workshops which require speakers and such things. But it's also great fun thinking about who would be interesting people to kind of slot in. We had a very good one on [climate] recently, and it's kind of interesting using that to connect with people across the university who have perspectives on these issues. And the last strand, I guess, like the kind of education side, we run like exec education courses and we're in the process of planning a new master's degree. So those three strands, I think, define my work.

##### Researcher

So are you involved in any direct teaching yourself, or are you just sort of in the leadership role?

##### Participant 38

One of the big attractions for me - I didn't mention before - of leaving the [public sector organisation] and taking this role was to do some teaching. When you develop experience, it's kind of quite an exciting prospect to put that into practice and pass that knowledge onto people. So I spend a lot of time designing courses. I think the pandemic hasn't helped in terms of being able to deliver these things. I think I will be delivering some courses this term, but as of yet, I haven't taught anything. We're thinking about a summer school as well. So the model is I will be doing the teaching myself, but it just hasn't happened yet.

##### Researcher

Okay. And in terms of obviously your own personal kind of I guess, research projects that may or may not be related to the research centre, I imagine they probably almost all would be, do you work towards sort of like publishing papers on a regular basis in a way that may or may not be linked to that research centre?

##### Participant 38

Yeah. It's part of my contract that I kind of remain active from a research perspective. And it's very much my goal. I think it's important to kind of continue to produce research and kind of the best way to understand an issue, to kind of teach about an issue, I think, is to try and write some papers down. So yeah, very much so. But, yeah, it's a very random process.

##### Researcher

I'd be interested to know, I mean, obviously working at the [public sector organisation] and coming into academia, like you say, you've only been in the business school for [time]. Your job at [public sector organisation], was that a sort of job where you would be publishing things on an academic level as well as working as a [subject specialist] and stuff, because obviously you would think without any sort of prior knowledge, someone who came into academia a year ago, you'd think publications and stuff would be like a whole new world. But is that something that you were quite accustomed to already having done a PhD and having experience of that environment kind of thing?

##### Participant 38

I think to a degree is the answer. So earlier on in my [public sector organisation] career, I wasn't really focused on publishing papers because the incentives of the organisation were, it was more about having impact internally as a way to be promoted rather than spending time trying to get papers published. I think as my career developed, I ended up taking more kind of a specialist route where I tried to kind of carve out an area of expertise that I was kind of known for within the organisation. And that can naturally then push you in a direction of then, you know, how do you demonstrate expertise? You need to kind of publish some papers. So, yes, I did do that, my list of publications is far less than kind of other senior people in the business school, I guess, naturally. But I do have some experience with this. Yeah.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. So one thing that you mentioned as part of your directorship role for the research centre that you're leading, is sort of like working towards creating what you said would be impactful research. What does that kind of mean to you from your perspective, what is impact would you say from your own experience and perspective?

##### Participant 38

I think of it as something very hard to measure, I'll say, to start off. Something whereby someone who has authority to make decisions, so some policymakers in some role or other - if you can generate research that influences the way they think about issues - doesn't have to change their mind, they may not even realise you are the person who's generated the idea. But if the idea eventually kind of is something they're weighing into the decision, I view that as impactful. That's the kind of ultimate test, I think, really. Now there's like a slippery slope of how do you measure that? And people play games about, are your papers being referenced in, like, policy of organisations or government agencies or whatever? There's probably some merit in those types of metrics, but I don't think that's the crux of that. It is about are you influencing the way people think about, people in power, think about issues?

##### Researcher

And I mean, obviously having been in the business school for [time] and obviously the majority of that time has been in Covid-19 so you perhaps I would kind of guess have been working from home and that kind of thing. But have you been able to gauge at all in your time if that kind of view of impact is kind of shared by the business school in general and your kind of colleagues that you've worked with?

##### Participant 38

Good question actually. I'm not entirely sure how to answer that. I've got some sense. So there's another version of impact, which is like, is your work being widely seen internally within the business school, university itself? Is it appearing in newspapers or this type of thing? I sense maybe these two kind of objectives or definitions of impact maybe play a role. It's more of a hunch. Of course, there's a means to an end, which is the end I described of actually influencing the way people think about things. Sorry, I can't give you a good answer to that.

##### Researcher

No, that's fine, that's really interesting. And another thing, I guess, impact, like you said, it's hard to measure. And there's so many ways you think about impact as you alluded to. And there's, like the classic citations, as you kind of mentioned, then that kind of engagement with external stakeholders. Another aspect of impact, I guess, is kind of like the impact case studies within the REF. What I'm wondering is while you were working for [public sector organisation] before you came into your current role, was there any kind of visibility of the REF? Were you aware of what that was or anything before you sort of moved into your current role?

##### Participant 38

Good question. Do you know, hardly at all. It played no real role in anything I thought about. In a sense, occasionally, I'd be asked to write something for someone that I'd worked with in academia, which always felt like a slightly contrived, you know, why am I writing this for you versus someone else? And then sometimes the [public sector organisation] would change its policies so we couldn't write such things. So I probably had quite a negative impression of that process, being completely honest. In a sense, I don't think it's really kind of getting at impact. I think it's me writing something, a supporting line for someone I happened to work with. Has it really changed anything?

##### Researcher

And in terms of obviously now I would imagine that you've, I guess, got to grips more with kind of the REF and the role it plays in business schools? Are you yourself kind of expected to contribute to the REF in terms of submitting publications? And perhaps, I'd be interested to know if you've been approached or been working towards any impact case studies?

##### Participant 38

Yeah, that's a good question. I feel slightly removed from this process. So yes, I was asked to submit publications when I joined. I have no sense of what happened to that. There is a slight issue of communication within the business school, I think. I was asked to do two things. One was, I was handed a portfolio of papers, I think it was a random portfolio of papers, to score on the basis of how... I can't remember if it was an impact score, I think it was more just like the quality of the work score. How would I rank these papers? I forget the criteria. Something like, are they of national quality or are they of international quality, these types of things. So I did that. I also looked at one impact case study for someone, but again, I wouldn't say I have any terribly useful thoughts on it. Yeah.

##### Researcher

That's interesting. And you mentioned there something, you said that there are a few kind of communication issues within the school. Could you just tell me a little bit more about that? Do you feel like perhaps things are slightly unclear in terms of the kind of expectations of you or what you're kind of supposed to be prioritising or do you not feel that's the case?

##### Participant 38

Good question. That wasn't what I was getting at with communication. I think I meant more just the issue of everyone working remotely from home, where you join an organisation, and you're not entirely sure who does what and these sorts of things. I think as a general rule, I'd say, like the level of communication is kind of two notches down from how it was at [public sector organisation], I'd say, which I think could well be appropriate because at [public sector organisation], you'd spend your life in meetings, and half the time people were telling you what was going on across the organisation. So there's tonnes of information flow being pushed to you as a member of staff. And that's kind of at a much lesser pace at the business school, you know, there's kind of seminars you can join, but I think it's much harder to get a picture of what's happening across the area. Now, that is probably appropriate because it's much wider in scope and the links between centres are smaller, but there might be scope for a little bit more in terms of joining up dots between what people are working on. You did ask me, like, do I have enough clarity about what my role is? And I think so. I have, like, a monthly bilateral with the dean of the school where we talk about priorities of the centre. The thing that I do find very attractive is I have a lot of discretion to set those priorities myself, and it's quite different to relationships I've had with bosses previously, where it's more of a one way relationship where we need to deliver X, Y, Z, give us a plan for delivering those things. Whereas this, I feel it's much more a two way discussion or, if anything, the other way around. You know, what do I think should happen? Which is good.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. And you mentioned the sort of working from home aspects, and I did kind of want to touch on the pandemic and kind of the impact of that, obviously, you joined recently, and that was obviously after the first lockdown. So I imagine quite a peculiar time for starting a new role. Do you think what you're doing at the moment and kind of your priorities and the kind of things that you've been working on, do you think that is the same as what you would still be doing if it wasn't for the pandemic? Or do you think the role would be kind of different in a way?

##### Participant 38

That's a really interesting question. This is going to sound crazy because, of course, it should change what everyone is working on, it's such an enormous event. When I took the role and interviewed for it, I wrote down like a plan for how I wanted to develop the centre. And I did look back at what I read the other day. And one metric, one way of answering your question, is how similar is it? Is that plan what we've actually ended up doing? And the answer is, it's not 100 miles away. I think there's something about, you know, some issues we haven't been able to take forward, obviously, because of the pandemic. So things like we had a vision for having, like, a big kind of visiting scheme where you could attract prominent academics to come and spend the summer in [city] or people from [public sector organisations] spending time with us. Those are things that just don't make sense in a remote world, I think, to do that type of thing. But in terms of the recent strategy of the centre, I don't think it's really had a huge impact. I mean, [subject specialists] everywhere are spending a lot of time trying to understand the impact this is having on the world. I'm not really seeing that as like the front and centre thing that we can contribute as a research centre just because everyone else is focusing on it. So sometimes you need to take a step back and focus on something slightly different. I don't know if I've adequately answered your question?

##### Researcher

Yeah, absolutely. That's really interesting. Thank you. So obviously being the director of a research centre and there's various different strands within that you're working on. So you wear a lot of different hats, do you have a fairly significant workload? Do you generally feel like your sort of workload is very manageable or do you ever feel slightly overwhelmed by what you're kind of working on as director of the research centre?

##### Participant 38

No, I don't feel overwhelmed. I feel it's kind of more manageable than it has been at various other times in my career being totally frank. The biggest difference is, I feel I don't have the same frequency of short notice deadlines that I used to have. So some unreasonable request where somebody senior calls you up in the morning and asks for something two or three hours later. That kind of never happens. So I feel there's much more time to kind of plan around things. On the flip side, it's also a lot more of a self driven role, so it's a bit like how long is a piece of string... as you're probably finding with your PhD, there's never a point where you finish and you can put things down on a Friday thinking you've done everything you need to do. It's kind of just different. I probably spend more time on weekends working than I used to as one metric of this. But I think I'm trying to keep my hours relatively manageable partly because I have a family to kind of look after as well, so I can't ignore them.

##### Researcher

Yeah, of course. Interesting as well. So another thing that I want to mention and it comes up in almost every interview, we haven't touched on it yet, but a big kind of factor in the working lives of research active academics is the ABS list. I guess a similar question to that I asked about the REF - was that ever something that you were kind of aware of in your career outside of academia? And has that been something that you've realised since coming into your job? That it's something that is used? Or have you not really had any kind of interaction with that or been exposed to that very much?

##### Participant 38

I wouldn't say it's really changed that much. So, I was aware of it in my [public sector organisation] career. We didn't call it an ABS list but we had our own internal list that probably corresponded quite closely. We only introduced that, if I'm being honest, when I'd already reached a level in the organisation that this then wasn't a super relevant factor to me. In the sense that I didn't need to feel like I was hitting a particular level on that list to be promoted to the next role. I guess I'm in a slightly happier position in the business school that I'm [role] already. I don't feel like a high pressure to meet a particular publication target to move up a level of organisation. So I'm a [practice-oriented role], so I guess the goal would be to kind of produce enough research output to convert that to an academic [role] during my time at the school, I think. That comes back to kind of wanting to remain research active. I think this is a has some slightly unfortunate consequences. I'm sure you're aware that these kind of lists, I think whereby it incentivises you in a very narrow direction, which is kind of not at all what really interests me as a kind of a researcher. So I'm kind of drawn to kind of projects that bind together different disciplines or, you know, less the kind of project that has an end goal of a particular paper. And I know that's probably not the best strategy if you want to publish in a particular area, particularly in [field], where there's a slight kind of religious way of thinking about what the right approach is.

##### Researcher

Okay, that's really interesting. So I sort of have one final thing that I want to ask and cover, which is, obviously as you spoke about earlier, the door is open for you to go back to your kind of previous place of work, but at the moment you're not entirely sure if you would stay in the current trajectory or go back, you said you were kind of leaning towards academia, which is great, but obviously you don't know quite yet. So hypothetically, if you were to stay in academia in an academic role, what do you think the kind of future would hold for you in terms of your kind of aspirations and your goals? Would you want to take on more kind of leadership roles and perhaps go for an even higher role? I'd be interested to know.

##### Participant 38

I think both to be honest. I think there probably would be scope to do both at different points. I would certainly want to, over time, have a role that allows me to contribute to some policy areas. So, for instance, at [public sector organisations], they sometimes appoint academic to take external positions on different policy committees. I kind of viewed this role as potentially the stepping stone to that sort of thing. I'd hope to be able to do that. Your point about kind of taking more of a management role within the business school, that's also quite attractive to me, to be honest as well. I'm conscious I would want to learn about exactly how the school operates before I want do that sort of thing, but it feels like a way of having more impact in terms of shaping the direction of the school, which, yeah, I can't see why I wouldn't want to do that to be frank. But I think that's what's attractive to me about these types of roles, that there is scope to kind of spend some time in a more management focused role and then climb back into a more research focused role, it seems very flexible, which is great.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. Thank you. So I think I've covered everything that I kind of would want to ask. So I'm happy to leave my questioning there and let you enjoy your Friday evening. I'm happy to kind of leave things there, unless there's anything you can think of off the top of your head that you think might be useful or relevant to add to this kind of overall topic, of the kind of environment of business schools and the kind of way you've experienced that environment. It's okay if not, because we've covered quite a lot of ground. But if there's anything you can think of at all that you might want to add... if not, I'm happy to leave things there.

##### Participant 38

Yeah, I don't think so. The only thing you didn't ask about it, which, really briefly, I do sense a much more entrepreneurial spirit of the business school in terms of fundraising or, you know, marketing the activities of the school. It's kind of a noticeable difference with quasi public sector, which is where I was before. But no, I think, yeah, I've enjoyed your questions.

##### Researcher

Thank you. That's really interesting. And yeah, I was actually thinking when you were talking about the kind of flexibility to sort of pursue those different things, it's like, yeah, you really sort of do need to work hard and manage your time well in an entrepreneurial way and stuff. It's really interesting.

##### Participant 38

The challenge I find is, I call it like the rabbit hole effect, or something like that. Which is because you have much more discretion about how you're spending your time. There's so many interesting questions and issues out there. It's kind of staying kind of disciplined each day so that you can make sure you're working on the most important thing that you should be. When you're in a job that doesn't have that freedom, those temptations are not there, if you like. And that's an interesting thing to look at... like a personal management thing.

##### Researcher

That's really interesting. Thank you for that final comment, because it is definitely something to think about in the context of my own research. So yeah. Thank you very much. I do really appreciate you giving me your time and your honesty and answering my questions. I've really enjoyed chatting to you, and I've got a huge page of notes, which is always a good sign after an interview. So yeah, thank you very much.

##### Participant 38

Very good. And good luck with it. Keep me in the loop in terms of how this goes and keep in touch.

##### Researcher

Definitely. And, yeah, like I said, thank you very much for your time and best of luck with everything for you and thank you very much and take care. Bye.