University of Southampton

Faculty of Social Sciences

Southampton Business School

Business Schools and the Impact Agenda

by

Samuel Douglas James Redgrave

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Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis is to explore the impact agenda in the context of business schools. This includes examining the academic discourse related to the relevance and impact of business schools and understanding the lived experiences of those individual actors – business school academics – who are navigating this agenda daily. This thesis is composed of three distinct yet related papers. The first paper is a systematic literature review that synthesises the fragmented body of knowledge pertaining to the relevance and impact of business schools. By acknowledging the contribution of applying a multidimensional lens to the study of business schools, a holistic thematic framework that provides theoretical directions for the future is developed. This framework emphasises the potential of an institutional logics perspective to viewing business schools, offers a novel proposal for understanding the gap between discussions of research and education, highlights the application of a value co-creation theoretical lens when considering how business schools engage with stakeholders in research and education, and puts forward an all-encompassing stakeholder-centric definition of relevant and impactful knowledge.

The second and third papers are based on semi-structured interviews with fifty-nine business school academics across ten research-intensive business schools in the United Kingdom. The second paper finds evidence for three field-level institutional logics in the business school environment: the *academic profession logic*, the *business logic*, and the *accountability logic*. The institutional environment is found to have nurtured an *institutionally driven perception of impact* among individual actors. This is the perception that impact is an elusive concept, a non-primary mission, and should be measurable to hold value to universities. This highly institutionalised view of impact was found to be exclusionary of the entire range of ways business school academics can be impactful, and as such, has consequences of how individuals identify with the concept of impact.

The third paper explores the academic environment of business schools further, finding that individual actors are constrained in enacting the subservient *accountability logic* due to the distinct ways in which the institutional environment manifests. The manifestations observed are categorised as *metrics & monitoring*, *administration & bureaucracy*, and *workload & wellbeing*. It is found that these elements contribute to a situation of bounded autonomy for participating in the impact agenda. Furthermore, when observing the academic career lifecycle, more senior academics are perceived as having a greater ability to engage with the notion of impact. This raises questions about the extent to which early career academics are able to, and can be expected to, respond to the impact agenda.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

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Samuel Douglas James Redgrave

Title of thesis:

Business Schools and the Impact Agenda

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
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Although the outputs of this thesis are co-authored, the work has been written and developed by me. The role of the co-authors was to supervise the work and provide guidance.

Abbreviations

ABS.................................. (Chartered) Association of Business Schools

CAQDAS .... Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software

ECA .... Early Career Academic

HE .... Higher Education

HEFCE .... Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEIs................................ Higher Education Institutions

KPIs .... Key Performance Indicators

KTP .... Knowledge Transfer Partnership

MBA................................ Master of Business Administration

mKTP .... Management Knowledge Transfer Partnership

NSS .... National Student Survey

PDR .... Professional Development Review

RAE................................. Research Assessment Exercise

REF .... Research Excellence Framework

TEF .... Teaching Excellence Framework

TTO................................. Technology Transfer Office

WAM............................... Workload Allocation Model

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the thesis

The significant role that business schools play in the worldwide higher education (HE) ecosystem cannot be downplayed. Indeed, "in many parts of the world, business schools are growing rapidly in size and prestige" (Harley, 2019 p. 286). In the 2021/22 academic year in the UK, business and management was the most studied subject, with almost 19% of students studying within this area (HESA, 2023). As for research, in the UK's 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment, 16,083 outputs were submitted in the "Business and Management Studies" unit of assessment (UKRI, 2022a) compared to, for example, 7,296 for "Computer Science and Informatics" (UKRI, 2022b) and 7,108 for "Biological Sciences" (UKRI, 2022c). Despite this prominence, business schools have been the centre of much debate related to how they balance the pressure to be scientifically rigorous and academic in focus with an expectation to be practically and societally relevant (Chia and Holt, 2008; Irwin, 2019; Thomas, 2009). This is also known as the "rigour-relevance debate" (e.g., Thorpe *et al.*, 2011 p. 422) and the "rigour-relevance gap" (e.g., Kieser and Leiner, 2009 p. 516).

This growing debate has coincided with the emergence of the "impact agenda", described by Holbrook (2017 p. 2) as "policy makers' attempts to impose accountability on academics for the public funding of research". This has been seen in the UK in the REF, replacing the former Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) (Smith *et al.*, 2011). In the REF, "impact" has become an "indicator of research excellence, where research excellence is analogous with the economic or societal value of research" and thus "academic departments are challenged to submit narrative-based impact case studies" as part of the REF exercise (Watermeyer, 2016 p. 200). Thus, the impact agenda reflects this "general trend to assign more weight and recognition to the extra-academic impact of scholarly work" (Angermuller and Wróblewska, 2023 p. 31). The impact agenda has raised important issues for academia, and whilst it has been generally welcomed as a way of demonstrating practical and societal relevance, there are questions about the dangers it poses to knowledge production and academic autonomy (Bandola-Gill, 2019).

The purpose of this doctoral study is to examine the impact agenda in the context of business schools, both in terms of the academic discourse related to impact and relevance in business schools and understanding the lived experiences of those individual actors (i.e., business school academics) who are navigating this agenda on-the-ground. This aim is demonstrated through three distinct but related papers (Chapters 3, 4, and 5), with the first paper being a systematic literature review of the discussions of relevance and impact in business schools, and the second and third papers being empirical investigations of business school academics in the UK. Chapter 3 is motivated by a seemingly fragmented literature base related to relevance and impact in the business school context, as well as a mixed understanding of what constitutes "relevance". Indeed, "the term relevance is often used in the academic debate without specifying exactly what is meant by it" (Flickinger *et al.*, 2014 p. 107). Chapters 4 and 5 are motivated by calls to develop our understanding of the institutional environment of business schools (Hommel and Thomas, 2014; Paterson *et al.*, 2018) and the lack of academic works on the notion of impact as it relates to business schools (Lejeune *et al.*, 2019).

1.2 Theoretical background

This thesis draws inspiration from institutional theory and the institutional logics approach. Viewing business schools through the theoretical lens of institutional theory is an effective means to examine and understand the complexity within the business school environment. Not only have the ideas from institutional theory been used frequently in the context of higher education (e.g., Bastedo, 2009; Mampaey and Huisman, 2016; Upton and Warshaw, 2017), but many developments in our theoretical understanding of institutions were derived from observations of the higher education setting (e.g., Thornton, 2004; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999). Furthermore, institutional theory, and specifically the institutional logics perspective, has emphasised the importance of considering field-level structures and focusing on a particular organisational field (Thornton *et al.*, 2012). An organisational field constitutes "those organisations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organisations that produce similar services or products" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983 p. 148). In this thesis, business schools in the UK are taken to compose an organisational field. The institutional logics approach helps to highlight how micro-level actors (i.e., business academics) perceive and navigate field-level pressures (i.e., pressures that business schools face), and thus lends itself to being appropriate for tackling the research problem.

Institutional theory is "an approach to understanding organisations and management practices as the product of social rather than economic pressures" and is based on "the key idea that the adoption and retention of many organisational practices are often more dependent on social pressures for conformity and legitimacy than on technical pressures for economic performance" (Suddaby, 2013 p. 379). A core argument in this thesis is that impact, as prescribed by the impact agenda, is an emerging theme in the HE context that is becoming more and more institutionalised, and this institutionalisation is a topic worth studying. Furthermore, this institutionalisation of impact into the fabric of higher education institutions (HEIs) is seemingly a product of external pressures and a quest for legitimacy, for universities in general and also business schools specifically.

Institutional theory is an established approach to investigating organisations and has been developing for some time. Scott (2014) explored the history of institutional theory and observed some of the early influences in this domain. He emphasised the influence of Herbert Spencer in the late 19th century and early 20th century, and William Graham Sumner in the early 20th century, to the development of early institutional theory in sociology. He highlights that Spencer saw society as an organic system that evolves, and that the transformation of this organic system to its context is accomplished via “the functions of specialised organs structured as institutional subsystems” (Scott, 2014 p. 10). Scott (2014 p. 10) points out that Sumner, embracing this conception, went on to posit that an institution is devised of a *concept* and a *structure*, whereby “the concept defines the purposes or functions of the institution” and “the structure embodies the idea of the institution and furnishes the instrumentalities through which the idea is put into action”.

Scott (2014) explored the development of institutional theory in sociology and the influence of various other sociologists such as Charles Horton Cooley and Max Weber. In particular, he points out the significant influence that Weber has on contemporary institutional analysis, given that his work was concerned with comprehending how cultural rules determine social structures and regulate behaviour. Contemporary approaches to institutional theory, referred to as Scott as “new” institutional approaches or “neoinstitutional organisation theory” (Scott, 2014 p. 22), combine the study of organisations with institutional theory. DiMaggio and Powell (1991 p. 14) highlight that "older institutionalists regarded organisations as both the units that were institutionalised and the key loci of the process", whereas "neoinstitutionalists view institutionalisation as occurring at the sectoral or societal levels, and consequently interorganisational in locus" and therefore neoinstitutional theory posits that "organisational forms, structural components, and rules, not specific organisations, are institutionalised”.

The idea of institutional logics stems from the context of neoinstitutional theory and analysing organisations through an institutional lens (Thornton *et al.*, 2012). An institutional logic is described by Friedland and Alford (1991 p. 248) as “a set of material practices and symbolic constructions” which constitute “organising principles” and which are “available to organisations and individuals to elaborate”. Examining institutional logics is useful for exploring how organisations and individuals are affected by the different aspects of an interinstitutional system, and institutional logics represent “frames of reference that condition actors’ choices for sensemaking, the vocabulary they use to motivate action, and their sense of self and identity" (Thornton *et al.*, 2012 p. 2).

Thornton *et al.* (2012) differentiate between societal-level logics and field-level logics, arguing that field-level logics are embedded within those at the societal-level. Citing McAdam and Scott (2005), they highlight that actors carry out different practices that are interrelated and taken-for-granted within and across organisations that exist within an institutional field. Thornton *et al.* (2012 p. 148) note that "field-level logics are shaped by, but distinct from, the logics of the interinstitutional system" and highlight that multiple institutional logics will typically develop at the level of the field. As an example that is relevant to the topic of this thesis, Conrath-Hargreaves and Wüstemann (2019) studied multiple institutional logics in the HE sector in Germany. They argued that there were three field-level logics that could be embedded in wider societal logics: the "government logic" coming from the societal-level "state logic"; the "academic logic" coming from the societal-level "professional logic"; and the "business logic" coming from the societal-level "market logic" and "corporation logic".

The applicability of the institutional logics approach in the domain of business schools is apparent from previous studies. The aforementioned rigour-relevance gap has, on occasion, been conceptualised as an issue of competing institutional logics (e.g., Bullinger *et al.*, 2015; Kieser, 2011; Paterson *et al.*, 2018). However, there have been various other applications of institutional logics in the business school domain. This includes, for example, in accreditation (Lejeune and Vas, 2014), internationalisation (Alajoutsijärvi *et al.*, 2014; Kodeih and Greenwood, 2014), open access education (Morgan-Thomas *et al.*, 2019) and responsible management education (Luow, 2015).

1.3 Research context

The systematic literature review in Chapter 3 is not relative to any one context. Indeed, the insights the review draws on come from many different contexts and countries. However, the empirical chapters – Chapters 4 and 5 – take place in the UK context, and specifically, look at business schools in the UK that belong to Russell Group universities. The Russell Group universities are a group of 24 research-intensive institutions in the UK (Russell Group, n.d.) that are known for their academic prowess. The decision to only approach Russell Group universities was to ensure a certain level of homogeneity in the research sample. It is very likely that the responses to the interviews would be different if a different group of universities were studied. A large number of universities in the UK are primarily teaching-focused, and the general expectations of these universities with regards to research are seemingly less intense. Academics working within Russell Group universities are well-placed to have experience of an environment driven by research pressures, alongside the educational and administrative parts of the job (Elen *et al.*, 2007).

Williams (2010) wrote about the history of business and management education in the UK. He noted that the UK was slower than some other countries, such as the USA and France, to enter the sphere of management education. He points out some early examples of management education in the UK, such as a “Faculty of Commerce” at the University of Birmingham that existed in 1902. However, he posits that it was not until the early 1960s that the United Kingdom saw “the start of a remarkable phenomenon in business and management education” (Williams, 2010 p. 12). with the establishment of university-based business schools. Before this, he argues, the only educational unit that came close to the concept of a business school was the “Administrative Staff College” at Henley that was established in the 1940s (now Henley Business School, part of the University of Reading).

Williams (2010) argues that two reports in 1963 were particularly influential in giving momentum to the development of business schools in the UK – the Robbins Report and the Franks Report. He points out that the formation of the Foundation for Management Education in 1960 was also pivotal in the development of business schools in the UK. He suggests that “the impetus came from the perceived need in the United Kingdom to improve productivity after the Second World War, and the belief that the higher productivity of the United States was partly due to the success of their business schools” (Williams, 2010 pp. 13-14).

Now, over 120 universities in the UK provide courses in the discipline of business and management (British Council, n.d.). Students from different countries across the world, both undergraduate and postgraduate, come to the UK for management education. A plethora of courses are offered – general business and management, marketing, accounting and finance, human resource management, entrepreneurship, innovation management, supply chain management, risk management, and so on. With the increasing success of management education in the UK has also come an emphasis on conducting scholarly research and a “discipline-led academic focus” (Thomas, 2009 p. 660).

This thesis is underscored by the premise is that examining any singular activity that could take place in a business school (e.g., research *or* education) in isolation when offering to study business schools in their entirety, as a unit of analysis, would omit to fully understand the complexity of a modern business school. Indeed, it is evident that business schools are complex, multi-dimensional entities with a variety of activities of focus that serve many different target audiences, consisting of a multitude of academic sub-departments (Jensen and Wang, 2018). As a minimum, business schools exist to engage with students, academics, and practitioners, achievable through various functions that must be balanced (Trieschmann *et al.*, 2000). Thus, when observing business schools as the subject of investigation, a focus on research activities alone, for example, would not accurately represent the reality of business schools. Thus, in this thesis, business schools are considered with respect to the entire portfolio of activities they engage in.

1.4 Research aims and objectives

As previously stated, the purpose of this doctoral study is to examine the impact agenda in the context of business schools, both in terms of the academic discourse related to impact and relevance in business schools and understanding the lived experiences of those organisational actors (i.e., business school academics) who are navigating this agenda "on-the-ground". This overall purpose is divided into three aims, and each of these aims are separately represented in the three papers that make up the thesis (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). Each aim is complemented by two objectives. These aims and objectives are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Research aims and objectives

Chapter	Aim	Objectives
3	To review and synthesise the current knowledge base in the domain of business schools and the relevance and impact of the knowledge they produce and disseminate in their research and education activities	1. To synthesise and thematically analyse the wide spectrum of literature in the area of the relevance and impact of business school research and education in order to generate themes that encompass the multidimensionality of business schools 2. To extend the synthesis, and contribute to advancing the business school literature, by identifying theoretical directions for the future and topics in need of empirical investigation led by a holistic thematic framework
4	To understand the institutional landscape of business schools and the implications of this for the notion of impact as perceived by individual-level actors within the environment	1. To identify the nature, salience, and prescriptions of the different institutional logics in the environment of business schools 2. To explore how the institutional logics shape perceptions and understandings of

		individual-level actors in relation to impact in business schools
5	To explore how the complex institutional environment of business schools' manifests in the lives of individual actors (i.e., business academics) and shapes their experiences of, and degree of autonomy in, engaging with the impact agenda	1. To explore what constrains individual-level actors in business schools in balancing core academic activities with being impactful on society and practice 2. To explore how the constraints experienced are perceived and navigated across the academic career lifecycle

1.5 Overview of the methodology

For Chapter 3, a systematic literature review guided by best practice (e.g., Denyer and Tranfield, 2009; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003) was utilised to systematically sift through the various works that were relevant to the aim of the review. This included the consistent use of a set of keywords across three databases (Business Source Premier, Scopus, and Web of Science Core Collections) and the application of strict inclusion and exclusion criteria that resulted in 266 peer-reviewed academic journal articles to be synthesised. A thematic analysis was conducted on article abstracts and significant streams of literature were organised into a holistic thematic framework.

Chapters 4 and 5 followed a qualitative, exploratory approach for data collection and analysis. Fifty-nine semi-structured interviews were carried out with business school academics across ten business schools in the UK. Purposive sampling was utilised to recruit participants who were able to provide rich information during the interviews. The business schools chosen are part of Russell Group universities, a group of institutions that are research-intensive. This helped to facilitate a certain degree of homogeneity in the sample, in that all participants were operating in a research-intensive environment, despite any differences in individual focus. The interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed and analysed using a thematic analysis approach that was inspired by the Gioia methodology (Gioia *et al.*, 2013).

A qualitative research design was deemed appropriate for this thesis due to the nature of the research aims and objectives. The goals of this thesis, in relation to Chapters 4 and 5, were best achieved by appreciating how the socially constructed realities and experiences of business academics are "produced and interpreted through social and cultural meanings" (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016 p. 4), which is the essence of a qualitative approach. The central focus of this research is individual experience of an institutional environment, and as such, qualitative research was the obvious choice and as it is "critical for gaining an understanding both of what individuals experience and how they interpret their experiences" (Bluhm *et al.*, 2011 p. 1870). The choice to use a qualitative approach for the thesis was guided by a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology. The methodology of the thesis is explained in-depth in Chapter 2, and the methodologies of the individual papers that make up the thesis are explained in their respective chapters (Chapter 3, Section 3.2; Chapter 4, Section 4.4; Chapter 5, Section 5.4).

1.6 Contributions of the thesis

This thesis makes a number of contributions to the literature on business schools, and the impact agenda, through the three papers that comprise it. Chapter 3, the systematic literature review, makes a significant stride in consolidating the various different lines of thought regarding the themes of relevance and impact as they pertain to business schools. The holistic thematic framework that is developed as a result of the review highlights the theoretical benefits of acknowledging that research and education co-exist in a wider business school system. An agenda is also put forward from the review to use an institutional lens in order to better understand the expectations and pressures that exist on business schools and, ultimately, on business school academics. The synthesis of the literature also led to the development an inclusive definition of relevant and impactful knowledge that can act as a reference point for more academic research into relevance and impact in the HE context. This definition is centered on an extensive synthesis of how relevance and impact have been discussed in the literature. This is important given that difficulties in defining what relevance is.

Chapter 4 provides a fresh way of viewing the institutional environment of business schools grounded in empirical data. Taking account of the varied pressures on business school academics in the form of research, teaching, and impact, Chapter 4 uncovers three institutional logics – an *academic profession logic*, a *business logic*, and an *accountability logic* – and explores how these exist within the socially constructed realities of business school academics and how they are guided by these logics. This chapter also explores the link between these logics and how impact is perceived, arguing that there is a perception of impact among individuals that is heavily shaped by the institutional environment. This paper provides evidence, at the level of the individual, of how logics are experienced and makes the argument that the way logics are presented to individual actors can significantly shape what they perceive as being legitimate when it comes to newly prescribed endeavours (in this case, impact).

Chapter 5 provides an even closer look at the micro-level of the institutional environment of business schools, exploring what constrains individual actors in engaging with the impact agenda. The argument made in this chapter is that the complex institutional setting, that comprises a space that is saturated with a multiplicity of complex expectations, manifests in a *constrained environment*, with implications related to metrics for measuring performance, bureaucracy, and workload. This *constrained environment* leads to a situation of bounded autonomy for individuals, where freedom is experienced within the limits of these implications and has further implications for the ability to engage with the impact agenda. The study also finds that with seniority comes enhanced agency to actively engage with the impact agenda, but this is very much down to individual choice, reflecting the subservience of the aforementioned *accountability logic*. The findings in Chapter 5 provide support for the notion that individuals can vary in the way they navigate institutional complexity and provides interesting empirical accounts of how an institutionally complex environment can be experienced in day-to-day working life.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. This chapter, Chapter 1, has introduced the thesis and stated the research aims and objectives. Following this, Chapter 2 takes the reader through the methodology employed across the thesis. This includes an overview of the ontological and epistemological assumptions, the research design (including sampling, the data collection process, and the data analysis process), reflexivity considerations and ethical considerations. Chapter 3 contains the systematic literature review of the literature pertaining to the relevance and impact of business schools, which includes a mapping of the literature streams and subsequent identification of avenues for future research and the development of a holistic thematic framework. Chapter 4 is the first of two empirical studies, utilising data from the semi-structured interviews, and examines – from the point of view of participants – the prevalent institutional logics in the business school field, and how these have shaped individual-level understandings of impact. Chapter 5, the second empirical study, uses the semi-structured interview data to explore the constraints on individuals in balancing the actions prescribed by the impact agenda with other academic endeavours, and explores this balance across the academic career lifecycle. The final chapter, Chapter 6, concludes the thesis, with a discussion of the theoretical implications of the thesis, the practical implications of the thesis, the limitations of the thesis, and potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 2 Methodology

2.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy refers to "a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge" (Saunders *et al.*, 2023 p. 131). Research philosophy is a fundamental concern for research design; the stance taken regarding philosophical considerations can notably alter the direction of research activities (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2021). It is important to consider both the ontology and epistemology related to a research project. Ontology relates to "ideas about the existence of and relationship between people, society and the world in general" (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016 p. 14) whereas epistemology relates to "assumptions about knowledge, what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge, and how we can communicate knowledge to others" (Saunders *et al.*, 2023 p. 134). The ontological and epistemological considerations for this thesis will be discussed in the following subsections.

2.1.1 Ontology

In a nutshell, ontology is related to "assumptions about the nature of reality" (Saunders *et al.*, 2023 p. 134). Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2021) point out four ontologies: realism, internal realism, relativism, and nominalism. They highlight that internal realism, relativism, and nominalism are the three positions that have been mostly debated within the social sciences. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016 p. 15) argue that, when contemplating what ontological position to adopt, it is important to "think about what you see as the fundamental properties in the social world that are worth studying". As discussed in the introduction, this research is about the socially constructed idea of impact and evaluating this in a particular context (i.e., research-intensive business schools). Judgements regarding impact and what it is, what it constitutes, and how it can be achieved are embedded in the particular context and background of an individual's experience, which exists within a wider organisational context. As such, the empirical parts of this thesis are concerned with the meanings associated with impact in the wider academic environment within the contexts that are being studied.

Psillos (2007 p. 218) suggests that relativism is "the claim that normative judgements have no force outside a certain context or background or community or framework in that there is no meta-perspective within which all different contexts, backgrounds etc. can be placed and evaluated". The empirical parts of this thesis arguably reflect this ontological stance. The context of the empirical parts of this thesis is research-intensive business schools in the UK, and no attempt is being made at extrapolating or generalising these experiences to contexts beyond this. Even within the context being studied, it is acknowledged that lived experiences and perceptions of individual organisational actors can differ, and thus only generalised themes that reflect common experiences can be developed. In other words, all claims that are made are essentially *relative* to the particular context being investigated.

A relativist approach emphasises that “different theories are regarded as alternative ways of construing the world, to be described or analysed rather than evaluated in terms of their predictive power" (Fletcher, 1996 p. 414). Chapters 4 and 5 make use of institutional theory, including the ideas of institutional logics and institutional complexity, to guide our understanding of the business school environment, and as such the findings are embedded in these wider theoretical frameworks. However, understandably, other frameworks or concepts could be used to theorise about the environment, and thus the theoretical foundations of the empirical parts of this thesis, as well as the findings generated, are acknowledged as being *one* way of construing the “world” as it exists for the participants who took part in the interviews. This is central to the relativist ontology adopted.

2.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with "the nature and limits of knowledge and justification" (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016 p. 236). Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2021) highlights positivism and social constructionism as two contrasting views. Whilst positivism refers to “working with an observable social reality to produce law-like generalisations” (Saunders *et al.*, 2023 p. 829), social constructionism refers to “a perspective that sees psychological, social and other categories as constituted and maintained through social processes, particularly language" (Breakwell *et al.*, 2020 p. 529). Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2021) argue that, under social constructionism, it is critical to comprehend how people make sense of their experiences. Furthermore, Burr (2015 p. 170) points out that “concern with social constructionist issues has led to new developments in research and a preference for qualitative methods of enquiry since these are ideal for gathering linguistic and textual data and are also viewed as less likely to decontextualise the experience and accounts of respondents”.

A social constructionist epistemology complements the relativist ontology (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2021). As mentioned in the previous subsection, relativism is focused on context, and “social constructionism argues that the ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific” (Burr, 2015 p. 4). This historical and cultural specificity is inherently tied with the idea of context. Within the context being studied, social constructionism aims to appreciate how phenomena such as organisations and industries – that are supposedly “objective” – are actually constituted by subjective meanings and discourse of individuals (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016).

Given the area of investigation for this thesis, social constructionism appears to be an appropriate and well-suited epistemological stance to take. The idea of impact in itself is a socially constructed phenomena and both the systematic literature review and the empirical parts of the thesis are concerned with the meanings attached to impact. In terms of the systematic literature review, this is the discourse of impact as presented in academic literature, whereas for the empirical parts of the thesis, this is the discourse of impact as given by organisational actors in business schools. It is also important, for the empirical parts of the thesis, to understand how social processes and experiences have built up the idea of impact. This can only be achieved by understanding how organisational actors have made sense of their experiences of impact. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that these understandings are developed within a specific context (i.e., research-intensive business schools in the UK), which a social constructionist epistemology appreciates.

2.2 Research design

According to Saunders *et al.* (2023 p. 178), a research design is “the plan of how you will go about answering your research question, achieving your research aim and meeting your objectives”. They also argue that central to a research design is the research *purpose*. Given the stated research aims and objectives in Chapter 1, and the associated relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology adopted, the purpose of this thesis is to *explore* the concept of the impact agenda in the business school context. Exploratory research “can help us fill a gap in our knowledge about a new or under-researched topic” and can be used to “approach the topic from a different perspective to generate new and emerging insights” (Leavy, 2023 p. 5). Saunders *et al.* (2023 p. 819) define an exploratory study as “research that aims to seek new insights into phenomena, to ask questions, and to assess the phenomena in a new light.” They posit that exploratory research is adaptable: what may start as a broad or general focus will become more defined throughout the research project.

The thesis adopts a qualitative research design. Qualitative research can be used to “robustly unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, people, or artifacts” and “is generally appropriate when the primary purpose is to explore, describe, or explain” (Leavy, 2023 p. 280). Thus, for an exploratory project, and given the research aims and aforementioned philosophical position, qualitative research was deemed necessary and appropriate. Qualitative research derives meanings from non-numeric data (Saunders *et al.*, 2023) which, in the case of the systematic literature review refers to published academic literature, and in the case of the empirical parts of the thesis refers to textual data generated from semi-structured interviews.

2.2.1 Sampling

Chapters 4 and 5 required the formal recruitment of participants to provide the data necessary to meet the research aims and objectives. This is referred to as sampling, which is the process of selecting "study participants from a study population" (Hennink *et al.*, 2020 p. 330). The study population in the case of Chapters 4 and 5 refers to business school academics in the UK who met the criteria for selection as laid out in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Study population criteria

Criteria	Description
Geographical	• Within the United Kingdom to ensure a degree of homogeneity in external pressures, such as research assessment
Type of business school	• A business school found within a Russell Group university – a group that represents "research-intensive, world-class universities" (Russell Group, n.d.) • This ensures a degree of homogeneity in the type of business school • Due to the research-intensive environment of Russell Group universities, academics within them are likely to experience institutional pressures related to publications alongside teaching commitments (Elen *et al.*, 2007)
Responsibilities	• Research and/or teaching responsibilities in the current role as a minimum in order to elicit relevant information • No academics who *only* engage in leadership, administrative, or enterprise roles

Purposive sampling was used to find interviewees. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure "in which the judgement of the researcher is used to select the cases that make up the sample" (Saunders *et al.*, 2023 p. 830). This mode of sampling was appropriate given the eligibility criteria and the need to find participants who could provide insightful information relevant to the aims of the thesis. Ten out of the twenty-four Russell Group universities were chosen to be represented in the sample, and those chosen provided a good level of geographic spread across the UK. In total, fifty-nine interviewees took part in the interviews, representing the ten business schools. Potential interviewees were contacted directly via the email addresses listed on their institutional webpages. The ability to view information about the academics online was useful for determining eligibility and thus informing the decisions regarding who should be contacted. Once contact had been established, discussion took place via email to determine a mutually acceptable time for the online interview to take place.

Overall, seventeen general sub-disciplines were represented in the sample, although it is important to note that research interests and teaching topics varied significantly within some of the sub-disciplines. Thirty male academics and twenty-nine female academics were represented in the sample. Forty-seven of the academics had a balance of responsibilities, in that they took part in both research and teaching, whereas six were teaching-focused and six were research-focused. The distribution of seniority among participants can be seen in Figure 2.1.

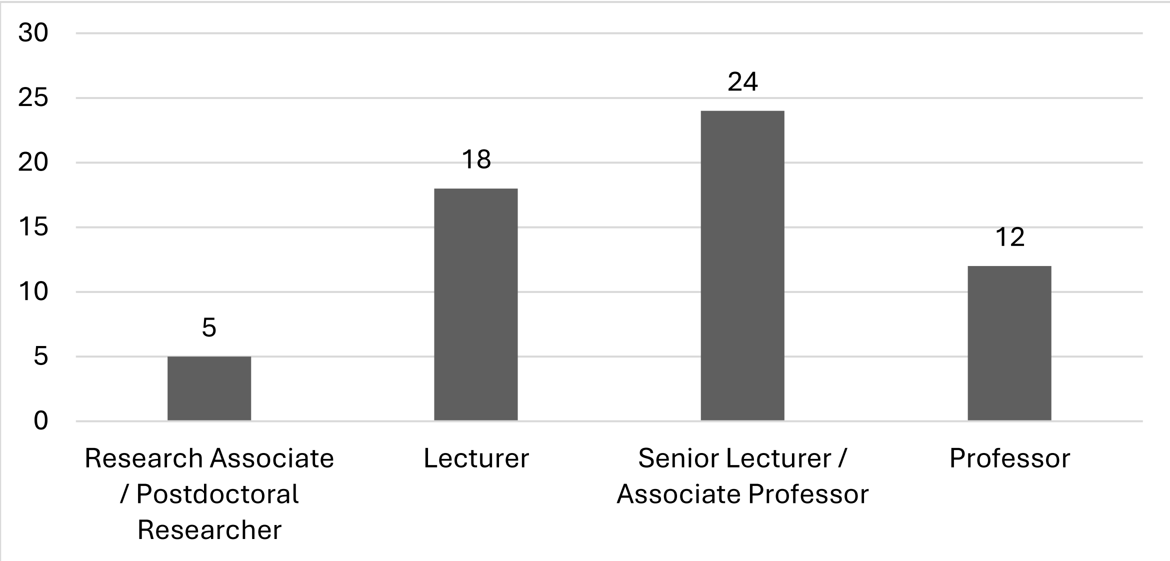


Figure 2.1 Distribution of seniority among participants

2.2.2 The data collection process

The systematic literature search for Chapter 3 initially took place in December 2018 and was subsequently repeated in March 2021, allowing for the inclusion of more recently published articles in the review. The search strategy involved the strict use of a set of keywords across three databases (Business Source Premier, Scopus, and Web of Science Core Collections). This was followed by the systematic use of inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine a final sample of 266 articles from peer-reviewed academic journals. The systematic literature review process was inspired and influenced by the guidance of Tranfield *et al.* (2003), aiming to be methodical and comprehensive. Both empirical and conceptual articles were included in the systematic literature review, whereas viewpoint articles were not. The methodology for Chapter 3 is explained in more depth in Chapter 3, section 3.2.

The data collection process for Chapters 4 and 5 took place between April 2020 and June 2021. The specific method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are those where the researcher develops a “set of questions which address the topic of interest, but these are used to guide rather than dictate the course of the interview" (Breakwell *et al.*, 2020 p. 529). This was a useful approach for being able to “probe” participants, allowing participants to expand on a previously made point, and was helpful to understand “the meanings that participants ascribe to various phenomena” (Saunders *et al.*, 2023 p. 450). Data collection took part during a significant period of uncertainty; the period between the first interview and the last interview saw a frequently changing set of restrictions on daily life imposed by the government due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, naturally, many participants reflected on their working experiences in the context of the pandemic, and how this interplayed with the different pressures they experience. This generated insightful and interesting data for the study and, although the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic is not the focus of the thesis, many of these sentiments are reflected in the verbatim quotes of participants in Chapters 4 and 5.

The semi-structured interviews were all carried out online. This made the data collection process much more logistically simple but carrying out data collection online inherently has its own challenges. One such of these challenges is summarised by Sedgwick and Spiers (2009 p. 7): “for those participants who have sensitive information and difficult experiences to share, the researcher’s lack of the physical presence might have a negative influence on the degree of sharing”. Although the interviews carried out for this thesis did not set out to collect data that is necessarily of a sensitive nature, naturally, with participants talking about their working lives, feelings of stress and unhappiness were inevitably communicated to the researcher. There are questions around to what extent this participants fully shared their thoughts and feelings, given the lack of physical presence of the researcher and therefore body language.

However, there are many advantages to carrying out interviews online using videoconferencing technology, making this a suitable choice beyond from the necessity due to public health concerns. Some of the advantages are summarised by Deakin and Wakefield (2014) and include: more flexibility for organising a time that is suitable for both the researcher and the interviewee; more cost effectiveness; and more time effectiveness. They also point out that building a rapport during online interviews may only be an issue when the interviewee is more reserved or unforthcoming. Therefore, despite the potential issues regarding hesitancy in sharing sensitive information and difficult experiences, it was still possible to build a good level of rapport with interviewees.

An interview guide was developed for conducting the interviews. An interview guide is not a fixed schedule, but rather a document that details the different themes and topics to be covered within the interview (Cameron and Price, 2009). An interview guide can include specific questions as well as prompts (Saunders *et al.*, 2023). The interview guide used for the interviews can be seen in Appendix A.

2.2.3 The data analysis process

As the thesis follows a qualitative research design, the data analyses procedures used across Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are designed for synthesising and categorising textual data into a meaningful medium for which insights can be drawn. As Saunders *et al.* (2023) highlight, qualitative data provides “an opportunity for in-depth analysis, where context can be related to the themes that emerge from analysis, to produce well-grounded and contextualised explanations”.

Chapter 3, the systematic literature review, followed the guidance of Tranfield *et al.* (2003), who highlight the importance of synthesising the findings of different pieces of research. They point out that such synthesis relates to “summarising, integrating, and, where possible, cumulating the findings of different studies on a topic or research question” (p. 217). To synthesise the plethora of perspectives, and variability in focus, of the different journal articles being analysed, thematic analysis was deemed to be a useful approach. Other systematic literature reviews have also used this analytical procedure (e.g., Liñán and Fayolle, 2015; Rashid *et al.*, 2019).

In thematic analysis, “the essential purpose is to search for themes, or patterns, that occur across a data set” (Saunders *et al.*, 2023). Thematic analysis is portrayed by Braun and Clarke (2006 p. 87) as an analytical procedure that includes the following steps: “familiarising yourself with the data”, “generating initial codes”, “searching for themes”, “reviewing themes”, “defining and naming themes”, and “producing the report”. For the systematic literature review, the abstracts of the 266 journal articles were coded using initial coding, with the codes relating to the specific topic(s) of the particular article. Initial coding “creates a starting point to provide the researcher analytic leads for further exploration” (Saldaña, 2016 p. 115). Ultimately, themes were developed that reflected different topics within the literature, and these themes were thus organised into literature streams which formed a structure for the review. The analysis procedure for Chapter 3 is explained in more depth in Chapter 3, section 3.2.

Chapters 4 and 5 also adopted the general principles of thematic analysis, in that there was a conscious development of themes that were representative of data from the data corpus. The fifty-nine interview audio files were fully transcribed and imported into the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) NVivo for coding. Within NVivo, initial coding took place, with an emphasis on generating concept codes. Saldaña (2016 p. 119) states that concept codes "assign meso or macro levels of meaning to data" and that "a concept is a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action". Following the coding of interview transcripts in NVivo, the development of themes was carried out manually without the use of CAQDAS.

The data analysis procedures that took place for Chapters 4 and 5 were inspired by the *Gioia methodology*, both in terms of terminology and how themes were developed. The Gioia methodology refers to "an approach that captures concepts relevant to the human organisational experience in terms that are adequate at the level of meaning of the people living that experience and adequate at the level of scientific theorising about that experience" (Gioia *et al.*, 2013 p. 16). The Gioia methodology is focused on transforming codes into first-order concepts, which can be grouped into second order themes, which can ultimately be distilled into aggregate dimensions. Despite the fact that the Gioia methodology is an inductive approach to the analysis of qualitative data, it can still be relevant for those studies that are more abductive in nature. An abductive approach to theory development "moves between data and theory, making comparisons and interpretations, in effect combining deduction and induction" and "is therefore open and sensitive to data while also using pre-existing theories for inspiration and to help identify and interpret patterns" (Saunders *et al.*, 2023 p. 158). This is the aim of Chapters 4 and 5. Gioia *et al.* (2013 p. 21) acknowledge that when the researcher is "cycling between emergent data, themes, concepts, and dimensions and the relevant literature" within their analytical process, this "might be viewed as transitioning from inductive to a form of abductive research".

There are numerous reasons why the Gioia methodology is particularly useful to frame the analysis in the empirical parts of the thesis, as elucidated in Gioia *et al.* (2013), and three of them are considered here. First, the Gioia methodology is well-positioned for developing a deeper knowledge of organisational experience. The context of the thesis is the organisational field of business schools, and in particular, the lived experiences of those participating in that organisational field. Second, the Gioia methodology makes the assumption – in tandem with the social constructionism epistemology adopted in this thesis – that organisational life is socially constructed. As such, actors who construct their realities in the organisational context are "knowledgeable agents", and these knowledgeable agents within organisations "know what they are trying to do and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions" (Gioia *et al.*, 2013 p.

17). This philosophy of treating participants as knowledgeable agents is core to this thesis, giving them a voice to illustrate how they have experienced the impact agenda. Finally, it is a method that is helpful for the audience to comprehend the data-to-theory connections, in that linkages can be made from the quotes displayed within the text through to the overarching themes. As a study of lived experiences, it is important that findings are grounded accurately and transparently in the data, for which the Gioia methodology allows.

2.3 Reflexivity considerations

Reflexivity refers to “self-examination, evaluation and interpretation of your attitudes and beliefs, reactions to data and findings, and interactions with those who take part in the research and acknowledgement of the way these affect both the processes and outcomes of the research” (Saunders *et al.*, 2023 p. 831). It is important for the researcher to think about their role in relation to the research process, and what influence this could have (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2021), and this is even more critical in qualitative research. Being reflexive means to be conscious of one’s own decisions – such as why a particular research idea is developed – in order to be cognisant of preconceived ideas and biases (Saunders *et al.*, 2023).

The researcher was in a unique position in that they were researching an organisational environment that they had experience in. Although each business school is different – and the researcher did not conduct any interviews with any academics from their own business school – the researcher was naturally mindful of some of the issues experienced by business school academics on a general level. This also had implications for how the researcher was able to relate to the participants of the interviews. As such, it was crucial for the researcher to be acutely aware of their own role in the research process, and to think carefully about how the research process was navigated (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2021).

2.4 Ethical considerations

It is imperative that researchers act with the highest levels of integrity. Saunders *et al.* (2023 p. 253) describe research ethics as “the standards of researcher behaviour that guide your conduct in relation to the rights of the subjects of your research and those who are affected by it”. The research underwent an ethics review in order to ensure that the data collection process was in accordance with the University of Southampton’s Ethics Policy.

Various considerations were put in place to ensure strict adherence to ethical best practice in research. Participants were provided with a detailed participant information sheet prior to taking part in the interview that gave details about what the interview would entail. Participants were also able to ask questions directly to the researcher prior to taking part in case anything was unclear or they wanted to find out more information. A consent form was provided to participants which enabled them to give their informed consent to take part in the interview and be audio recorded. Participants were able to withdraw from the interview at any point during the interview itself for any reason. Participants were also able to request for their data to be withdrawn from the study up until the submission of the thesis.

It was also important to maintain the confidentiality of participants and their data. Saunders *et al.* (2023 p. 815) describes confidentiality as the "promise made by the researcher not to reveal the identity of participants or present findings in a way that enables participants to be identified". As such, participants are not named within the thesis but rather are referred to by their participant number (e.g., Participant 1). Any information that could identify a participant, such as the name of a project, has been anonymised in the transcripts and therefore with any verbatim quotes included in the thesis. The researcher has also omitted to include the names of the business schools in which the participants were working at, as an extra precaution to minimise the possibility of identification.

Chapter 3 The relevance and impact of business schools: A systematic literature review

3.1 Introduction

The increasing demand for business school education alongside the need for academic research to improve business and organisational practices has entrenched business schools as significant knowledge-producing bodies within higher education institutions across the world (Durand and Dameron, 2011). Simultaneously, business schools have become entities in their own right to be researched, examined, and written about. Despite the growing popularity of business schools, as both knowledge providers and as subjects of empirical and conceptual examination, there has been a wealth of scepticism and questioning about their purpose within society and their wider impact beyond academia (Pettigrew *et al.*, 2014). Criticisms of business schools have been wide-ranging, spanning the arenas of research and education (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005), with a central theme of how "relevant" they are (e.g., Butler *et al.*, 2015).

A myriad of criticism of business schools has manifested in a relatively fragmented evidence base spanning several streams of literature. At the macro-level, there are two vast yet isolated streams of scholarship related to the so-called relevance problem: one stream that focuses on business school research and one that focuses on business school education. In terms of research, Palmer *et al.* (2009) note that critique has arisen surrounding the creation of knowledge that is bound by a strict adherence to academic rigour. Some authors, such as Liu and McKinnon (2019), highlight that this involves a lack of emphasis placed on finding out things that are useful, or *actionable*, for practitioners and policymakers. Beyond the outputs themselves, the debate also encapsulates issues related to engagement with practitioners. As Vermeulen (2007) notes, for example, it is important to consider engagement with practitioners not only to maximise the impact of our research, but also to inform our research. In terms of education, the discussion shifts towards how the aforementioned research outputs are embedded in the syllabi of education programmes of business schools (e.g., Tucker and Scully, 2020), such as Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes. A central argument in this space is the risk that students of business school programmes could be "ill-equipped for the challenges of the real world" (Chia and Holt, 2008 p. 471). Debates surrounding education in the context of the relevance problem are far-reaching, with some authors proposing specific suggestions to fill knowledge and skill gaps (e.g., Calma, 2021; Cole and Snider, 2019; Neriz *et al.*, 2020).

Across these two streams of literature, there have been various areas of focus, including a focus on the sources of the relevance problem, a focus on the nature of the problem, a focus on how the situation can be improved, and a focus on what actually constitutes relevant knowledge. Although it is entirely appropriate to investigate the arenas of business school research and business school education separately and in-depth, when assessing the relevance of business schools in their entirety it is important to acknowledge that they are not one-dimensional entities with one area of interest. As Jensen and Wang (2018 p. 1024) articulated, business schools are "complex multi-unit organisations that serve a variety of audiences with different products, such as student education, academic research, and business consulting". When assessing the relevance of business schools in their entirety, fragmented streams of literature that are somewhat isolated from each other may not be reflective of business school practices in reality. Thus, it is crucial that any review of this literature base explores business schools beyond the view of the rigour-relevance debate associated exclusively with business school research, instead encompassing both research *and* education activities. A comprehensive view acknowledging the significance of education alongside research should not be overlooked when addressing business schools as a unit of analysis. Thus, there is a need to combine the various streams of literature related to the relevance of business schools to reflect their multi-unit, complex nature in the twenty-first century. This reflects the idea that the rigour-relevance debate should be concerned with research *and* education as intimately connected activities.

This systematic literature review, therefore, is a response to the disjointed evidence base that currently exists. This paper reviews and synthesises the current knowledge bases in the domain of business schools with respect to the relevance and impact of the knowledge they produce and disseminate in their research and education activities. This is done with the intention of meeting two research objectives. These are:

> Research objective 1: To synthesise and thematically analyse the wide spectrum of literature in the area of the relevance and impact of business school research and education in order to generate themes that encompass the multidimensionality of business schools.
>
> Research objective 2: To extend the synthesis, and contribute to advancing the business school literature, by identifying theoretical directions for the future and topics in need of empirical investigation led by a holistic thematic framework.

Thus, business schools are the unit of analysis. This review is very much focused on the role played by business schools as producers and disseminators of knowledge – looking at the discourse on the relevance and impact of their activities and discussions surrounding the environment of business schools themselves. The key theoretical contributions of this review are threefold. First, the themes identified provide an oversight of the business school literature related to relevance and impact, providing clarity of the different streams of knowledge. The holistic thematic framework demonstrates how the thematic analysis can be augmented with different theoretical approaches to advance the business school literature. This integrative framework demonstrates the theoretical importance of acknowledging that research and education do not exist separately but instead co-exist in a wider system. Second, this review exhibits the significance of understanding the wider context and environment of business schools. This study identifies the numerous expectations placed upon actors within the business school environment that have been documented, and an agenda for using an institutional lens as a vehicle for developing our understanding of these expectations is put forward. Finally, a much needed definition of relevant and impactful knowledge is offered that can act as a point of reference for future scholarly investigations into relevance and impact. Based on a comprehensive synthesis of how relevance and impact have been conceptualised in the literature, this is particularly significant given that there is currently no universally agreed definition of relevance, or indeed, relevant and impactful knowledge. Adopting such a definition, that is inclusive of research and education, can act as a conceptual bridge between the two and is helpful for understanding what it means for either activity to have a real-world impact.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, the systematic literature review methodology used is explained, providing information about the search strategy, how the literature was selected, and the subsequent analysis approach adopted to draw insights from the literature. The descriptive analysis of the literature base is then presented. Then, before presenting the findings of the review, the contributions that other reviews in this area have made prior to the current one are examined. Not only does this contextualise the current review, but it also provides a further justification for why the current review is necessary. This is followed by an account of the results of the review – the four streams of literature – and the relevant themes. The holistic thematic framework is then presented with particular emphasis on the implications for future research into business schools. The paper concludes with a discussion of the contributions this review makes, as well as its limitations.

3.2 Methodology

This systematic literature review adopts an approach advocated in Tranfield *et al.*'s (2003) seminal paper on conducting a systematic review in the field of management. This review synthesises 266 articles that were published or available in press at the time of the literature search in March 2021. This review is motivated by methodological best practice for executing a systematic literature review, and thus follows a comprehensive and methodical process as a way of allowing conclusions to be drawn from the literature. A systematic literature review should be transparent, inclusive, and illustrative (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Based on this premise, both conceptual and empirical papers were included in the review because they were deemed to be significant to the body of literature, consistent with earlier systematic literature reviews (e.g., Xiao and Nicholson, 2013). Analysing conceptual papers in conjunction with empirical and review papers allowed for a more inclusive and thorough review process for this particular domain.

This paper takes a five-step approach to conducting a systematic literature review: (1) identifying keywords, search terms and search strings, (2) searching in bibliographic databases, (3) applying inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Appendix B), (4) data extraction, and (5) synthesis of the literature. The importance of these activities has been echoed by various authors (e.g., Denyer and Tranfield, 2009; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). These five steps manifested into twelve transparent and replicable stages (Table 3.1), with a visual breakdown of the number of journal articles excluded at each step of the literature search presented in Figure 3.1.

Table 3.1 Stages of the systematic literature review

Stage	Description
1	Preliminary searches within key bibliographic databases were conducted to identify key articles in the field. The titles, abstracts and keywords of these articles were evaluated to generate two groupings of keywords related to business schools and their relevance and impact. This was an iterative, back-and-forth process in which keywords were continuously updated based on emerging literature from the range of databases.
2	The keywords were assembled into two search strings: 1. “business scho*” OR “management scho*” OR “business educat*” OR “management educat*” OR “school of business” OR “school of management” OR “business research*” OR “management research*” OR “business studies” OR “management studies” 2. “relevan*” OR “impact*” OR “influen*” OR “legit*” The Boolean operator “AND” was used in between the two search strings. The protocol for the use of these search strings was consistently applied within each database used for searching. Strict use of these search strings echoes the particular focus on relevance and impact as it applies to business schools as the unit of analysis, reflecting the scope of the review.
3	The search strings were used to search three bibliographic databases: Business Source Premier, Scopus, and Web of Science Core Collections. Based on the

Stage	Description
	experimentation of different databases in Stage 1, these three databases were deemed to provide fruitful results and consequently were selected. No restrictions were put on the time period in the search because it was important to collect as many papers as possible, and it was not immediately clear when the very first discussions of this topic were published. Therefore, the search included anything published up until the time of the literature search (March 2021). A total of 28,144 citations were identified from the search (including duplicates).
4	All citations that were *not* a peer-reviewed journal article were excluded, thus applying the first inclusion/exclusion criterion. This action was taken to ensure that only sources subjected to rigorous academic scrutiny could be included in the review. At this stage, 6,123 citations were excluded, and the remaining 22,021 were exported to an EndNote library.
5	The remaining citations were assessed according to the second inclusion/exclusion criterion: the article must indicate some relevance to the topic and objectives of the review. This initially involved applying this criterion to the article titles, and any article that had a title that was deemed to be totally irrelevant to the research objectives was excluded. At this stage, 19,935 citations were excluded, leaving a new total of 2,086. Duplicates were also removed during this stage.
6	After article titles were reviewed, the same inclusion/exclusion criterion was then applied to the abstracts of the remaining articles. At this stage, 1,642 citations were excluded, leaving a new total of 444.
7	The 444 citations were separated into an A list, a B list and a C list using strict quality criteria. The A list (266 articles) represented empirical articles, conceptual articles, or review papers from journals ranked as 1, 2, 3, 4 or 4* in the Chartered Association of Business Schools (commonly referred to as "ABS") Academic Journal Guide 2018. The B list (118 articles) represented any article that appeared to be a viewpoint or opinion piece, regardless of the journal ranking. The C list (60 articles) represented any empirical articles, conceptual articles, or review papers that were *not* from a journal ranked in the ABS Academic Journal Guide 2018. Citations from the B and C lists were ultimately excluded from further analysis, applying the two final inclusion/exclusion criteria, leaving a final sample of 266 articles.
8	A Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet was compiled, comprising of important data that was extracted from all 266 citations. This included basic data such as publication year,

Stage	Description
	author(s), journal title, ABS Academic Journal Guide 2018 ranking, and article title. This also included study information such as the focus of the article (research, education, both, or other), methodological choice, the management sub-discipline that formed the context of the article (if any), the geographical origin of the article, the theoretical lens used in the article (if any), and the article abstract.
9	The abstracts from the 266 articles were coded according to their content. A first-level thematic analysis was consequently conducted to generate sub-themes.
10	An iterative secondary-level analysis was conducted using the sub-themes, resulting in refined themes, which were organised into literature streams. These literature streams were developed to demonstrate how the holistic approach to viewing business schools has captured a wider range of literature elements than a view of just research *or* education would have.
11	The articles were reviewed in light of the themes that were uncovered in Stage 10. In reviewing the articles, promising approaches that have been adopted, or alluded to, by other authors to advance the business school literature were sought. A conscious effort was also made to organise the fundamental principles of relevant and impactful knowledge, as has been emphasised in a multitude of ways by previous authors, into an inclusive definition that represents the entire scope of business schools.
12	It was ascertained how the divide between research and education could be conceptually bridged based on an understanding of the literature base. Consequently, a holistic thematic framework was developed, detailing this bridging mechanism and also injecting the previously identified literature streams with a proposed theoretical direction. These insights drew on the analysis from Stage 11 as well as broader understanding of the business school context.

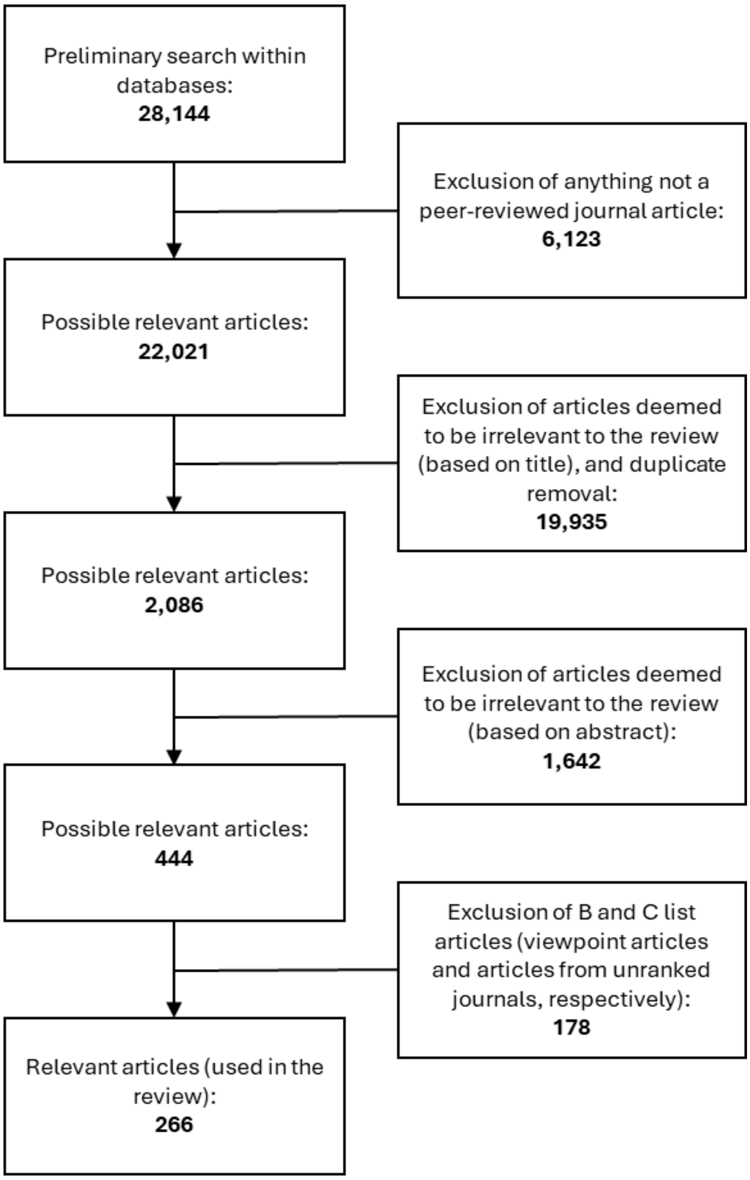
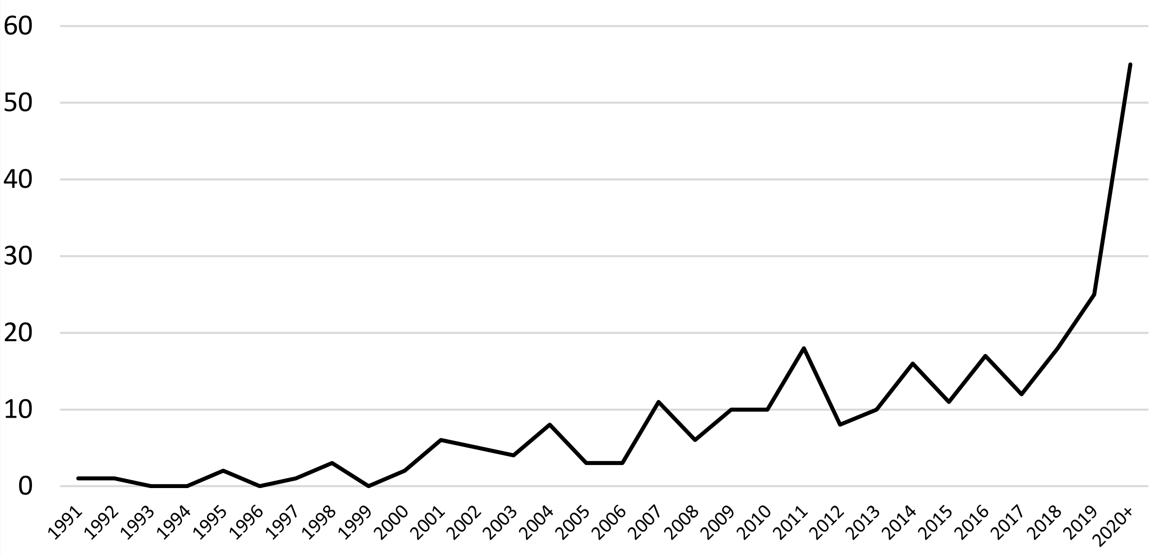


Figure 3.1 Article exclusion stages

3.3 Descriptive analysis

An analysis of the sample of articles revealed a range of descriptive insights that are useful for understanding the composition of the business school literature. Perhaps the most prominent finding, and one that emphasises the necessity of this review, is that the scholarly interest in the relevance of research and education in business schools has grown considerably – especially in the past few years (see Figure 3.2). Interest in the area began in the early 1990s, although only a modest number of articles were published pre-2001. After 2001, interest increased substantially, undoubtedly due to a series of seminal articles published in the early 2000s such as Starkey and Madan (2001) and Pfeffer and Fong (2002). The number of articles per year following these seminal articles increased steadily and this growth extended into the next decade, with a subsequent sharp increase in articles towards the end of the 2010s and the beginning of the 2020s.



Note: "2020+" refers to articles published in between 2020 and March 2021 or that were available in-press at the time of the literature search in March 2021

Figure 3.2 Volume of literature per year

The articles included in the review were also analysed on the basis of their geographical origin. This was determined by examining each article to understand the specific setting being referred to, or for empirical articles, the location of the fieldwork. Where neither of these were evident, the institution of the lead author was used as an indication of geographic region. Of the 266 articles included in this review, the majority (54.5%) originate from Europe (see Figure 3.3). Despite concern that business schools on a global scale have succumbed to an excessive influence from the United States HE landscape (e.g., Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991; Pfeffer and Fong, 2004) – a factor which could have conceivably therefore featured in the literature *about* business schools – a smaller proportion of articles (27.8%) came from North America. The body of knowledge appears to not be reflective of all geographic regions, particularly Africa and South America, which both have very little representation in the literature. In terms of actual countries, the most represented country in the sample is the United Kingdom (*n* = 71), followed by the United States (*n* = 57), Australia (*n* = 25), Canada (*n* = 17) and Sweden (*n* = 15). These five countries together make up almost 70% of the sample.

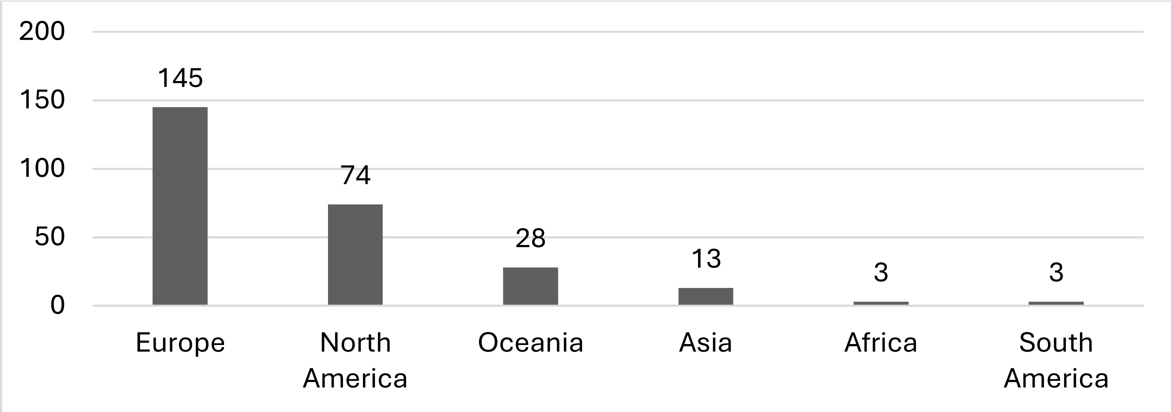


Figure 3.3 Geographical composition of the literature

The analysis also revealed the most popular journal to accommodate articles on this topic is the *Academy of Management Learning & Education* (*n* = 26), followed by the *British Journal of Management* (*n* = 21). Conceptual papers (*n* = 97) and qualitative studies (*n* = 96) were the most popular article types, followed by less common quantitative studies (*n* = 39), mixed method studies (*n* = 19), and reviews (*n* = 15). The majority of articles focused solely on business school research (*n* = 168), with fewer focused on business school education (*n* = 72). Some articles focused on both research and education (*n* = 22), whilst a small amount were classified as "other" (*n* = 4). Those classified as "other" did not relate specifically to either research and/or education but instead business schools more generally, such as the issue of managing business schools. The majority of articles did not concentrate on a specific business subdiscipline (*n* = 161), but where a subdiscipline was focused on, the most common was the subdiscipline of *sustainable and responsible business* (*n* = 19). Finally, almost a third of articles had no distinct theoretical lens (*n* = 80). By far the most common lens through which the relevance of research and education in business schools is examined is that of *knowledge exchange* (*n* = 59). Knowledge exchange here is used as an overarching term to classify studies that draw on concepts such as knowledge transfer, knowledge co-production, knowledge creation and integration, knowledge markets, knowledge ecosystems, knowledge translation, forms of knowledge, value co-creation, and design science. Institutional theory (*n* = 12), experiential learning theory (*n* = 8), social constructivism (*n* = 6) and Boyer's (1990) model of scholarship (*n* = 5) follow as the most popular frameworks to be utilised in this area.

3.4 Previous reviews

Before delving into the findings of the systematic literature review, it is sensible to highlight the previous reviews in this area that were returned in the literature search. Not only does this provide a context for the current review, but this also helps to elucidate the current knowledge gap that makes the current review necessary. As detailed in the previous section, the systematic literature search returned, among other article types, fifteen review articles. Drawing on the definition given by Post *et al.* (2020 p. 352), a review paper was determined as being a "study that analyses and synthesises an existing body of literature *[...]* through an examination of a body (or several bodies) of prior work". Previous reviews in this area were therefore selected on the basis that they, through a general or specific literature review methodology, either (1) synthesised previous work that is directly related to the topic of this review; or (2) adopted a lens for assessing relevance and impact as they may relate to a certain relevant context or area.

These fifteen articles include twelve literature reviews, two systematic literature reviews, and one multimethod review. It is important to acknowledge the great strides made in this area from the perspective of previous reviews. Not only do they enhance understanding of how the field has been synthesised, but they also help us to understand how the current review can contribute. A chronology of the previous reviews (see Appendix C) demonstrates that none of them bear a particularly strong resemblance to the current review, although each of them make an important contribution in their own right. The majority of the reviews focus on research, with three that consider both research and education (i.e., a more general view of business schools) (Anderson *et al.*, 2020; Pettigrew and Starkey, 2016; Ungureanu and Bertolotti, 2020) and only two focused exclusively on education (Govender and Vaaland, 2022; Rubin and Dierdorff, 2013). Even though there are three previous reviews that encompass both research and education, similar to the current review, they each take a markedly different form.

A number of the previous reviews refer to specific business subdisciplines – namely, international business (Oesterle and Laudien, 2007), information systems (Moeini *et al.*, 2019), and supply chain management (Lambert, 2019; Svanberg, 2020; van Weele and van Raaij, 2014). Contrastingly, the current review considers research and education activities without regard for any particular management subdiscipline, in line with some of the previous reviews that have approached this area with a more general unit of analysis such as "business schools" (e.g., Pettigrew and Starkey, 2016) or "management research" (e.g., De Frutos-Belizón *et al.*, 2019).

There is no striking chronological pattern to observe when looking at previous reviews, but some observations can be made about how the reviews reflect the development of the debates in this area. Reviews carried out in the 2000s – although few – make good progress in advancing the understanding of the relationship between research and practice by acknowledging research utilisation (Hemsley-Brown, 2004) and relevance (Oesterle and Laudien, 2007). Later reviews began to explicitly consider the connection between rigour and relevance (Carton and Mouricou, 2017; van Weele and van Raaij, 2014). In terms of contribution, some of the reviews are significant and present an agenda for future research (e.g., Kieser *et al.*, 2015) whereas others appear more incremental to the overall picture. The reviews have captured relevance and the gap between academia and practice from a variety of angles. Yet, as some other authors have noted (e.g., Nyilasy and Reid, 2007), the topic still appears to be conceptually underdeveloped. This range of angles from which to view the topic has resulted in previous reviews being particularly heterogenous, although there are some common themes. One particularly noteworthy theme throughout previous reviews is the focus on a particular gap or tension, conceptualised in a range of ways, such as between academics and practitioners (Hemsley-Brown, 2004), rigour and relevance (Carton and Mouricou, 2017; van Weele and van Raaij, 2014), research and practice (De Frutos-Belizón *et al.*, 2019), theory and practice (Ungureanu and Bertolotti, 2020), and business schools and business (Govender and Vaaland, 2022). Some of the reviews have concentrated on analysing the debate around this topic (e.g., Kieser *et al.*, 2015), perhaps more closely aligned with the objective of the current review, whereas others have made their own progress in assessing relevance of a particular field or activity (e.g., Brammer *et al.*, 2019). The lack of reviews that focus wholly on education makes drawing any themes from this area difficult. However, both reviews of business school education (Govender and Vaaland, 2022; Rubin and Dierdorff, 2013) identified discussions related to curricular deficiencies that exist within business school programmes.

It is important to note the two of these previous reviews that are the most relevant to the current review. First, the review by Carton and Mouricou (2017), who conducted a systematic analysis of the rigour-relevance debate in top-tier journals. Their article provides a comprehensive understanding of the different views of the rigour-relevance problem. However, it different from the current review in that is principally with business school research, not research *and* education. Second, the review by Kieser *et al.* (2015), who provide another promising literature review and develop an interesting research programme for the utilisation of business school research. Again, the authors focus exclusively on business school research. The current review aims to enhance both the scope, in terms of considering business schools holistically, of the topic, drawing evidence from empirical findings and conceptual contributions. The current review intends to go beyond the rigour-relevance debate and how it relates exclusively to business school research, instead considering the business school as a multidimensional entity.

3.5 Research objective 1: Thematically analysing the literature

In order to meet the first research objective, this section demonstrates the outcome of the thematic analysis of the abstracts of the articles included in the review. The themes uncovered were organised into four streams of literature that encapsulate the ways in which the relevance and impact of business schools has been discussed. These streams are: (1) *the business* *school environment*; (2) *criticism of core business school activities*; (3) *proposals for enhancing relevance*; and (4) *fundamental elements of relevant knowledge*. Following the systematic analysis of these four streams of literature and how they integrate, a thematic map of the literature has been developed (Figure 3.4) to organise a critical discussion of these streams.

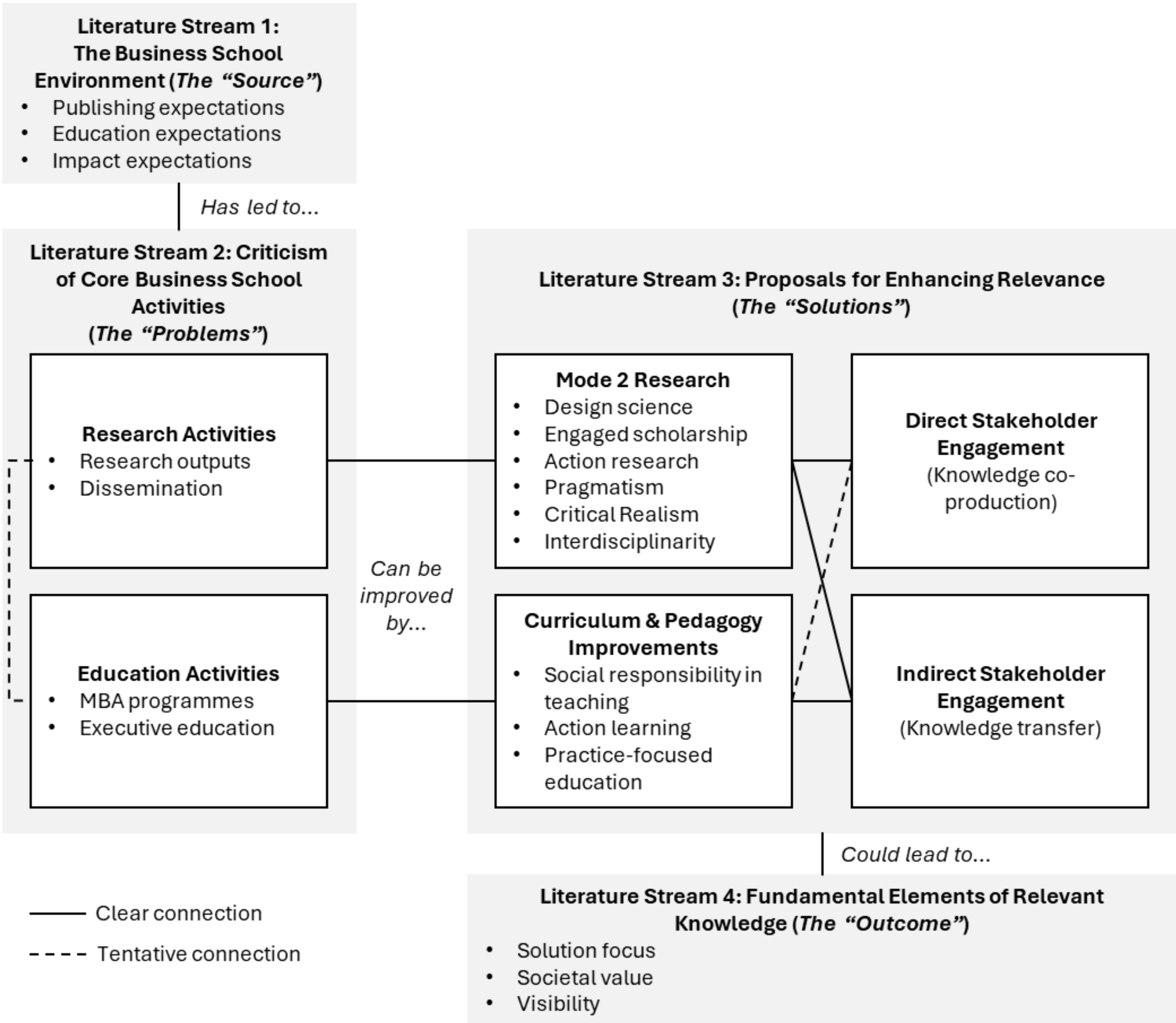


Figure 3.4 Thematic map of the literature

Connections made between research and education in general throughout the literature base are lacking. Despite this, the different streams of literature identified in the review do not exist in isolation. The literature streams, together, form a bigger picture. The environment in which business school academics operate (Literature Stream 1) is perceived as being a primary contributor (the "source") to the relevance problem (Literature Stream 2) (the "problems"). The relevance problem is fixable, and various solutions (Literature Stream 3) (the "solutions") have been put forward which, potentially, could help to make the knowledge produced in business schools reach the fundamental criteria of relevance (Literature Stream 4) (the "outcome").

The thematic map emphasises that the link between Literature Stream 2 ("the problem") and Literature Stream 3 ("the solutions") is reflective of the general disjoint in the literature base between research and education. The problems with research and education, although arising from the same institutional environment, are discussed differently with specific proposals related to Mode 2 knowledge production (for research) and pedagogical enhancements (for education) with no overlap or combined approach relevant to both. This is also reflective of the lack of discussion concerning the *relationship* between research and education.

The following subsections explore each individual literature stream and details the main points derived from previous authors.

3.5.1 The business school environment (the "source")

Business schools have been subject to criticism regarding the relevance of their activities, and there has been interest in diagnosing the source of the issues that have attracted this criticism. The body of literature suggests that the environment of business schools, in which business school academics operate, is a significant contributing factor to the so-called relevance problem. The general argument in this area is that the institutional environment in which business schools exist makes it difficult to balance the competing priorities of generating rigorous theoretical knowledge versus generating practical solutions of immediate relevance to practice and society (Harrington *et al.*, 2015; Stentoft and Rajkumar, 2018).

A significant element of this stream is embedded in the notion of the legitimacy of business schools. The quest to be seen as a legitimate knowledge-producing institution has been challenged on the basis of business schools' role in society and their overall purpose (Snelson-Powell *et al.*, 2016). How legitimate business schools appear to practitioners, students, and research funding bodies is a significant cause of concern – and fundamental to the relevance problem (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2016; Tushman *et al.*, 2007). Thomas and Wilson (2011) cite academic rigour and practical relevance as the two key conflicting sources of legitimacy for business schools in terms of research activities, and some have argued that this drive for academic legitimacy, and thus academic rigour, has threatened the ability of business schools to concentrate on the real-world impact of their outputs (e.g., McGrath, 2007; Seal, 2012). Legitimacy is earned largely from the perspective of key external stakeholders (Masrani *et al.*, 2011) and these external stakeholders are increasingly defining what constitutes legitimate and relevant knowledge in the field of business and management (Lehtimäki and Peltonen, 2013). An empirical study by Paterson *et al.* (2018 p. 1371) supports this argument, finding that practitioner evaluations of relevance were "stronger predictors of academic legitimacy than methodological rigor".

The discussion of the business school environment has manifested in three main focus areas: *publishing expectations*, *education expectations*, and *impact expectations* (Table 3.2). These three expectations combine to form an environment that holds *co-existing expectations*.

Table 3.2 "The business school environment" literature stream

Literature stream	Theme	Sub-theme	Main points
Stream 1: The business school environment (the "source")	Co-existing expectations	Publishing expectations	• It is argued that "one of the most enduring beliefs in academe relates to what is often referred to as the 'publish or perish' phenomenon" (Miller *et al.*, 2011 p. 423) • Research productivity remains a primary indicator of excellence for business school academics (Hamet and Michel, 2018)
		Education expectations	• Business school education is somewhat seen as a "cash cow" (e.g., Pfeffer and Fong, 2002), putting increasing pressure on business schools to attract and retain large volumes of high-quality students • Business schools are under pressure to reflect the needs of businesses in their educational programmes (McMillan and Overall, 2016)
		Impact expectations	• Expectations to evidence impact outside of academia arise from formal research assessment structures such as the REF in the UK (Rao-Nicholson *et al.*, 2018) • Impact can be conceptualised in many different formal and informal ways and thus measurement of impact is not straightforward (Johnson and Orr, 2020)

3.5.2 Criticism of core business school activities (the “problems”)

At the heart of most business schools are the core offerings of research and education. However, criticism has arisen that these core activities are potentially insufficient with respect to producing relevant and impactful knowledge – criticism that has been picked up on by authors in this space (Table 3.3). The literature pertaining to business school relevance is heavily skewed towards criticising *research activities*, with a smaller literature base focusing on the relevance of business school *education activities*. With respect to research activities, criticism has arisen in the areas of *research outputs* and *dissemination* of knowledge. In terms of *education activities*, the body of literature is largely focused on *MBA programmes* and *executive education*, undoubtedly because these courses are practitioner-focused and thus are expected to be significantly relevant for practice. Despite this, other levels of education have also received attention, such as Anderson and Gold (2019) contending that norms in doctoral education favour the academic community at the expense of practice.

Table 3.3 "Criticism of core business school activities" literature stream

Literature stream	Theme	Sub-theme	Main points
Stream 2: Criticism of core business school activities (the “problems”)	Research activities	Research outputs	• It is speculated that much business school research is pre-occupied with scientific rigour and neglects practical relevance, known as the rigour-relevance gap (e.g., Starkey and Madan, 2001) • The rigour-relevance gap manifests in the different languages, styles, logics, and problem-solving methods that academics and practitioners use (Kieser and Leiner, 2009)
		Dissemination	• It has been argued that business school academics operate in a closed loop of communication in which they “read the work of other academics and write in academic journals to reach that same audience” (Vermeulen, 2007 p. 754)

			• Business schools are under increasing pressure to lower their "walls" in the interests of society and practice (Currie *et al.*, 2016)
	Education activities	MBA programmes	• Various authors have acknowledged the critiques of the value of MBA programmes (e.g., McGrath, 2007; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Rubin and Dierdorff, 2011; 2013) • Issues have been found with how research outputs are positioned and communicated to enhance learning on MBA programmes (e.g., Tucker *et al.*, 2019)
		Executive education	• Various authors have acknowledged the critiques of the value of executive education programmes (e.g., Harrison *et al.*, 2007; Paton *et al.*, 2014; Tushman *et al.*, 2007) • There is a significant relational potential for academic-practitioner knowledge exchange in executive education programmes, but this is dependent on how such knowledge exchange is approached (Ungureanu and Bertolotti, 2018)

3.5.3 Proposals for enhancing relevance (the "solutions")

The current issues with core activities in business schools are not irreversible (Barrett and Oborn, 2018). The literature discusses strategies that can contribute to the bridging of the gap between rigour and relevance in both research and education. The literature base is compartmentalised in that the methods for enhancing relevance are very much applicable to either research *or* education. Nevertheless, these various proposals comprise a set of impact-oriented strategies and approaches that, if used appropriately and perhaps in combination, could seemingly enhance the relevance of research and education in business schools.

The proposals related to research are all grounded in the overarching idea of *Mode 2 research*, a widely cited concept in the body of literature (Table 3.4). *Mode 2 research* refers to research approaches that call for "a variety of disparate stakeholders being involved in all aspects of the research process from problem formulation, through data collection and analysis, to dissemination" and is "driven by a quest for problem solutions that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries and which results in the rapid dissemination of findings through a variety of channels" (Hodgkinson *et al.*, 2001 pp. 41-42). In contrast to *Mode 2 research*, Mode 1 research involves knowledge production that is discipline-bound and based on the premise that issues are defined with regards to the interests of the management discipline and its gatekeepers (i.e., business school academics) (Kelemen and Bansal, 2002).

Table 3.4 "Proposals for enhancing relevance" literature stream (research)

Literature stream	Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Stream 3: Proposals for enhancing relevance (the "solutions")	Mode 2 research	Design science	An approach with the intent of developing "knowledge that the professionals of the discipline in question can use to design solutions for their field problems" (van Aken, 2005 p. 20)
		Engaged scholarship	A "collaborative form of inquiry in which academics and practitioners leverage their different perspectives and competencies to co-produce knowledge about a complex problem" (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006 p. 803)
		Action research	Action research is a research strategy whereby the researcher "simultaneously studies the phenomena and actively participates in organisational change" (Fendt *et al.*, 2008 p. 482)
		Pragmatism	A "philosophy of science that addresses the relationship between theorising and practice *[...]* focusing on asking the 'right' questions and providing empirical answers to those questions" (Fendt *et al.*, 2008 p. 473)

		Critical realism	A philosophy of science that commits to a realist and pluralist ontology, acknowledging that our knowledge is always contextually relative and that a variety of research methods are necessary to access different social and conceptual structures (Syed *et al.*, 2010)
		Interdisciplinarity	Finch *et al.* (2017) cite the definition from Davis (1995 p. 5): “the work that scholars do together in two or more disciplines, subdisciplines, or professions, by bringing together and to some extent synthesising their perspectives”

On the other hand, there are also several proposals in the literature that are education-specific (Table 3.5). The proposals related to education are grounded within the theme of *curriculum and pedagogy improvements*. It has been implied that graduates struggle to make a connection between their curricula and what happens in practice, and thus cannot effectively deal with real-world problems (Muff, 2012; Teece, 2011). Thus, these suggestions all display a shared goal of making business school education more reflective of, and sensitive to, real-world issues, enhancing the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a range of contexts.

Table 3.5 "Proposals for enhancing relevance" literature stream (education)

Literature stream	**Theme**	**Sub-theme**	**Description**
Stream 3: Proposals for enhancing relevance (the “solutions”)	Curriculum and pedagogy improvements	Social responsibility in teaching	The adjustment of business school curricula to more of a sustainable focus, beyond the superficial incorporation of business ethics programmes and away from the embedded assumption that profit maximisation should be the primary objective (e.g., Baden and Higgs, 2015)
		Action learning	Action learning “couples traditional content-driven learning with learning-by-

			doing" and "is rooted in real problem-solving, involving data gathering, active reflection, and action planning" (Tushman *et al.*, 2007 p. 350)
		Practice-focused education	Education in business schools that equips students with the necessary competencies for the workplace (e.g., Andrews and Higson, 2014)

Evidently, numerous approaches have been put forward for more impactful research and education in business schools. It is apparent from the literature that each of these approaches share a common purpose: to improve engagement with various external stakeholders to enhance the impact of business school activities. It is a consensus in the literature that "relevant and impactful management research requires close interaction between academics and external stakeholders" (Rossi *et al.*, 2017 p. 1), a view that is echoed in business school education (e.g., Anderson *et al.*, 2017). The literature identifies not only *indirect stakeholder engagement* (*knowledge transfer*), but also *direct stakeholder engagement* (*knowledge co-production*) (Table 3.6). It is notable that the links between research and knowledge co-production are much more explicit in the literature base than the links between education and knowledge co-production, hence the tentative link for the latter relationship shown in Figure 3.4.

Table 3.6 "Proposals for enhancing relevance" literature stream (direct and indirect stakeholder engagement)

Literature stream	Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Stream 3: Proposals for enhancing relevance (the "solutions")	Direct stakeholder engagement	Knowledge co-production	Business school academics' "active and participatory involvement with multiple stakeholders from business, government, and society through 'deep interactions' *[...]* in which all parties leverage distinct resources to generate new knowledge collaboratively" (Rossi *et al.*, 2017 p. 1)
	Indirect stakeholder engagement	Knowledge transfer	A "process whereby knowledge is transmitted unidirectionally from academics to external stakeholders, who benefit by

			using such knowledge for their own objectives" (Rossi *et al.* 2017 p. 1)

3.5.4 Fundamental elements of relevant knowledge (the "outcome")

Three primary facets of relevance emerged from the literature base: a requirement for knowledge to have a *solution focus*, a requirement for knowledge to have *societal value*, and a requirement for knowledge to have *visibility* to those who need it. These elements seemingly form the basic criteria for *relevant and impactful knowledge:* the criteria required for business school outputs to be deemed as relevant and impactful beyond academia (see Table 3.7).

Table 3.7 "Fundamental elements of relevant knowledge" literature stream

Literature stream	Theme	Sub-theme	Main points
Stream 4: Fundamental elements of relevant knowledge (the "outcome")	Relevant and impactful knowledge	Solution focus	• Knowledge that practitioners can utilise to find solutions to real-world issues (de-Margerie and Jiang, 2011) • Resonates with similar conceptualisations of practically focused outputs, such as prescription-driven research (e.g., van Aken, 2004), applied research (e.g., Tranfield and Starkey, 1998), actionable research (Liu and McKinnon, 2019), and instrumental knowledge production (e.g., Mesny and Mailhot, 2012)
		Societal value	• Knowledge that can help to solve problems that actually exist; problems that are experienced by practitioners and society (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2010; Tushman and O'Reilly, 2007) • In achieving research and education that is of societal value, scholars could draw on so-called "grand challenges" such as climate change and global health (Brammer *et al.*, 2019)

		Visibility	• Knowledge that is utilisable because it is visible and accessible to the stakeholders who need it (Hamet and Maurer, 2017) • There have been calls for more “boundary-spanning intermediaries” to facilitate knowledge dissemination (e.g., Bansal *et al.*, 2012)

3.6 Research objective 2: Advancing the literature

Embracing the multi-dimensional and complex nature of business schools in this review has led to insights that would certainly have been missed if simply focusing on one activity, such as research. Indeed, exploring business schools through a lens of being something of a living organism with multiple interrelated activities allows the notion of relevance and impact to be viewed much more holistically. This has consequently raised some important issues for further research, and conceptualising business schools in a similar way as in this review could be useful for other scholars who both theoretically and empirically examine business schools in the future.

With this in mind, herein the holistic thematic framework (Figure 3.5) is presented that goes beyond the identification of different literature streams by integrating some of the relevant theoretical considerations for advancing the business school literature. It is important to note that this is not simply a proposition of theories and concepts to be shoehorned into future research on business schools, but rather this is a reflection on what appears to be some of the potential avenues for investigating business schools based on the development of the field that has been synthesised. Thus, in fulfilling the second research objective of this review, the holistic thematic framework is offered, which can contribute to advancing the business school literature by identifying future ways of researching business schools and avenues in need of empirical investigation.

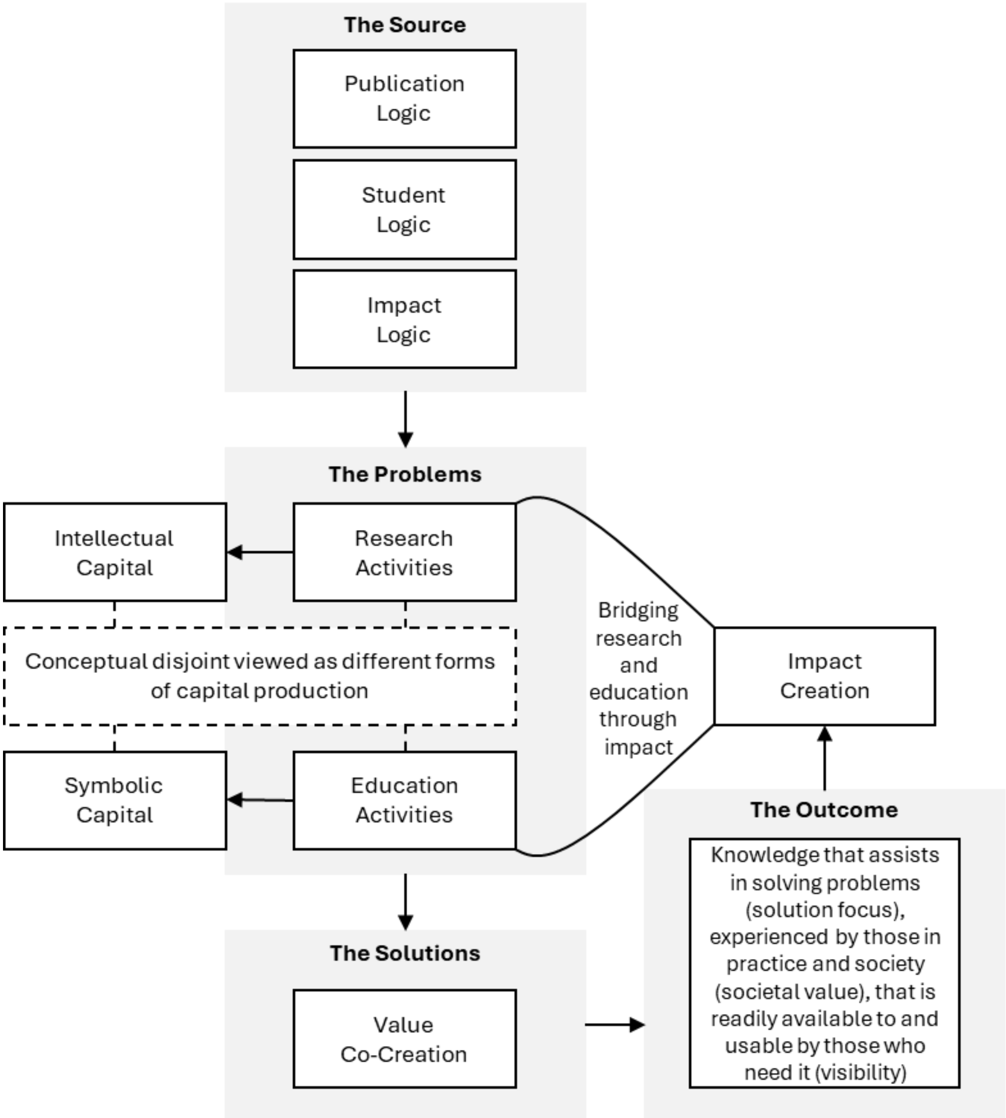


Figure 3.5 Holistic thematic framework

Figure 3.5 demonstrates how the examination of the past can be augmented to offer new ways of thinking about business schools in the future. The different expectations identified in the "source" literature stream lend themselves to being reconceptualised as coexisting institutional logics. It is important to note the lack of cross-fertilization between the discussions of research and education, as identified in the "problems" and the "solutions" literature streams. Thus, a novel hypothesis for why this may be the case is proposed: framing business and management as a "temporally dominant discipline" mirroring the distinct publication and student logics. Furthermore, the plethora of suggestions of how business schools can enhance their relevance and impact (the "solutions") can be contextualised by drawing on the wider concept of value co-creation. Finally, it can be emphasised that the "outcome" – relevant and impactful knowledge – should be reflected in an inclusive definition that is representative of the different ways relevance has been approached in the literature. Embedding holism in how we conceptualise business schools is something that can be achieved by applying the same criteria of impact (reflective of the proposed definition) to both research and education, acknowledging that both activities are critical to the wider impact agenda.

The following four sub-sections are each the result of careful evaluation and consideration of the literature streams, reflecting the holistic thematic framework.

3.6.1 Reconceptualising expectations as institutional logics

There exists a gap in the literature base in that, although there have been claims that the institutional environment of business schools is complex (e.g., Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Bullinger *et al.*, 2015), there is a lack of empirical evidence of the potentially problematic nature of the academic environment of business schools and how this environment contributes to the relevance problem. Indeed, some authors (e.g., Paterson *et al.*, 2018) have acknowledged that there is not enough empirical research into the institutional logics at work in the academic environment of business schools. The issue of lacking empirical evidence seems to also be evident in the wider business school literature (e.g., Koris and Aav, 2019; Tucker and Scully, 2020). It is likely that there are various institutional pressures at play which may influence behaviour of organisational actors. For example, one of the institutional pressures not overly documented in the reviewed literature base is accreditation standards, arising from accreditation bodies (e.g., EQUIS, AMBA, AACSB, etc.) which in themselves may manifest in different institutional logics (Lejeune and Vas, 2014). However, most critically, it is unclear from the literature base how business school education fits into the wider discussion of the institutional environment (i.e., the discussion is skewed towards the trade-off between rigour and relevance in the context of research), which brings us back to the idea that business school research does not exist in a vacuum but is instead executed in an environment in which business school education is also delivered. The role that student expectations play in the interplay between publishing expectations and impact expectations is an area that is currently not well understood that requires scholarly consideration.

There are many detailed and thought-provoking papers that, although not empirical, make great strides in our understanding of the institutional environment of business schools. For example, Harley (2019) points out many factors within the environment that have contributed to the so-called crisis, such as incentives and the “rules of the game”, competition for funding and prestige, and good teaching being seen as, fundamentally, a hygiene factor. What is needed is an empirically-grounded understanding of this environment, in the context of the lived experiences of those who act within it.

Therefore, it is proposed that there is a need to study business schools as comprising of multiple yet potentially conflicting institutional logics that demonstrate varying stakeholder interests. With regards to this, the idea put forward by Finch *et al.* (2018 p. 153) can be echoed: "productive engagement between science and practice exists on a continuum, and the position of a discipline on the continuum is determined by institutional forces ranging from macro-level variables (institutional mission, discipline and profession) to micro-level variables (academic training and practitioner experience)". Such research would be invaluable for understanding how identity conflict of academics at the crossroads between research, teaching and knowledge exchange is facilitated and maintained (Empson, 2013). However, there are relatively scarce discussions related to competing institutional logics in business schools (e.g., Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Bullinger *et al.*, 2015) and there is a lack of empirical evidence in this area. There is a need for such evidence that explores the experiences of business school academics in the environments in which they work, in order to truly appreciate the contribution that the academic environment makes to the relevance problem and the impact agenda. As mentioned, there is a need for discussions related to the institutional environment to acknowledge the significant role that education activities play in the life of business school academics, which is something that could also be illuminated through further empirical work. Thus, drawing on the insights of the holistic thematic framework and particularly Literature Stream 1 (the business school environment), it would be sensible to conceptualise the field of business schools as comprising of three distinct logics that are direct counterparts to the three identified expectations: the publication logic, the student logic, and the impact logic. This is demonstrated in the holistic thematic framework. Future research on business schools could use this conceptualisation as a foundation for exploring why business school activities are seemingly "irrelevant", the micro-level behaviour and strategies of actors within this environment, and for understanding what institutional forces legitimise different objectives, such as high-ranking publications and increasing student numbers.

3.6.2 Business and management as a temporally dominant discipline

The point has been consistently made throughout this review that research and education have largely been debated in isolation when business schools are discussed, and yet there is no clear explanation as to why this is the case. Understanding this divide is a research gap in itself. Whilst others in this space are encouraged to speculate why this disjoint may exist, a hypothesis is offered here that may help us to understand the divide, both practically and conceptually. This novel suggestion is that the business schools can be seen as the home of a temporally dominant discipline, as advocated by Wacquant (1990) some decades ago, relating to disciplines such as medicine and law that can address varying sources of *capital*. Relating to the "currency" of actors in a field, capital refers to an actor's power and resources, and it enables those in a field to gain social position and status (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital has been applied previously in the business school context, notably in assessing the career trajectories of business school academics themselves (Rossier, 2020). Inspiration is also drawn from authors included in the review who have utilised a Bourdieusian perspective (e.g., Andrews and Higson, 2014; Brooks *et al.*, 2019) as well as the plethora of applications of such thinking to the HE context. As a starting point, business schools can be defined as a field, described by Bourdieu as a configuration of relations between different social positions determined by different sources of capital, involving specific “rules of the game” that are needed for actors to navigate said field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This is most obviously seen in relation to the business school environment (Literature Stream 1), which consists of multiple competing expectations (or logics) that foster an air of complexity and determine the rules of the game and how capital is accumulated. A novel application of Bourdieusian thinking from the holistic thematic framework, however, relates to the different forms of capital and how this can help to explain the chasm between research and education and the subsequent lack of cross-fertilisation between discussions of them with reference to relevance and impact.

One explanation for this apparent disconnect is the idea that research and education address and produce different forms of capital. Business schools are tasked with producing intellectual capital (i.e., research outputs), the “knowledge and knowing capability of a social collectivity, such as an organization, intellectual community, or professional practice” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998 p. 245). They can also produce symbolic capital – the compilation of an actor’s symbolic cultural resources that can be leveraged to accrue value and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1994) – which in the case of business schools relates to granting degrees (e.g., Ryan *et al.*, 2015) and providing prestigious affiliations, both for those inside (academics and students) and outside (partners and graduates) of the immediate business school system. Another layer of complexity is added when one considers that perhaps the wider university that a business school is positioned in wishes to transform these various forms of capital into economic capital, in order to fund and manage the (often resource-scarce) university, concurrent with critiques of universities treating business schools as “cash cows” (e.g., Parker and Guthrie, 2010). This conceptualisation could augment the previously described institutional logics approach. Indeed, previous work in multiple areas has examined the relationship between institutional logics and the Bourdieusian idea of capital – capital acts as a basis on which a particular logic is acted upon (Misangyi *et al.*, 2008) and the value of a certain capital is defined by a logic (Weik, 2011). Thus, it can be argued that the intellectual capital produced is representative of the publication logic, whereas the symbolic capital produced is representative of the student logic.

Temporally dominant disciplines are more directly associated with external sources of power (e.g., Lapping, 2004), which is therefore arguably the case for business schools as the home of the temporally dominant discipline of business and management. Thus, they are faced with producing intellectual capital, which is linked to producing academically rigorous research outputs, whilst simultaneously producing symbolic capital, which is linked to producing graduates and building an educational reputation. Under this lens it is clear that the disconnect between research and education could be reflective of the inherent need for business schools to address different forms of capital. Since business school research and education are both concerned with external structures of power in different ways, it is no surprise that the discussions of how they should go about becoming more impactful are largely divorced. However, as seen in Literature Stream 4, relevance as it applies to produced knowledge is applicable to both research and education. An important consideration for future study is to understand to what extent the relevance and impact of research compared to education is contingent on the different criteria for relevant knowledge (solution focus, societal value, visibility) given the different sources of power they are associated with. This could provide an insight into the divide. As a starting point, for example, given that education produces symbolic capital for graduates and future businesspeople, one could hypothesise that the need for content in education programmes to be solution-focused and societally valuable is greater than that for research outputs. This would support the notion that education is a principle disseminator of university-produced knowledge (e.g., Visser-Wijnveen *et al.*, 2010), perhaps even more so than other forms of dissemination.

3.6.3 Value co-creation

As noted in the descriptive analysis of the sample of articles, the most common theoretical framework utilised in the literature is *knowledge exchange* (n = 59), yet only a small proportion of these papers focus on co-production or co-creation. Furthermore, the lack of connection made between the proposals for enhancing the relevance of business school *education*, and direct stakeholder engagement, was identified through the review of the literature. A clear connection across the literature base was found between *research* and *knowledge transfer*, and between *education* and *knowledge transfer*. There is also a clear connection between *research* and *knowledge co-production*. However, there is only a tentative connection between *education* and *knowledge co-production*. In other words, there is a lack of cross-fertilization in the literature between knowledge co-production and the education-focused proposals for creating impactful knowledge.

Although a relatively novel connection, and one that would perhaps not be expected of business school education (except for the case of executive education, where it is more likely to be anticipated), the importance of co-producing knowledge cannot be underestimated (Rossi *et al.*, 2017). In its direct nature, knowledge co-production manifests in the dialogue between academia and practice. This dialogue provides an invaluable platform for “support, challenge, exchange, generation, and experimentation" (Marcos and Denyer, 2012 p. 444). Knowledge co-production is generally seen in collaborative research with practitioners (Kieser and Leiner, 2012), and thus has not been widely applied to business school education. However, some key authors within the literature base have highlighted the potential applications of knowledge co-production to business school education. Berggren and Söderlund (2008) demonstrate that business school education, particularly programmes for practicing managers, can offer promising foundations for knowledge co-production. Anderson *et al.* (2017) describe the co-production of management knowledge through education as "relational" education. This notion has been supported by Werr and Strannegård (2014) who, after observing an educational programme for practitioners involving collaborative research with business school academics, conclude that programmes of this nature can nurture the development of relevant, co-produced knowledge. These authors emphasise that knowledge co-production can be applied in the context of business school education, but this is an area that requires further research. Some authors have explored the notion of business school students participating in real-life projects and work-based learning, but without any explicit use of a theoretical lens of co-production of business school knowledge.

It would therefore be beneficial to better understand how business school education can involve direct stakeholder engagement. Indeed, it can be argued that impact is contingent on stakeholder engagement (Huzzard, 2021), and in this spirit it is proposed that future research on business schools moves towards expanding the use of a *value co-creation* lens for understanding impact and relevance across the entire spectrum of activities that business schools assume. Studies into how knowledge can be co-produced and co-created with practitioners in an education setting are sparse, but it should not be assumed that business school education is limited to the transfer of knowledge to practitioners indirectly via graduates. The notion of co-production can be extended, using the ideas behind service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), to theorise how value is co-created (e.g., Farr, 2016). Co-creation, defined as "an interactive, creative and social process between stakeholders that is initiated by the firm at different stages of the value creation process" (Roser *et al.*, 2013 p. 23), is often seen as interchangeable with co-production, with there being no empirically remarkable difference between the two concepts (Voorberg *et al.*, 2015). It appears that the papers that have championed co-production did not make explicit reference to the adjacent field of co-creation, despite adopting the general principles of co-creation. Rossi *et al.* (2017 p. 2) argue that the idea of generating knowledge collaboratively "provides a more accurate description of the engagement process of business school academics, as well as a more suitable theoretical framework with which to characterise how academic engagement generates impact". The findings of this review support this sentiment, and so it would be sensible for future research on business schools to draw on the wider literature and theoretical underpinnings of co-creation, given that co-production and co-creation are interchangeable. Thus, the holistic thematic framework points towards understanding the approaches for enhancing relevance under the wider lens of value co-creation. In the spirit of the holistic approach taken with the framework, it should be emphasised that co-creation should occur both with practitioners and with students. More explicit theorising related to the co-creation concept is needed when exploring co-production, in order to build bridges between the examination of knowledge co-production in business schools and co-creation theory which emphasises the role of the "consumer" (Cova *et al.*, 2011).

As a starting point, drawing on the ideas of Vargo and Lusch (2004), and the importance of stakeholders and the co-creation process, it would be appropriate to consider the following points in future research: (1) relevance, or impact, is "value"; (2) relevance is defined by and co-created with practitioners and/or students; (3) relevance is determined by practitioners and/or students on the basis of "value-in-use"; (4) value-in-use in this context implies that the value of knowledge is an outcome of engagement with practitioners and/or students; (5) relevance results from the application of operant resources (i.e., the approaches for enhancing relevance and core competencies of business schools); and (6) business school outputs have "relevance potential" but are not embedded with relevance – rather, relevance is realised based on specific stakeholder needs through knowledge co-creation. These assumptions are borne out of an approach that would emphasise co-creation with practitioners and with students, as per the holistic thematic framework. Furthermore, Vargo and Lusch (2004 p. 9) emphasise that knowledge and skills "can be transferred (1) directly, (2) through education or training, or (3) indirectly by embedding them in objects". This conceptualisation of value resonates with the findings related to Literature Stream 3, with regards to the idea of direct and indirect stakeholder engagement, whereby "objects" could be research articles, for example.

3.6.4 A stakeholder-centric definition of relevant and impactful knowledge: Bridging research and education

As a final point, this review reveals the absolute importance of stakeholders in any discussion of the impact of business schools, highlighting that any strategy taken to enhance the relevance of either research or education involves some form of engagement with stakeholders, whether that be directly or indirectly. Despite this clarity on the significance of business school stakeholders, the definition of relevant and impactful knowledge is less clear. Relevance and impact are far-reaching and can encapsulate many meanings. Indeed, impact itself can be achieved in a multitude of ways, ranging from integration of research into the L&D activities of organisations (e.g., Ross *et al.*, 2021) or through professional doctorate graduates being able to apply their accumulated skills and critical thinking abilities to practice (e.g., Creaton and Anderson, 2021).

Inspired by stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Laplume *et al.*, 2008) and its applications to higher education (e.g., Alves *et al.*, 2010; Chapleo and Simms, 2010) and even specifically business schools (e.g., Rao-Nicholson *et al.*, 2018), and drawing on the findings of what relevant knowledge *actually* is, a stakeholder-centric definition of relevant and impactful knowledge in the context of business schools is proposed. This definition does not only speak to those critics who have identified a lack of clarity around what relevance *is* but represents a thorough and representative amalgamation of decades of debate on the purpose of business schools. Based on the in-depth synthesis of the relevance literature, the following stakeholder-centric definition of relevant and impactful knowledge is offered:

> *Knowledge that assists in solving problems (solution focus), experienced by those in practice and society (societal value), that is readily available to and usable by those who need it (visibility)*

It has been argued previously that relevance is a difficult concept to empirically assess with respect to university-produced knowledge (e.g., Palmer *et al.*, 2009), and the point raised by Kieser *et al.* (2015 p. 196) is echoed: "practical relevance has many different dimensions", which have "not been properly acknowledged in most contributions to the relevance debate". Thus, it is hoped that synthesising previous discussions of relevance and impact with a view to offering an all-encompassing definition will be useful for future research. Furthermore, the definition offered here can be applied to two of the three forms of knowledge utilization as explained Astley and Zammuto (1992), them being instrumental – directly influencing managerial behaviour, and conceptual – influencing how managers perceive a problem. The proposed definition echoes the idea that business school research should be relevant to the issues of a wide array of key stakeholders (Hodgkinson *et al.* 2001), including practitioners, government, and consumer groups, reflecting the diverse requirements of modern business schools to meet multiple needs. Furthermore, the "visibility" aspect emphasises the importance of considering *how* knowledge is communicated with stakeholders, in conjunction with authors such as Cummings and Cummings (2022) who highlight the role of language use in communications with students and practitioners.

It is important to note that, in addition to the ideas that relevant knowledge should have a solution focus, societal value, and visibility to external stakeholders, it is also vital that such knowledge is based on valid evidence. This reflects the growing popularity of "evidence-based management" (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006; Rousseau, 2006) in business and business schools. Discussions of evidence-based management were minimal in the returned literature, with only one result looking at the concept in-depth (van Aken and Romme, 2009). This was not enough to generate a meaningful theme that would ultimately be included in the framework. This may represent a weak link between the evidence-based management literature and the conceptual and empirical relevance literature, considering that this review omits to analyse viewpoint articles. However, it can be argued that a precursor to the three identified fundamentals of relevant knowledge would be for ideas to be based on scientifically valid insights, and thus evidence-based. This acknowledges the legitimacy and validity of the rigour side of the rigour-relevance spectrum – the issue here is striking the right balance.

A fruitful application of the definition can be offered for advancing the business school literature. The holistic thematic framework demonstrates the criticality of capturing the relevance of business schools in the context of research *and* education, appreciating the respective roles they play within a wider multi-dimensional entity (e.g., Jensen and Wang, 2018). Importantly, it also allows us to expose facets of the literature that are underdeveloped and require further investigation. In particular, the lack of previous studies that acknowledge the multi-dimensional nature of business schools is evident, with little cross-fertilisation between discussions of research and education. This review emphasises that business school research does not exist in a vacuum, but instead goes hand-in-hand with education in the wider business school system. It has been identified previously that research into the complex relationship between research and education is lacking (Starkey and Hatchuel, 2014). The findings of this review support this stance, identifying a significant gap in the literature in that there has been little examination of the complex relationship between research activities and education activities in business schools in the context of relevant knowledge production and dissemination.

It can therefore be argued that the definition epitomizes this multi-dimensional view, given that it is borne from synthesis of literature from both sides of the topic. The proposed definition of relevant and impactful knowledge is applicable to the whole business school portfolio without discrimination against either research or education. The conditions for co-created knowledge to be relevant and impactful is the same, it can be argued, for both. Thus, impact – which reflects the ultimate outcome of relevant and impactful knowledge – can act as the conceptual bridge between research and education, hence the final piece of the puzzle: "*bridging research and education through impact*". This coincides with a belief that scholars who engage in the rigour-relevance debate in the future should not omit to recognise the role that education plays in the endeavor for impact.

It should be noted that the interrelation between research and education has not been *completely* omitted in the literature, and has been recognised by some key authors, which is a useful foundation for understanding the interconnections between the two. Critically, authors in this space have recognised the immense potential of education activities as a key disseminator of research findings and as a way of achieving impact (e.g., Anderson *et al.*, 2017). In a similar vein, others have appreciated the role of research findings in the business school curriculum (e.g., Berggren and Söderlund, 2008), highlighting the organic relationship that exists between research and education. Others have been more critical of the relationship – for example, Pearce and Huang (2012) found evidence that research in business schools has become less actionable and is therefore less useful for students. Additionally, Peng *et al.* (2018) suggested that new research findings seldom make it into textbooks and classroom environments in a timely and efficient way, suggesting a level of distance between research and education. Overall, however, discussions of the relationship between research and education have been lacking, and the holistic thematic framework has demonstrated that applying holism to the study of business schools is beneficial for appreciating their complex nature.

3.7 Conclusion

This paper has provided a systematic review of the literature on the relevance and impact of business schools, encompassing their multidimensional nature by recognising both research and education activities. Based on a systematic analysis of 266 journal articles published between 1991 and March 2021, a holistic thematic framework has been developed that incorporates the main streams of literature in this domain and represents how business schools could be studied in the future. Not only do these frameworks demonstrate how these streams of literature fit together within the wider body of knowledge, but they also expose the gaps within this knowledge base that need to be addressed. Fundamentally, the thematic findings demonstrate that the environment in which business school academics operate is perceived as a primary contributor to the relevance problem; however, the relevance problem is seemingly fixable, and various solutions have been put forward to encourage business schools to produce and disseminate knowledge that meets the fundamental criteria of relevance. By exposing gaps in related strands of the body of literature, the findings of this review have mapped out a much clearer route for researching and understanding business schools in the future.

This review makes three key contributions to our scholarly understanding of business schools. The first contribution is the synthesis of the body of knowledge in this area and the resultant holistic thematic framework. As has been reiterated throughout, the underlying premise of this review is the conceptualisation of business schools as multi-dimensional entities. The previous lack of cohesion among both the different activities that business schools undertake, and the different schools of thought in the overarching topic of the relevance and impact of business schools, has resulted in a fragmented body of literature with little oversight of the development of the field. This oversight in demonstrated in the framework, which is the first framework to the author's knowledge that has laid out a processual map of different thematic streams (the "source", the "problems", the "solutions", and the "outcome"). The framework presented in this review not only provides a way for scholars to comprehend the different areas within this topic and how they relate, but it also demonstrates the theoretical importance of applying a multi-dimensional lens to the study of business schools. This lens, which encapsulates both research *and* education within business schools, can allow us to appreciate that neither activity exists within a vacuum, and despite the compartmentalisation of previous literature, that the issues of relevance and impact apply to them both simultaneously and can thus conceptually bridge the two concepts. It has been highlighted that whilst these two streams of literature exist, and they both draw on similar concepts (e.g., knowledge exchange; the institutional environment; societal value of knowledge), they are actually almost completely divorced from each other. Viewing business schools in their entirety as a unit of analysis – and appreciating the inclusivity of what impact can be and how it can be achieved – is the way to marry these separate schools of thought.

Second, among other theoretical perspectives that could offer useful ways for investigating business schools in the future, this review has highlighted both the value that could be offered by using an institutional lens through which to view business schools, as well as the urgent need for more attention to be given to empirically understanding the institutional environment of business schools. Specifically, the synthesis of previous research revealed three distinct expectations that exist within the business school environment (publishing, student, and impact). This review has proposed a link between these expectations and the notion of institutional logics. Only a handful of previous papers have used an institutional complexity or institutional logics lens in order to understand the environment (e.g., Kieser, 2011), but principally focus on research activities. This review has emphasised the fact that these institutional forces apply to both research *and* education and should prompt future scholarly work in this area to use an institutional lens that considers the entire spectrum of life within a business school. This review has also demonstrated that the consensus among scholars in this area is that the current problems faced by business schools are principally facilitated by the institutional environment, and thus emphasises the necessity for more empirical studies of said environment.

Finally, it has been noted previously that relevance, in the context of business schools, is ill-defined. For example, Augier and March (2007 p. 138) commented that "the definition of relevance is ambiguous, its measurement imprecise, and its meaning complex", whilst Butler *et al.* (2015 p. 733) argued that "the precise definition of 'relevance' is rarely explicated in detail by commentators, yet the pursuit of relevance is unanimously accepted as a worthwhile common goal within the business school". Following the literature synthesis, the key constructs of relevant and impactful knowledge were identified and a definition was developed of what said knowledge *actually* embodies. This definition is anchored on the three facets of relevance found within the analysis: knowledge that is solution-focused, societally valuable, and visible. Not only does this provide a practical "checklist" of sorts for assessment of knowledge production efforts, but it can be used in future research to help conceptually understand what is meant by *relevance*. Furthermore, this definition, as it has been illustrated, is applicable to both research and education, representing a critical bridge between the two in how impact can be equitably assessed across activities.

As with any review paper, this one has strengths and limitations. This systematic literature review provides a transparent and replicable methodology guided by experts in the field of systematic literature reviews (e.g., Denyer and Tranfield, 2009; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, using rigorous and comprehensive qualitative methods to derive dominant themes from the literature has helped in drawing robust insights from textual data. In terms of limitations, it is possible that there is a certain level of publication bias. Similar to previous systematic literature reviews (e.g., Nolan and Garavan, 2016), only peer-reviewed journal articles were considered and other forms of literature (e.g., conference papers) were disregarded. It is therefore possible that some relevant literature was not considered in the review. Furthermore, this review only included peer-reviewed and ABS Academic Journal Guide 2018 ranked work and excluded viewpoint papers. Although this is common of systematic literature reviews, the various critiques related to an overreliance on scientific rigour in business schools have been simultaneously emphasised in this review, something which – to an extent – has been replicated through a strict methodology. However, it could be argued that this meant that a high level of quality was maintained in the selected sample of articles.

A final limitation – which is perhaps not only a limitation of this review but also a limitation of the wider rigour-relevance and impact debates – is that there are likely variations in the size of the rigour-relevance gap within business schools themselves (i.e., across subdisciplines). One could argue that some distinct subdisciplines that are more quantitative in nature and less focused on managerial issues per se – such as data analytics, accounting, and finance – could innately be more relevant to practice than, say, organisational behaviour or critical management studies. On finance, Brooks *et al.* (2019 p. 25) comment that "beyond direct involvement with firms operating in the sector, finance is an area that is of interest to governments and regulators both in the banking sector and beyond *[…]* finance is a leading indicator of the direction of travel of other scholarly sub-fields in business schools". With this in mind, given that the unit of analysis is business schools and thus encompassing all subdisciplines, the possibility that the conclusions drawn here may be more fitting for those less quantitative areas of business schools should be acknowledged – however, this would need to be empirically verified. This is an inherent issue of looking at business schools in their entirety. However, this opens up another interesting avenue for future research – to compare and contrast relevance and impact between various business school subdisciplines.

Chapter 4 The institutional environment of business schools and implications for individual-level perceptions of impact

4.1 Introduction

Business schools are a significant segment of the higher education system in the UK. Not only have business schools experienced rising student numbers (Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2023), but they have also become significant arenas of research and enquiry, with the Chartered Association of Business Schools (2022 p. 4) noting that "research funding for Business & Management grew for the fifth consecutive year and recorded an all-time high for the fourth consecutive year, reaching a total of £80.1m for the academic year 2020/21". Despite this, business schools have come under criticism, particularly over the past two decades, for failing to juggle the need to produce relevant, impactful knowledge for society and practice, and the need to be academically and scientifically rigorous to maintain academic legitimacy. Palmer *et al.* (2009) noted that business schools have been criticised for prioritising rigour at the expense of their beneficiaries, such as practitioners. A number of authors have implied that the academic environment is driving this phenomenon seen in business schools (e.g., Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Cotton *et al.*, 2001; Miller *et al.*, 2011), and a number of authors have framed the relevance problem as one of differing institutional logics (e.g., Bullinger *et al.*, 2015; Kieser, 2011; Paterson *et al.*, 2018).

A central element of this debate is the contentious issue of impact. The Economic and Social Research Council define research impact as "the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy" (Economic and Social Research Council, 2021). They further typologize impact into two categories: "academic impact", which relates to advancing methods, theories, and understanding in and across academic disciplines, and "economic and societal impact", which relates to the contribution that research makes to the economy, organisations, individuals, and society at large. The latter type of impact has seen a distinct formalization in how it is evaluated. This has been primarily through the requirement for higher education institutions to submit "impact case studies" as part of the 7-yearly REF exercise, the successor to the RAE that ceased to exist from 2008.

However, impact is arguably difficult to define and measure (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Publicly funded research universities have an unwritten yet rather overt social agreement to create some sort of value for society, in return of the money they receive. Yet, what impact actually is can vary by university, faculty, discipline, or even as Martin (2011) suggests, by individual. Martin also points out that impact can vary enormously in its scale – sometimes impact can be rather monumental, whereas in many cases it is relatively moderate in the grand scheme of things. In a similar vein, impact can also arise from different elements of academic activities, if one looks beyond the likes of the REF and impact case studies. Armstrong (2011) frames the phrase "meaningful impact" within the debate surrounding management education and developing leading practitioners of the future. Educational impact, in comparison to research impact, has received less attention in the context of business schools. This is seemingly paradoxical, given that business schools can make vast contributions to the development of future leaders and entrepreneurs. Of course, not every academic is required to teach, but scholars can in one way or another translate their work into educational practice (Burke and Rau, 2010).

The repeated calls to enhance our knowledge of the institutional environment of business schools (e.g., Hommel and Thomas, 2014; Paterson *et al.*, 2018) is echoed in two key justifications for this empirical study. First, there is a need to acknowledge the breadth of the institutional landscape of the business school environment. This is important for building a comprehensive view that recognises the multidimensional nature of business schools (Jensen and Wang, 2018) and the variety of activities they assume – research, education, and impact. Previous work that has explicitly focused on complexity in the institutional environment has often focused on research activities only, in the context of rigour and relevance (e.g., Bullinger *et al.*, 2015; Kieser, 2011; Paterson *et al.*, 2018), without explicitly considering the institutional pressures that simultaneously come from education. Second, there appears to be very little empirical evidence of how logics are experienced on an individual actor level within business schools (i.e., from the perspective of the academic). Research that is conceptual in nature is useful for theorising the institutional environment of business schools, but the field is currently missing key evidence of lived experiences. This deficit of empirical research into the logics at work in the academic environment of business schools has been noted by Paterson *et al.* (2018), and also there are "few, if any" scholarly works on the broadly defined idea of impact as it relates to business schools (Lejeune *et al.*, 2019 p. 88).

To appreciate the notion of impact as it exists within higher education and, specifically, business schools, it is important to initially "zoom out" to explore the context in which impact plays a part within a larger system of logics, expectations, and institutions. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of institutional logics (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008), the problematization of this paper, therefore, is the issue of cohesion – cohesion and harmonization between an institutional view of impact at the macro-meso level and an individual micro-level view of impact as exhibited by academics operating within this space.

The overarching aim for this research is, therefore, to understand the institutional landscape of business schools and the implications of this for the notion of impact as perceived by individual-level actors within the environment. Through critically exploring this pivotal issue of the business school environment, the goal is to not only to extract the characteristics of each logic, but also to deepen understanding of the relative strength of the different logics within the environment and the implications of this for micro-level actors in how they understand meaningful impact. Subsequently, it is intended that a clearer picture can be built of the extent to which the institutional system is guiding academics towards making a meaningful impact for both practitioners and society at large. Thus, two research objectives underpin this study:

> Research objective 1: To identify the nature, salience, and prescriptions of the different institutional logics in the environment of business schools.
>
> Research objective 2: To explore how the institutional logics shape perceptions and understandings of individual-level actors in relation to impact in business schools.

Exploratory, qualitative inquiry was used to enable the experiences of business academics to be brought to light and thus achieve the stated objectives. Based on the understanding of institutional logics (e.g., Thornton *et al.*, 2012; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008) and the analysis of 59 semi-structured interviews with business academics across 10 business schools within UK Russell Group universities, this study explores, from an individual-level perspective, the prevalent institutional logics in the business school field and their associated characteristics. Then, building on this fundamental underpinning of how the macro-meso layer of the environment is perceived, the institutional environment is examined with regards to how it has shaped micro-level conceptualisations of, and attitudes towards, impact.

4.2 Business schools and impact

As touched upon in the introduction, impact is an elusive, difficult-to-define and difficult-to-measure construct (Hopkins *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, it has become something that is expected of higher education institutions and, indeed, business schools across the UK and beyond. The impact narrative has embedded impact as something to be associated with research activities regarding socio-economic outcomes that can be demonstrated in a case study (Rao-Nicholson *et al.*, 2018). In the 2021 REF, 539 impact case studies were submitted under the “Business and Management Studies” unit of assessment across 108 institutions that made a REF submission within said unit (UKRI, 2022a).

However, the REF, and indeed impact case studies, have not escaped criticism within and beyond the business school context. Hughes *et al.* (2019 p. 639) point out that “case studies only pick up wider impact that can be evidenced”. Thus, impact that may occur in a more serendipitous way, or impact that may be unbeknownst to decision-makers in the business school context, cannot be captured in these submissions. Impact case studies have also been described as a symbol of the neoliberalisation of higher education in the UK, whereby an academic’s “capacity to sell themselves as impactful [...] is analogous to the commodification of seemingly every facet of academic life and its celebration” (Watermeyer and Hedgecoe, 2016 p. 663). In other words, one could argue that impact case studies act as a marketing tool for universities – or indeed, individuals – to claim practical or societal legitimacy. Consequently, universities can act as “gatekeepers of impact narratives” (Bandola-Gill and Smith, 2022 p. 1869), facilitating accounts of endeavours that are likely to succeed from a REF point of view at the expense of others considered to be less convincing – and thus reinforcing an institutionalised ideation of what impact means.

Impact from academic work can often be opportune and it can be difficult to trace a particular societal benefit back to any one research project, researcher, or institution (Donovan, 2011). This raises many questions about what kind of impactful work is actually visible on a wider scale. If the definition of impact put forward by Mason (2015 p. 1) is taken – taking “academic work and turning it into knowledge that is useful and used by business, government, and society more broadly” – it is obvious that it would be impossible to track and measure every ounce of impact achieved by academics. Furthermore, what is seen as impactful may vary between institution, discipline, and even individual – one form of impact may feel particularly meaningful to a certain group and not to another (Penfield *et al.*, 2014).

This begs the question – what does impact mean? And how have the likes of the REF influenced that meaning? Traditionally, impact in the scholarly sense was related to academic publications and citations from others in the academy (Sandhu *et al.*, 2019), so arguably the REF has somewhat broadened the horizons of impact already. Indeed, Simsek *et al.* (2018 p. 2021) acknowledge that “multiple pathways exist for impact” and outline three pathways for impact through research. However, what is missing from the mainstream discourse is not only the value of knowledge dissemination to students for achieving a research impact (Aguinis *et al.*, 2019), but also the value of disseminating knowledge to students (and other stakeholders) through teaching (and, perhaps, other engagements) for achieving a wider, more meaningful impact that is not necessarily attributed to research alone (Johnson and Orr, 2020). Thus, the REF may have broadened horizons to an extent, but what is not fully understood is the full consequences of its implementation as experienced by individuals "on-the-ground" who may be guided by various different logics.

It is becoming clearer that multiple perspectives of impact – and how it can be demonstrated – exist (Pettigrew and Starkey, 2016). Lejeune *et al.* (2019) argue for a wider lens in this domain, proposing three categories of impact: economic, knowledge, and responsibility. Economic relates to, for example, the economic benefits brought about by business schools for regional economies and the entrepreneurial ventures of graduates. Crudely, it could also include the financial gains of being a business school graduate at the individual level. Knowledge impact relates to knowledge transfer between business schools and business practice, whether that be via research, education, or other engagements. Responsibility impact relates to a positive contribution to society – for example, through curricula embedded with ethics and sustainability themes. The benefit of Lejeune et al.'s conceptualisation is that, crucially, it moves towards a philosophy that impact is not strictly achieved solely for research-active academics.

Despite the lack of institutional emphasis given to impact through education, this critical area has begun to receive more scholarly attention in recent years. In their qualitative study of research-intensive schools, Johnson and Orr (2020) proposed a more holistic understanding of impact, with participants mentioning that an "often overlooked mechanism for generating impact is through learning and teaching provision" (p. 568). They argued that "the models of impact incentivized by the REF reflect narrow, knowledge-based conceptions that account for only a minority of the approaches" (p. 569). Referring to the research-teaching nexus, Wickert *et al.* (2021) point out that business school graduates act as the first channel for societal impact. It is also important to consider the skill development offered by business schools to students – for example, for doctoral students, the ability to apply high-level critical thinking (Creaton and Anderson, 2021) is an impact in itself.

One of the most prominent works related to conceptualising educational impact is Anderson *et al.*'s (2017) advocation of what they term *relational management education* as an alternative to the dominant narrative related to research publications being the route to impact. They highlight that a preoccupation with the notion of a "practitioner" may disillusion some from believing that students are there to be impacted, arguing that "if we recognize our former, current and future students of business and management as practitioners, then it is possible to take a broader view of the community with which we are trying to connect and the sense of separation and isolation is diminished" (p. 19). The relational aspect engages with the idea that educators are co-producers of knowledge, not passive instructors.

4.3 An institutional logics approach

This study utilises institutional logics – the "the socially constructed, historical pattern of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organise time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999 p. 804) – as a guiding framework on which to examine the business school environment. Institutional logics act as a tool to guide rational behaviour (Thornton, 2004). Such a focus on institutional logics allows for a focus on both the material and ideational aspects of the institutional environment (Jones *et al.*, 2013). Institutional logics can provide a source of agency, enabling actors to create change, but can also act as a constraint on action (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). Constraint on action is particularly relevant here. Unrelated works that have similarly adopted an institutional logics approach have acknowledged this consequence of institutional logics, such as Westermann-Behaylo *et al.* (2014) who discussed the institutional logics that constrain organisations from participating in corporate responsibility toward employees. However, the aim of this study relates to this constraint at the level of the individual (as opposed to that of the firm). Nevertheless, it can be argued that our understanding of the constraining mechanism of institutional logics (regardless of the level of examination) can be bolstered through examining them in an empirical context.

Multiple institutional logics can co-exist together as competing logics (Scott, 2014), and these can exist for a sustained time period whereby participants in the environment must manage them on a long-term basis (Reay and Hinings, 2009). When these multiple logics give rise to conflicting pressures, the institutional environment becomes complex (Greenwood *et al.,* 2011). Institutional complexity can be defined as "competing and potentially incompatible prescriptions from multiple institutional logics" (Saka-Helmhout *et al.* 2016, p. 2). Smith and Tracey (2016) noted that, although many studies simplify the dynamics of institutional complexity by focusing on two institutional logics, several logics can actually co-exist within an environment. Through this empirical study, it can be identified at which junctures complexity or, alternatively, mere coexistence, manifests. However, at the heart of these logics is the academic (the "actor") who must make sense of this environment and guide themselves towards carrying out meaningful day-to-day activities (Blomgren and Waks, 2015). This sensemaking process is necessary in an environment with multiple logics because this multiplicity can confuse what should be considered legitimate with regards to actions, behaviours, and the value and use of different resources (Bertels and Lawrence, 2016).

Business schools, therefore, are prime examples of environments that have a multiplicity of influential institutional logics. A number of studies have previously applied the ideas behind institutional logics and institutional complexity in this domain. Some authors have focused on the rigour-relevance gap (see Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009 and Kieser and Leiner, 2009 for discussions of the gap) and conceptualised 'rigour' and 'relevance' as two opposing institutional logics. Paterson *et al.* (2018 p. 1372) explains that "as organising principles for the field, they provide rule-like guidance to researchers and inform the way that decision makers, such as journal editors, reviewers, and other scholars, grant legitimacy to research by publishing it and then citing it". Kieser (2011) views rigour and relevance as conflicting logics yet argues that they can co-exist in the field, conceptualising the former as the logic of basic research and the latter as the logic of 'research for the profession'. Bullinger *et al.* (2015) make a similar application – instead referring to relevance as the logic of applied research – but argue that these logics can be considered incompatible because of the conflicting organising principles which effectively dictate different ways of working. The current study wishes to extend the strides made by these previous authors by incorporating both an appreciation for the education side of business schools, and an acknowledgement that 'impact' may be a more appropriate way of viewing the practical utility of academic knowledge – as opposed to 'relevance' – in the context of logics. 'Relevance' has traditionally been embedded almost exclusively in a research context.

4.4 Methodology

The objective of this study is to explore the complex institutional environment of business schools in the UK and how the impact agenda fits into this. Given this objective, and the keyword being 'explore', this study adopts a qualitative approach to the collection and analysis of data. This was deemed to be appropriate when compared to a quantitative approach because this study seeks to understand the real lived experiences of business academics who are subject to different priorities, pressures, and expectations. Understanding how participants make sense of their environment, in their own words, can be achieved through qualitative inquiry that allows them to speak openly about their experiences (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The principal focus of this study is the context in which business academics operate (i.e., the institutional environment), and a qualitative approach is well-placed to derive rich and holistic data that is reflective of context (Tracy, 2020).

Theoretically, this study draws on the concepts of institutional theory (e.g., Scott, 2014) and institutional logics (e.g., Friedland and Alford, 1991), and these concepts informed the research process. The notion of logics as being frameworks that guide behaviour (Thornton *et al.*, 2012) seemed appropriate for understanding the complexity of the institutional environment on business academics. This attention to theoretical frameworks during the research process, whilst also letting ideas emerge organically from the data, is reflective of an approach that utilises both inductive and deductive reasoning (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

This study includes a sample of 59 business academics from 10 business schools in the UK. A total of 17 management sub-disciplines were represented across the sample. Levels of seniority were split into four categories: research associates/postdoctoral researchers (*n* = 5), lecturers (*n* = 18), senior lecturers/associate professors (*n* = 24) and professors (*n* = 12). The majority of the sample consisted of academics actively engaged in both teaching and research (n = 47), with a handful who were focused almost entirely on teaching (n = 6) or entirely on research (n = 6). Male academics marginally make up the majority of the sample (n = 30), with slightly less female academics (n = 29). The participants were sought via a purposive sampling method, utilising the judgement of the researcher in picking cases that would provide rich information (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). Potential participants were identified through staff profiles on institutional webpages and were approached via email. The criteria for being approached as a potential participant was threefold. Firstly, the individual must be an academic member of staff within a management sub-discipline (e.g., accounting, entrepreneurship, marketing) within a business or management school. Secondly, the individual should have research and/or teaching responsibilities as a minimum (i.e., no academics with only leadership or enterprise-related duties were included in the sample). Finally, the individual should come from a business school within a UK University that belongs to the Russell Group. The decision to only approach Russell Group universities was made on the assumption that targeting a wide range of different universities would possibly yield heterogenous results that would be difficult to apply across the entire UK higher education spectrum, and it would instead be better to focus on a particular subset of universities. Russell Group universities are research-intensive (Furey *et al.*, 2014) and so the academics within the business schools of these universities are well placed to experience institutional pressures related to research outputs and dissemination, alongside educational responsibilities (Elen *et al.*, 2007).

Each business academic participated in a semi-structured interview. The choice to use semi-structured interviews is reflective the need to find themes and patterns organically in the data whilst still informing the line of questioning with prior knowledge of institutions (Tracy, 2020). The interviews lasted between 26 minutes and 12 seconds and 1 hour 40 minutes and 47 seconds, with thirty-five of the interviews lasting longer than 50 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed for data analysis. The original plan was to conduct at least some interviews face-to-face. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions and practicalities, interviews were instead carried out online via video conferencing platforms. The interviews were carried out between April 2020 and June 2021. Participants were provided with a participant information sheet and a consent form.

An interview guide was used to inform each interview (see Appendix A). The interview guide, as with many qualitative studies, was continually adapted, added to, edited, and improved as more participants were interviewed and as issues that were not anticipated prior to the research study became clear (Howitt and Cramer, 2017). Questioning was adapted based on the participant: for example, if a participant signified early on in the interview that they had very little or no teaching responsibility, or if their staff profile on their respective institutional webpage indicated this, then the interview would reflect this. This flexibility inherent in semi-structured interviews proved to be beneficial for drawing rich and relevant information from the participants (Malhotra *et al.*, 2012). Using semi-structured interviewing also enabled the probing of answers, encouraging the participants to elaborate on their responses (Saunders *et al.*, 2016), which proved useful for getting to the bottom of the different pressures the participants face in their working lives.

During the interviews, the participants were initially asked to simply describe their job role, their responsibilities and their background, not only to get some critical information to guide the remainder of the interview, but also to act as an 'ice breaker' to put them at ease and help to build a rapport (Tracy, 2020). To meet the research objectives, questioning in the interviews related to the different pressures experienced by interviewees in their day-to-day work and what is important for their success. The interviewees were encouraged to think about the different facets of their job where different expectations come from. The interviewees were encouraged to think about the topic of impact, how they believed it was relevant to them and how they perceived it, in light of the different pressures and expectations they are subject to.

Following the audio recordings of the interviews being transcribed verbatim, the textual data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) inspired by the Gioia method (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). This involved a first-cycle process of initial coding with use of descriptive codes and concept codes, followed by a second-cycle process of focused coding to build categories (Saldaña, 2016). This led to ultimately generating themes from the dataset. As with the complexity and flexibility inherent within qualitative data analysis, it was not a straightforward journey from codes to themes – rather, it was a back-and-forth iterative process, making use both of emerging ideas from the data corpus as well as prior knowledge and a general idea of how the data were to be organised. Themes for research objective 1 were formed as specific institutional logics prevalent in the business school environment. Subsequently, the environment is conceptualised as having three co-existing logics that vary in salience: the *academic profession logic*, the *business logic*, and the *accountability logic*. Themes for research objective 2 were formed as institutionally driven perceptions of impact prominent across the dataset: *impact as an elusive concept*, *impact as a non-primary mission*, and *impact as something measurable*. The data structure that encompasses the entire research aim (i.e., inclusive of both objectives) is presented in Figure 4.1.

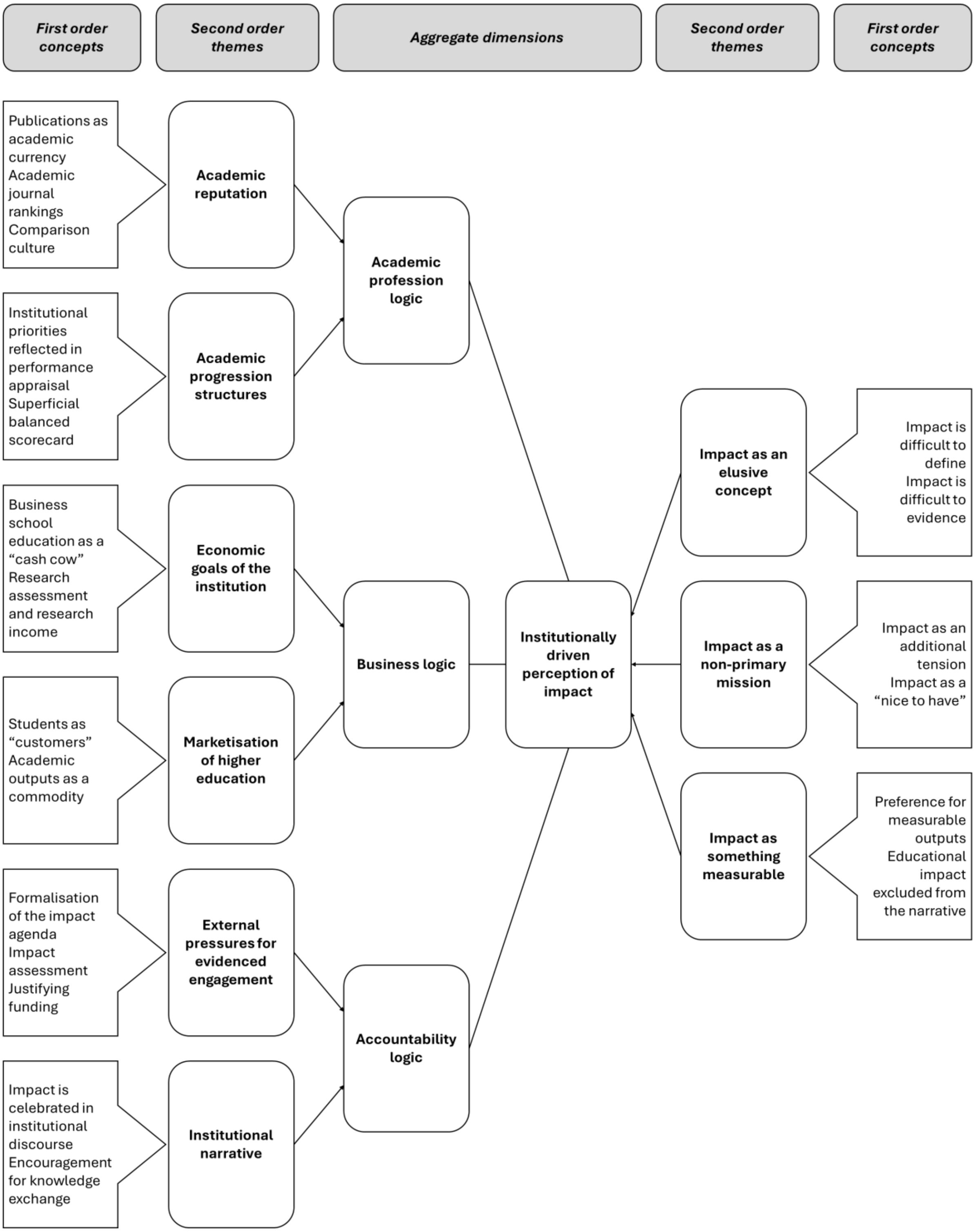


Figure 4.1 Data structure for Chapter 4

4.5 Research objective 1: Field-level institutional logics in the business school environment

The three logics that are discussed in this section are summarised with some associated characteristics in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 The three logics

	Academic profession logic	Business logic	Accountability logic
Institutional order	Market-professional (Mountford and Cai, 2023)	Market-managerial (Mountford and Cai, 2023)	State (Thornton, 2004)
Duty of the academic	To publish in highly ranked academic journals	To contribute to the maintenance of a steady stream of fee-paying students and secure research income	To justify research outputs beyond academe by demonstrating practical and/or societal impact
Main source of pressure	Business schools; academic peers	Universities	Government

4.5.1 Academic profession logic

The *academic profession logic* represents the norms of what is seen as a successful business academic. Participants in the sample spoke at length about how they are judged, what they are expected to achieve, and what is central to them advancing through the academic ranks. This logic is upheld by strong normative institutions that are longstanding and deeply embedded, as well as socially constructed attitudes towards the "status" of research and the subsequent material practices of performance and appraisal structures. The following subsections will explore the themes of *academic reputation* and the resultant *academic progression structures* that embody the *academic profession logic*.

4.5.1.1 Academic reputation

It became apparent throughout the interviews that a career in academia is a career hinged on reputation, and business schools are certainly no exception to this. Participants in the interviews were keenly aware that their research reputation is the key to being seen favourably, from a scholarly point-of-view, both within and beyond their institutions. This reflects the individualistic nature of academia. It also reflects the heavy weighting put on publications as a metric of success. Participants were very cognisant of the role reputation plays in their careers:

> *It's an individual type of career that you happen to do with an institution.* (Participant 17)

> *In some ways it's very insular [...] your reputation is absolutely everything.* (Participant 17)

> *My goal is research and wanting to publish, especially in kind of four star journals and having that, what they call the unfortunate phrase, having the "research pedigree" basically on your CV, of where you've published. So that for me is my key motivator.* (Participant 42)

> *I mean, our progression is about reputation, and in one way or another, we know that publishing in these sort of journals sort of ranks you within your community as to how good you are. You could say it's a community pressure and the people that I am working with are also in that sort of mindset. Therefore, that is why I think it's important to publish in these sort of journals, because I have the aspiration to be that sort of academic that publishes in these sort of journals.* (Participant 22)

Having a solid research portfolio and thus a prominent research reputation can be useful – there was a perception among some participants that life becomes easier once you have good contacts and have "got your name out there". This makes building an *academic reputation* all the more critical:

> *I haven't got a four star publication yet. And it's not even as though... you know, there's a lot of luck in it. It's not just about talent and hard work. It's also about who do you get as your reviewers and who is your editor? And do they take a dislike to what you're doing? And there is definitely, once you've got your name out there and you're a professor, you have it easier. You can see from some of the things that get published. It's not the meritocracy that it sort of claims to be, I don't think, exactly.* (Participant 35)

Interestingly, some participants alluded to how the changing technological landscape has made an individual's reputation more visible. This element of digital visibility can act as a mode of performance benchmarking for things like promotions:

> *There's no document out there that suggests that we need to have this many, exactly this many publications and how many need to be three star versus four star. So there's*

no kind of document around that. So what I'm saying is that it's kind of like a rough approximation, based on people who got promoted. And obviously I can look at their web profiles and see how much they've published. (Participant 42)

The normative institutions that uphold these reputational pressures are related to the ideation of what a successful academic is, and the consequent publication pressures. One of these norms is conforming to the ABS Academic Journal Guide (the "ABS list"). One respondent commented "*if I were to say, not publish in a three or four star journal over a two year period, I'd be in a spot of bother with my manager [...] you always know that if you want to continue in employment, you need to be moving towards publishing in three and four star journals*" (Participant 8). It became evident from the interviews that, explicitly or implicitly, and whether it is openly admitted or not, the likes of the ABS list have become completely embedded in the fabric of business schools:

The underlying system is that we still need papers, we still need to cling on the four star, three star. (Participant 13)

I was definitely told when I came here that the ABS was everything. And again, you know, I had the option of a publishing contract out of my PhD, taking my dissertation and turning it into a book. And I was straight up told "don't waste your time on that". Because it doesn't count. (Participant 30)

So what this involves and for me to pass the probation is I have to submit one journal paper to a journal, a good journal, per year. So we're talking about a three or four star journal, or if it's not a three or four star journal, it needs to be a quite high quality two star journal. But essentially, preferably with three or four star journals. (Participant 9)

So obviously you know about the ABS list, the sort of emphasis on three and four star papers when you're in sort of relatively decent universities. And the first couple of meetings I had with my head of group, with the dean, they basically said, we don't really care about quantity so long as you get something that kind of sets us apart. (Participant 59)

A prominent theme in the mind of many business school academics is that of these "top journals" – those that sit atop the likes of the ABS list. There are significant reputational implications for publishing in a perceived top journals. Indeed, they can be career changing. The likes of the ABS list have emphasises a "quality over quantity" mindset in some cases, in that numerous publications in lower-tiered journals are seemingly less appreciated:

> *There is a strong status hierarchy and that maps very strongly onto your research productivity. Now, what I mean by that is not just producing lots of papers. It's not just quantity, but really quality matters enormously. So, you know, I think you get status or you kind of have esteem from your peers and you feel like you're doing relatively well if you're producing, publishing in top journals. And you know, if you're publishing in top journals, then the more you publish the better. But, you know, I think it's kind of like if you produce, you know, if you're publishing a lot, but they're all in lower tier journals, then you're not going to be so highly esteemed.* (Participant 4)

Many universities are signatories of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, which advocates for assessment of research that is not solely based on metrics and journal identity (San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, 2012). Participant 7 inferred that although this is in place at their own institution, they have still very much internalised the use of the ABS list:

> *I still very much use the star system even though I know that we've got [the Declaration on Research Assessment] in place. I still talk about stars and colleagues talk about stars. Not just from my university, but colleagues from other universities talk about stars as well. So, yeah, I do wonder about the extent to which we have internalised stars over the years as a way of communicating about the quality of our research.* (Participant 7)

Internalisation of the ABS list was prevalent across many participants. It has become part of the language of business schools and is widely understood, making it so easy to refer to when talking about research:

> *I've just been filling in a form this morning, you know, about some of the stuff I've done in the last year. I've still stuck ABS three star or whatever in brackets afterwards, just as a bit of a signal. I know I'm not supposed to be using it anymore. So I think now, you know, we just tend to use words along the lines of "we're expecting people to publish in international standard journals", which is kind of code speak for the publications that are in those kind of ABS three and four star journals.* (Participant 11)

Having such a common standard of “good” scholarship within business schools creates an immense amount of pressure on business academics perform well with respect to the likes of the ABS list. To an extent, that pressure can be self-imposed, arguably due to the internalisation of these metrics that are so widely used:

> *I think it's more pressure that I place on myself to publish at the very top of, if I can, the very top, ABS four and hopefully one day ABS four star, rather than a pressure that I get*

> *from my school necessarily. So I think a lot of the pressure comes, at least, in my case, comes from my own expectations I have. And from the people I work with who also publish in the sort of journals.* (Participant 22)

> *Maybe it's that feeling of you're only as good as your last article, because that's a culture I've been brought up in academically [...] so I guess I've internalised the performance measurement system, you know? I rail against it. I complain about it. But then I also embody it at the same time.* (Participant 31)

Even those who do not buy into the ABS list can acknowledge the prevalence of what has become a dominant institution in the business school field:

> *It shouldn't be about "I'm going to get a paper in a four star journal". I can almost hear my colleagues falling over in shock in terms of me dismissing the career pipeline, and I don't mean to do them as disservice. That's a very secure way to have an academic career, and it plays to the metrics, and it probably makes your life a lot easier.* (Participant 45)

One thing that was noticed during the data analysis process was a connection made between publishing in high-ranking journals and feelings of worth and credibility. The harsh reality of business schools is seemingly that your worth is tied the rankings of the journals you have published in, and this was keenly felt across the sample. This reflects the idea that high-ranking publications are the currency of business academics and that reputation is contingent on this:

> *I hope everything goes well and you find interesting results and get published in the best journals because this is the currency we're dealing with.* (Participant 51)

> *There's a credibility thing here as well [...] it does no harm for me to be on the education track and still have a very credible research output. I could do less. I know that I could do less, but I probably push myself to do a wee bit more because I just think, from a credibility point of view, which is an interesting, internalised pressure.* (Participant 34)

> *And you can do all your teaching, you can be fantastic, you can be a good citizen – if you don't publish then you're not going to get anywhere. So it's one of those things where I felt it was, I don't know... that was a reality check in terms of, it is not about your intellectual worth so to speak. And I believed that was relevant, in terms of my work ethic and the value of my ideas were going to get me places, but they don't.* (Participant 58)

Participant 19 described the inculturation of new scholars entering the environment and becoming accustomed to the ideas around publishing and reputation. This makes it acutely clear how important this is, even from the very early stages of an academic career, to understand the significance of building a research reputation:

> *I think when you see PhD students, you see that inculturation almost happening the front of your eyes. Especially those who would like to remain in academia. And some might in their third year be trying to get a paper out, half way into the third year or something. They might have a paper that they can write and they'll be thinking carefully about where to send it, because if they had luck with it, it can be quite a, you know, big thing on their CV.* (Participant 19)

4.5.1.2 Academic progression structures

The importance of *academic reputation* manifests in the internal progression structures within institutions. A number of respondents noted that the performance management systems in place favour those who are research-oriented, with an annual professional development review (PDR) often giving attention to research metrics and publications. An exception of this exists for those in education-focused roles, but even then, the ambiguous area of "scholarship" commonly attached to their pathway is frequently a push towards publishing pedagogic or other work.

Some participants alluded to what was termed in the data analysis a *superficial balanced scorecard*. This represents the idea that, although business schools and the progression structures within them are clear about using a range of indicators for performance (i.e., a balanced scorecard approach), there is an overwhelming feeling that what really counts is research performance:

> *Although the performance reviews are notionally about how you perform along those three criteria of teaching, research and administration, really, it's a research discussion. So it's all good and well, if you're a good teacher, if you're a competent manager. But what really matters, like what's up for review and what's up for contestation, is your productivity as a researcher.* (Participant 49)

> *The university criteria are quite clear in terms of you need to have high quality teaching plus high quality research plus citizenship. However, it does feel like the only thing that actually matters is publications. The rest is either seen as a good thing to have as an aside or a hindrance to getting promoted. Because the more time you spend being a good teacher or being a good citizen, the less time you spend working on your research.* (Participant 51)

Due to the emphasis on high-ranking publications within *academic progression structures*, it is widely felt that these are, above all, the priority for business schools. Being research-active, at least for those with research allocation in their contract, is widely regarded as the most important element for promotion:

> *Most institutions value research, you know, increasingly becoming obsessed with research. So I suppose one thing you've got to navigate and make sure you do quite well is ensure that you show yourself to be research active in some way.* (Participant 5)

> *We are scholars and we take our scholarship seriously. So therefore, at the end of the day, writing articles, being in the press and doing Twitter, whatever, doesn't count as much as publishing a really good and rigorous scientific article in a good journal, I think [...] most importantly for the promotion process, I think research is of paramount importance for the regular faculty.* (Participant 48)

> *No matter what the institution says about the value placed on leadership and citizenship and teaching and programme design and all of those things that are really important, at the end of the day, the only thing that will get you a promotion is research. And everybody says it. Whilst the institution puts forward the message that it is, what do we call it? "Balanced excellence" or "the well-rounded profile" or "we will, if you exceed in one area, used that to offset another area" - that just doesn't happen.* (Participant 41)

This has consequences for other areas of the job. Because of the prioritisation of research outputs for progression, other areas of the job can be perceived as less important. Impact activities, for example, are thus seen as lacking importance for progression:

> *After all, the impact, yes, it's nice to have, but it's not the thing that's going to get you over the line.* (Participant 46)

The same can be said for teaching. Despite being a fundamental part of universities, in the research-intensive business schools studied it is, in many cases, seen as a hygiene factor for progression:

> *The teaching, you've still got to be a good teacher. You can't be a terrible teacher and you can't just not bother with it. But at the same time, there's not the same incentives. And also it doesn't make you really valuable to other institutions either. So no matter, if I can get brilliant student ratings, it's not going to make somewhere else want to give me a job.* (Participant 57)

> *The education is like a hygiene check, right? So do you have adequate levels of teaching performance? And they do celebrate exceptional teaching performance, and in the actual documents, they say, you know, not one of these things is more favourable than the other, and they want this balance scorecard. But let me tell you, in practice, it's just about research. Really, in the past few years, I've seen colleagues that have performed well on just the research category and managed to jump up in the promotion scheme.* (Participant 36)

The *academic progression structures* that represent the *academic profession logic* can be disheartening and demotivating for those whose interests lie outside of consistently publishing in highly ranked journals. As Participant 58 puts it, these expectations create a *single* narrative of what success looks like, which can be limiting and exclusionary:

> *Some of the stuff that I do, regardless of how important I see it as being, it's not mainstream, it doesn't really fit with that narrative and so that's one of the issues that I find that needs to be addressed in the business school. But there's a single narrative about what a successful academic is. And that successful narrative doesn't include people like me for example.* (Participant 58)

4.5.2 Business logic

The *business logic* largely represents the interests of the university itself and its business model. Business schools are uniquely placed within the wider university ecosystem in that they generally provide a large number of students, many international. This creates significant wealth. The *business logic* also prescribes behaviours related to wealth generation in terms of research funding. Two facets of this logic, the *economic goals of the institution* and the *marketisation of higher education* will be explored in the following subsections.

4.5.2.1 Economic goals of the institution

The core argument here is that "*business schools are essential to universities for the student numbers they generate*" (Participant 15). The economic value the business school provides to the university was recognised by participants:

> *I'd say that the ways of working are definitely influenced by that external pressure, which I think it's just about metrics and economic value, really. It's about creating economic value and the economic value depends on you having a good performance as a business school, and then obviously as an organism that has people in it working, you need to make those people work in the way that means you would perform really well as a*

> *business school. So it's like a chain, I suppose, of tools and mechanisms that actually at some point they just become institutionalised, normalised, embraced as part of the business school culture.* (Participant 47)

The *business logic* is significant and incumbent. Participants were acutely aware of the contribution business schools make to a wider university due to the sheer volume of students and the coinciding income. They understand that the *business logic* centres around the continuation of education as a reliable economic source for both the school and the university. The term "cash cow" was used frequently by respondents:

> *There is a general attitude that business schools are the cash cow of universities, and we would cross subsidise pretty much the rest of the faculty. And that's the reality. As a result, there is a huge pressure from the central university to grow our student numbers and to not place a cap on student numbers. So that starts to put obviously enormous pressure on staff. And then it also diminishes the student experience [...] we are, the business schools - I say that in a collective way - we are the income generators for many universities, and our overheads are low. It doesn't usually take very much to put on a class in marketing or HR or whichever subject compared to, say, engineering or medicine and so forth.* (Participant 43)

> *What I do know is that from the university budget standpoint, normally business schools are the cash cows of the universities. The reason is that we don't have that much of a cost at the end of the day. Let's face it. I mean, the entire cost of a department that is offering these sort of business and management or economic courses being MBA, executive, non-executive, it's just toilet paper and printers and some coffee machines. So compared to STEM, let's say, they are dealing with very expensive machinery and equipment and materials and raw materials and so on and so forth. We are costless. So the investment is not that much. Yet on the other hand, MBA courses, for example, are very expensive. So we are talking about £40,000, £50,000, just to have a one year degree of an MBA here at [current institution].* (Participant 44)

Participant 5 recognised business schools as being significant generators of income for universities and the importance of international students for this reason. However, they recognised the burdens this places on teaching staff. The more students, the more pressure on academics in terms of time:

> *The teaching is important in terms of the business model, because that ultimately is what brings in most of the income. And business schools are, of all the, in terms of the*

departments in a university, business schools are amongst the best income generators, best at attracting overseas students. And they bring a lot of income. That may change potentially, but that's been the traditional pattern. And so, so compared to, say, other departments, we find business schools have pretty high, especially postgraduate numbers, would be pretty high and that does put a lot of burden on teaching staff and that sort of, it does, it does interfere, it does limit the amount of time you have. (Participant 5)

Universities operating, in a sense, like corporations, means the economic focus often feels front and centre for the participants of the study. Different aspects of academic life they were able to relate to financial implications. Participant 6 inferred that cost saving and efficiencies are of significant concerns to university management, which can have a residual effect on academic staff:

Decisions are not made on pedagogic quality grounds. They're made on very different business grounds. Students don't complain, that's fine. And they make the students happy in other ways, which is not reliant on paying a salary, like renovating the sports hall or bringing in an outside company to put up the, you know, the student halls, which are all new and shiny, instead of continuing with the old ones that the university used to run. You know, all of these things, which is "keep the students happy in different ways but keep wages down by ensuring a minimum number of staff". (Participant 6)

The *business logic* is not exclusive to education, but also reflects the economic concerns related to research. It was reported by a number of participants that securing grants and research funding is perceived as being very favourable, although such monies can be difficult to secure. Research money is less “certain” than money from education. When asked why they thought research took precedence over teaching with regards to progression, Participant 49 noted:

Well, I think very straightforwardly, it's a financial or resource issue, so to speak, purely descriptively. We already have the money from the students, but the research money is up for grabs. And I think that reality determines quite a lot of how performance management is undertaken. And I think, I kind of say this partially in the light of the last twelve months where I kind of see not just in [current institution], but how a large proportion of universities dealt with the Covid-19 crisis, dealt with student relations, dealt with issues of communication with students about what level of teaching provision was going to be put on, so on and so forth. I think that what really made me come to that conclusion about the prioritisation of research over teaching is because I think that UK

> *universities in general and research intensive universities in particular kind of take the teaching money for granted, whereas the research money is an opportunity for revenue generation.* (Participant 49)

A number of participants understood the importance of research outputs for their institution's overall REF results, which dictate the research funding allocated to institutions as a performance-based research funding system:

> *I think research, kind of the income attached to research is probably much more easy to tie to specific individuals, because it's more like a solo pursuit. You have publications which get money for them for the REF.* (Participant 37)

Securing grants and funding for research projects can provide high levels of esteem for individual researchers. Universities are perceived as looking highly on grants and research funding because of the associated economic benefits they bring. Participant 12 spoke of the significant change to their career after securing a large research grant:

> *If you bring in money that's the best thing you can do, basically. If you can bring in serious amount of money you become untouchable in two senses of the word. One, obviously all of your time gets bought out of the workload model, so you literally are not on that, which is great, and two, there is this sort of cultural attitude to "ooh, he can win money!" Because it's so short, it's in such short supply. I mean, my career totally changed - not totally, but it changed very significantly for the good - once I got my [large bid]. You know, literally people look at you like, "wow", and that is nice.* (Participant 12)

The importance of bringing in money to the institution is reflected in way that performance is evaluated for progression and promotion:

> *I think that getting some grants would be something that certainly would help. So at the moment, I have an internal, I've got internal grants, but I didn't get any external grants. So certainly the next stage will be, it will be to get research funded through external grants. And if I can have external grants and work with other institutions, that would be, I think, a big leverage for getting a promotion.* (Participant 23)

> *Obviously at the end of the day you need to have a grant. I think it's one of those things, they expect you to bring some income [...] I need external validation because I don't get any within the school. Unless I bring money.* (Participant 50)

When asked about if their institution expected them to engage in impact activities, in reference to a corporate funded project Participant 32 noted:

> *No, [current institution] doesn't care at all. I think what they cared about in the first place was the grant - and that's it. So all the requirements that we have come from the funder and the main goal is to make them happy [...] [current institution] doesn't care at all what we are doing. They have the cheque for the grant, and I guess they get some parts of it, I assume.* (Participant 32)

4.5.2.2 Marketisation of higher education

Marketisation can be defined as "applying the economic theory of the market to a sectors' services and functions, along with introducing business practices of resource competition" (Johnson, 2017 p. 72). Business schools were recognised by a number of participants as increasingly operating on a competitive basis and adopting market behaviour. Marketisation was actually explicitly identified by Participant 10, who commented:

> *I do feel as if the marketisation of higher education has weakened that kind of public ethos, sadly. So I do think that it's now become much more business oriented. It's become much more financially based, much more based on market principles, much more based on competition. So all of those elements of it, I think, do undermine that broader public ethos that universities should be about, in my view.* (Participant 10)

The pressure to live up to the cash cow role meant that participants could see the pressure for business schools to maintain an increasing flow of students. Some participants touched on the idea that there is a shift to treating students as "customers" who are purchasing a service. The greater emphasis on delivering for students as customers was reflected on by some participants:

> *The expectations are, particularly from students, a lot more, and part of it is because they are consumers. They see themselves as paying for the service, and that's what most other service orientated businesses deliver for them. And they expect that from the university or from the lecturers.* (Participant 40)

> *So there's a greater emphasis on delivering for our "customers", quote-unquote. This term now is being used, and I am very surprised to hear the school refer to the students as customers. So there's a lot of emphasis on delivering for our customers now, who happen to be students [...] of course, that has a lot to do with money and resources, and then being able to ensure that you are able to meet the expenses of the university and*

> *the business school [...] it is very important for the university that the school continues to attract the number of students that it routinely does, and is able to keep student numbers up because we have a large cohort of students who are non-residents as well.* (Participant 18)

Some participants even cited situations where there was an implicit expectation not to fail students – in essence, ensuring that they receive the certificate they are "buying".

> *The admissions pressures are to bring in as many master's students as you can possibly sign up. And give them master's degrees, because there's a pressure to actually pass them as well [...] everyone is under pressure to keep fail rates down. So degrees are being given to students, you know, standards are falling. And this is happening on an undergraduate basis too. I'm just using that as an example in terms of the way in which the priority is the cash flow and then everything else works around that [...] there's a sort of a deference to the business logic of the university.* (Participant 29)

Changes in the way higher education was funded has forced the hand of universities, and business schools, to become more commercial in their approach:

> *The university could justify it because with the removal of government subsidies for the sector, the industry had no choice, no choice, but to become more commercial because really you need income and wages [...] it doesn't matter if they're former polytechnics, redbrick, what have you, if they start competing with digital companies, with platform universities, with their edX type platforms, I mean, we'll be playing the game on their terms, losing that which is unique - face to face education, open door policy, access, the human side of things.* (Participant 1)

The *business logic* and the *marketisation of higher education* have also been reflected in the discourse used within universities, as noted by Participant 3:

> *I thought I was going to work in the university, and the university department called the business school. But it's just. That's not the experience I then have. I mean, all this talk about the "Chinese market", the "Indian market", what? I thought we were teaching people, students. The "market"?* (Participant 3)

When asked why they thought metrics, such as the ABS list, had become increasingly important in business schools, Participant 50 mentioned the idea of "new public management" in relation to higher education:

> *Well, I think partly it's a purely British obsession of measuring performance, sort of a new public management kind of thing. And I think research is really difficult to quantify. The academics who developed this list just provided an instrument which then could be easily used by management to do what they wanted to do.* (Participant 50)

Even the notion of the impact agenda was related to the corporatisation and commercialisation of knowledge by some participants:

> *The kind of the corporatisation of universities or corporatisation of knowledge... I think there are areas where knowledge is important for knowledge's sake, where we are humans and we are interested in stuff [...] I don't subscribe to the idea of "well, that's not going to change the economic system so why is it important?"* (Participant 28)

> *Even the fact that I have to call this work impact is a kind of [imposing REF terminology on] my work. Right? In ways that I find really uncomfortable and unnecessary.* (Participant 52)

It was noted by Participant 47 that business schools across the world are in competition and referred to the "business of business schools". They made the connection between this competitive element and the different metrics used for measuring success:

> *I suppose that I wasn't very familiar with the agenda of a business school and how a business school actually makes money, what makes it popular, what makes it... I wasn't aware of this competition between business schools across the world. I think it's an international competition. I don't think it's just a national one. And this is in the sense that I didn't experience that in other places that I worked or where I studied. So there's a business of business schools that I came to realise and the kinds of metrics used were completely unknown to me before.* (Participant 47)

4.5.3 Accountability logic

The *accountability logic* represents the growth of accountability measures in academia, including being accountable for using resources to engage with, and positively impact, practitioners and society. In the UK, this is largely driven by the REF and, specifically to impact, the introduction of impact case studies. These *external pressures for evidenced engagement* were understood by participants to be a driving force for the formalisation of the impact agenda. These external pressures manifest in an *institutional narrative* that both promotes and celebrates knowledge exchange as being a seemingly core element of business school operations. The following subsections explores the ideas of *external pressures for evidenced engagement* and *institutional narrative* in more depth.

4.5.3.1 External pressures for evidenced engagement

It was commonly understood among participants that, to a large extent, external pressures have been a driving force of the institutionalisation of impact as a pillar of academic work. Impact assessment and, specifically due to the UK context, REF impact case studies were a common topic when the notion of impact was discussed. It was acknowledged that impact has gone through a process of “formalisation” due to this stated focus from the REF:

> *People often ask me what has changed in academia, you know, why is it considered so difficult now? And it's not that the job itself has fundamentally changed. The doing of the research and the teaching, yes, there's new ways of doing it. Yes, there's all of that. But I think actually at the heart of it, where the pressure has come from is on the* impact *work and the sort of formalisation of that in the REF, without it necessarily being formally articulated within the way in which we do things.* (Participant 39)

The expectations of the government, as reflected in the REF, infiltrates down to individual academics through the university. The fact that the REF has introduced impact assessment and a requirement for evidenced engagement is no exception. Participants perceived universities as “catering” to the requirements of the REF, including not only the requirements in terms of research publications, but also the requirements for evidencing impact:

> *Increasingly, you need to look at what the REF requirements are because that's what all universities, the pressure that they're working under. REF requirements are constantly changing with each REF cycle. So now we obviously have been told that there's a lot more emphasis on impact. So like, for example, some of my collaborators that I work with, we're kind of tweaking things a little bit to make sure that we kind of start thinking in that direction [...] because that's a good rule of thumb if you're just looking at what the REF cycle is demanding, because that's what all universities are going to be catering to.* (Participant 42)

Impact case studies appear to be at the forefront of the minds of academics operating in business schools when the idea of impact is presented to them. Understanding was shown among participants that impact case studies can have a financial benefit for the institution in terms of monetary reward for an improved REF scoring. Thus, links to an external pressure for accountability were inferred:

> *I'm sure you know about the REF sort of impact case studies, and I'm sure they've come up a lot in your interviews. So there's, it's not like 100% an expectation, but it's very, very welcome if you can have an impact case study. And as far as I understand, I don't know what the process is, but my understanding is that then universities get more funding from the government if they have impact cases or something like that. I don't know how it works, but that's my understanding. So, you're very welcome if, as an academic, you do publish an impact case study, so there is that side of things, which is obviously good for you and your career because it's sort of, it's one additional thing that's good if you want to apply for promotion.* (Participant 22)

Accountability with regards to impact case studies relates to something that can be demonstrated to an external audience related to some kind of evidenced outcome for a certain set of stakeholders, as emphasised by Participant 27:

> *You have impact case studies, right? So they're a big part of the REF. Certain projects get picked as strong impact examples. And so I look at those and I think those are probably reflective of what our shared understanding of impact is. And often they have, like, strong stakeholder relationships, strong financial and policy and environmental outcomes, that can be demonstrated and communicated to diverse audiences.* (Participant 27).

That being said, the notion of impact and measurement of it is still becoming embedded in the fabric of business schools. With impact assessment becoming formalised only since the cessation of the RAE and the introduction of the REF, business schools are arguably still in a “transition” phase when it comes to impact:

> *I think with successive REFs, it has embedded itself a bit more. But I would argue, I'm not sure if this is a very decisive answer either, but I would argue we're in transition. It's very mixed. I think probably in any given business school, it's almost half and half. I mean, people are kind of aware of it. They will build it in when they can. If you, if you're in a particular leadership role, you will be more aware of it across the university or across your department. And you may use the language more. But some individual academics will still be very focused on publishing, and they'll worry about impact as it arises.* (Participant 27)

> *It was already part of the agenda in an embryonic way. The first impact case studies I think were in the 2014 exercise, right? That wasn't an issue for me. They just sort of hired me because of my publications. But then, constantly there were like impact seminars at*

> *[previous institution] and obviously at [current institution] we have now have an associate dean who is in charge of impact, which is not something you would have had a few years ago. So this agenda has picked up steam from 2014.* (Participant 31)

Obviously, not every piece of impact achieved by an academic will eventually form an impact case study or be part of a knowledge transfer partnership (KTP) or management knowledge transfer partnership (mKTP) – but the *external pressures for evidenced engagement*, which seemingly have been internalised by business schools, have certainly shone a light on impact that has strengthened and institutionalised the *accountability logic*:

> *For example, because of the way the government has reduced funding and because when they do the REF calculations, they place more emphasis on level four publications and on impact* [...] *they want us to focus on impact. There's a lot of highlight on impact, so we are encouraged to think about impact case studies, but at the same time, there's a little flexibility there that if you have KTPs, if you're working on KTP, then that's fine. You don't need to have an impact case study, but you do some sort of impact activity, some sort of engaged activity.* (Participant 56)

Overall, this manifestation of the *accountability logic* and impact as being somewhat of a "justification" for any public money being used for research was a sentiment that appeared in the interviews. As emphasised in Chapter 3, business schools are in a quest for legitimacy, and this is clearly not only in the eyes of the academic community, but also beyond:

> *And HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) themselves were surprised. I remember the then [stakeholder within] HEFCE, because I was talking to them about impact, and they said, oh, the impact thing has been fantastic, treasury love it, because it gave HEFCE a whole load of examples of what all this funding was doing in terms of supporting, you know, research, having a real world impact. So HEFCE thought it was great, and the treasury clearly thought it was great. I think that the whole exercise is very important overall for everyone in terms of funding.* (Participant 24)

One participant summed up this legitimacy-seeking as "post-hoc rationalisation":

> *With the recent research assessment exercises, they've been focusing on impact statements. And people have had to scrabble around trying to prove how much impact their research has had. A lot of it's been post-hoc rationalisation, I think. I think that's become more and more important and that's coming from government I suppose.* (Participant 25)

External pressure does not always have to come directly from the expectation to submit impact case studies, but can also come from, for example, funding bodies:

> *In our funding agency's requirements, dissemination is part of the requirements. And you don't get an external budget for your project unless you put something in the project plan that says something like practitioner engagement, or policy papers, or, obviously there's the output side, the academic output side. But then there's also reports to the funding agency.* (Participant 3)

> *But I think that the impact side, I think, you know, very often, people pursuing work, if they were doing it through funding, in particular, the funding agencies were interested in impact really before the REF and the RAE were around. And so the funding we got for the research centre, we always pushed the fact that we wanted to make an impact on policy and practice.* (Participant 11)

4.5.3.2 Institutional narrative

A large component of the *accountability logic* is its manifestation in the narrative of institutions. It was a commonly discussed theme among participants that business schools and the wider institutions that house them are keen to espouse their commitment to public value in both external and internal discourse. Impact has, since the formalisation of impact assessment happened, become a central part of the conversation and ethos and this was understood by a number of participants:

> *They're working really hard on pushing the impact agenda.* (Participant 16)

> *It's kind of a broader sort of ethos. It's talked about there's lots of kind of symbols around the school about it.* (Participant 10)

> *So we've been having this kind of internal discussion and speaking to consultants and other things about what is our mission and vision? And there's a lot of processes involved like focus groups and other stuff [...] and I think that people buy into that as well. I think there's a lot of stuff in the kind of psychology literature that says people need a sense of purpose, just being paid is not sufficient. And I think bringing that into research, bringing that into education, is, it's definitely an ethos that's being pushed and I think is valiant within the business school.* (Participant 21)

A key word here is *encouragement* – business school academics are certainly encouraged to think about the societal implications of their research. Encouragement suggests that there is an element of choice about engaging with the impact agenda. Some individuals who do overtly engage in with the agenda are expected to share this to bolster the narrative:

> *It is important within our research centre, but also within the division, within the school, we are asked to always share any sort of impact we might have had, even if it's very small scale, you know. Like giving a talk and there was people from [stakeholder group] or things like that. So we are encouraged to think about it, we're encouraged to think about publishing in the media and so on.* (Participant 46)

At the internal level, impact and the expectations around this can be seen in different contexts. This includes, for example, during meetings or in progression reviews. This was a noticeable change in the discourse by some participants:

> *And in all section meetings, we now have an impact section, standing section at the meeting - I don't know if you've been part of a meeting - but, I mean, that's a whole new culture of, that's completely new to me, but you know, you have these standing items at the end of each meeting and one of those standing items is impact now. So they're making, they're making efforts to really anchor this value in practical terms within what the school is doing.* (Participant 6)

> *As soon as the new REF rules come out, there's a new conversation that starts. So now in your annual performance reviews, like since the last REF kind of suggested that impact was becoming more important, now suddenly that's a really big part of the conversation.* (Participant 42)

Business schools and institutions are also emphasising impact, knowledge exchange and societal impact at the nexus between the internal and external narrative, in the form of their strategic statements, missions and visions. Participant 35, for example, felt that this was a reflection of the changing attitude of their business school and their commitment to being externally impactful:

> *And also there's much more emphasis on the, [current institution] has this strategy and their sort of vision is that they want to be a university that's actually doing good in the world. So they've got a tagline. And I actually do think they try and follow through on it. Like, I don't think it's just marketing and you can see it in the way that as a business school, we're developing. It's not just about business and profit and growth. It's about how can we be a positive force for society as a whole.* (Participant 35)

However, a number of participants displayed cynicism at the impact agenda as a whole and, in some cases, specifically at the impact narrative that is represented in the discourse. Some feel that this is part of a rationalisation process; something that is communicated but not necessarily followed through:

> *You know, they have to say lots of different things in order to meet all these missions and visions.* (Participant 12)

> *But the business school, how can I put it? Again, it's something that is emphasised. But it's at the discourse level, in my opinion. It's not something that I feel like we do a lot or that if we do it a lot, we're going to be valued for it.* (Participant 47)

> *Obviously this whole, you know, at least at [current institution], we have this [engagement] discourse going on, being [an engaging] business school. And that obviously only becomes relevant, you only need this attachment to your name, [engagement], once that [engagement] is in question.* (Participant 3)

Participant 29 recognised the shift in discourse as part of a wider movement in the management culture of their institution. They pointed out that impactful activities were taking place before “impact” became a common word in the institutional terminology:

> *Well, I don't think there is any such thing as impact before it became a term in the REF process. So, you know, it's not a word you would have heard in 2009, impact, this wouldn't have been, you know, in the discourse. You know, people might have been doing things that you might call impact, but it wasn't called impact, and it wasn't the sort of thing that your research director in the department will have been banging on about, you know. So I think these sort of like discourse shifts or terminological shifts, they kind of move along with the management cultures in the university. And I guess people get into the habit in different ways of thinking about their work in those terms.* (Participant 29)

When talking about the shifting focus on impact, Participant 57 painted this as a strategic decision. This idea reflects some of the questioning from other participants as well about the extent to which a shifting focus on accountability, as per the *accountability logic*, and the associated representation in *institutional narrative* is genuine:

> *It's a very strategic decision, same as like, everything they do is strategic, which is kind of fair enough, right?* (Participant 57)

4.6 Research objective 2: Individual-level perceptions of impact

4.6.1 Institutionally driven perception of impact

The second stage of analysis involved moving beyond comprehending the logics of the environment and into understanding how impact is experienced at the micro-level. The interviews revealed that, although attitudes to impact vary from individual to individual, there is an overall perception of impact and what it entails that is driven by the institutional environment. The key themes that reflect this are impact being an *elusive concept*, impact being a *non-primary mission*, and impact being *something measurable*. The following subsections will explore each of these themes.

4.6.1.1 Impact as an elusive concept

Given the emergence of the *accountability logic* in business schools in recent times, impact is still perceived as a “fresh” topic and is much less established than the activities of research and education. As the *accountability logic* elucidates, impact is still becoming embedded in the academic remit (at least in disciplines where outputs are not as clearly related to a practical outcome, such as the social sciences) and is enduring the aforementioned formalisation process. As such, individual-level understandings of impact reflect the lack of structures that exist around engaging in and evidencing impact:

> *The real issue around this topic, if you like, around engagement, is what do we mean by engagement?* (Participant 20)

Impact can be defined in many different ways, and this lack of universal definition was reflected in the experiences and perceptions of the participants. There was a sense among participants that, because impact is such a broad notion, it is difficult to pinpoint what the impact agenda is calling for beyond impact case studies:

> *I mean, the business school takes impact very seriously, but nobody really knows what it is. I wrote a chapter on it a couple of years ago and I still haven't got the faintest idea what it actually is. It's one of these things, I mean, I think we're expected to kind of keep it in mind, we're expected to kind of think about the idea of value when we're carrying out our work. But because it's very difficult for us to define what value actually is, it is hard to do that.* (Participant 8)

> *For impact, it still does remain this sort of fluid, dynamic concept that [...] I had a paper recently; it was used by [foreign ministry]. So to me, yeah, that's impact. But what do I do*

with that? Who do I report that to? How do I add that to my CV? I don't. Or, well, I could, but you know what I mean. It's difficult to sort of really get to the bottom of what institutions are looking for when they say impact. (Participant 59)

It was also picked up on by participants in the sample that impact is difficult to measure. Again, impact can mean many different things depending on the context and can be achieved in a multitude of ways. Some ways are perhaps easier to evidence and measure, whereas others are very difficult:

Impact is considered a good thing, but perhaps because in many ways it's less measurable [...] there's no easy win kind of thing with impact. (Participant 37)

I'm fairly open minded about what constitutes impact, but I think, I can see there's probably a sliding scale. So there's probably some things that are, most people I think would agree, it's difficult to demonstrate impact in a lot of the research that goes on in business schools. It's not impossible, but it's just quite difficult in many cases to build up a strong impact story. (Participant 27)

There are many situations where an impact could be completely unknown to the author of a research output, as Participant 38 pointed out:

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? (Participant 38)

Research, and the associated metrics, provide an easy mechanism for measuring achievement – perhaps why it is so central to business academic success. With impact, this is not so much the case. There is a lack of established procedures in place to measure impact, which is aside from the fact that some impact would be immeasurable anyway. Participant 31 was particularly questioning of the impact agenda:

So this agenda has picked up steam [...] they're still not quite sure what to do with it, because it's so hard to evidence it and a lot of people just get their mates to write letters, it's a very ropey evidence base for the actual impact, and a connection between the research you produce and the actual impact that takes place on a policy, an organisation, it's quite problematic. So I wouldn't be surprised if the impact agenda fell away because of that. Because, you know, a lot seems to ride on it just now, but it's less credible, you know, with publication outputs it is much easier. (Participant 31)

Another important point to raise here is that there are significant differences in impact potential for different disciplines and types of research. Participant 14 was vocal about their own opinions of the impact agenda, arguing that they did not feel it applied well to their own research:

Well, I'm aware that they want us to do it and to have it. For my kind of position and the research I do, I don't legitimately think that we have to aim to have an impact. Universities have been around for nearly 1000 years. So they're part of society. So if we want to write about stuff that we think is relevant, that has the impact it has. So, I'm not really comfortable with it, but I'm aware that universities want us to do it. But my stuff is, you know, my topics, who's going to say, who's going to do an impact case study on it - nobody. So I just haven't got time now, and the stage I'm at in my career, I need to just, I can't do it, so I kind of brush it aside, but they want us to do it. (Participant 14)

Participant 23 thought about business schools in general, arguing that there are other disciplines outside of business and management that, arguably, find it much easier to engage with the impact agenda. This raises questions about how to apply the concept of practical and societal impact to social science disciplines, such as business and management:

If I can have a direct impact, and change the way people manage, that would be interesting. But it's, I think it's more complicated for us than for the school of molecular biology, for example. (Participant 23)

Participant 27 reflected on different research projects they had worked on, arguing that it can actually vary from project to project. This raises question about the applicability of the impact agenda in all situations. The lack of universal application of the concept of impact demonstrates its illusiveness and difficulty for some participants to relate to their own work:

And when I collaborate with different people, I learn a lot about why they want to do a project. And sometimes there's an implicit impact narrative that we can explore. You know, like why are we actually doing this research? What do we hope will come out of it?

But then I do think there's a lot of research, and some of it is stuff I like doing [...] but it's a bit more blue sky, you know? It really just doesn't have any impact. (Participant 27)

4.6.1.2 Impact as a non-primary mission

Despite the narratives that push an impact-focused ethos to the forefront of business school activities, on-the-ground actors in this space in many cases feel impact is presented as an “added tension” (Participant 5) on top of the core offerings of research and education. Impact-focused activities, as prescribed by the REF, may in some cases be subsumed into research time, and defining the boundaries of what constitutes impact could be difficult. From an institutional point of view, the impact agenda is supported by the necessity for impact case studies that form a part of the REF. However, these are generally perceived as being less important for individuals than publications in terms of research assessment. When talking about external engagement, Participant 47 commented:

Unfortunately, I don't think it gets as much attention as the publications. (Participant 47)

Largely due to the *academic profession logic* and the associated progression structures, there is little incentive for an academic to focus primarily on impact, unless this is likely to culminate in an impact case study. Participants were left, in some cases, that impact is not something that they need to prioritise:

If you have one day of the week you can focus on your papers, where you're not doing admin work or teaching work or all the other service work for the university that you're doing, you're not going to focus on that third mission. You're going to leave it to someone else. (Participant 47)

I don't necessarily feel [the institutional push for impact] so much as perhaps others will, because I choose to ignore it because I've got enough on my plate. So you have to be able to balance out. And I, looking at this from a managerial point of view, it's understanding where your strengths lie and playing to your strengths. (Participant 40)

Impact case studies are seen as a hugely time-intensive endeavour. With the workloads and the amount of things academics have to do, it is understandable that impact and impact case studies are seen as “additional work” if it is not formally expected of them. This deprioritises the impact agenda in a sense, and raises questions about how much more impactful business academics could be if more institutional support was in place for these activities:

Sometimes you're doing a project and you keep getting emails from the research office saying that this could be an interesting impact case study and you're thinking, yeah, it

> *would be, but I don't have the time to actually publish and do an impact case study. Because that's additional work, basically. It's almost a shame because the impact element, I think, is actually really quite important. Our research having impact is quite important. It's actually really positive that the REF is thinking in those terms as well, it's actually highlighting that as an important thing. But the problem is that as an individual, it almost seems like one more box you have to tick now [...] unfortunately, the REF as like a "stick" that exists in the labour market means that a lot of really good things also end up just looking like things you have to do. And that creates a certain amount of resentment.* (Participant 42)

> *It's quite likely or quite plausible that the work I've been doing on [topic] could become a foundation for an impact case study. But quite simply, I've not had the kind of time or wherewithal over the last year to do much about it. So I've continued doing my writing up of the work and continued interviewing people. But ideally what would have happened in the last year is that I would have made a lot more inroads into setting up discussions with policymakers and that could very easily have served as a potential impact case study. But in the end, just for reasons of time, I didn't have enough time to do it, so that's kind of falling away.* (Participant 49)

There was a sentiment across a number of participants in the sample that impact is a “nice to have” – indicating that, although impact is an attractive prospect and can earn an individual some kudos, it is not what is necessarily going to define their career as an academic or give them the necessary esteem for their next promotion. As per the *academic profession logic*, the main activity for progression is publications:

> *The priority goes to the academic publications first. Then those impact cases are auxiliaries.* (Participant 44)

> *For the regular faculty, research is most important, next is teaching, and then a bit of organisational service. And on top of that, whatever you do for the press, whatever you do on the side to disseminate knowledge, certainly people will give you credit for that. That may not be a key driver for promotion, though. A nice to have, basically.* (Participant 48)

> *There is no expectation in the sense that if you don't do it, nobody will, I mean, you won't be sanctioned. But there is strong encouragement to think of impact when you start the research. But it's not like, it's not in the contract. So at the moment we are at that stage. Strong, strong encouragement to think about impact. But if you don't have an impact*

> *case, well, that's, that, if you have good publications, then that's qualifying.* (Participant 23)

Some participants touched on the idea that the impact agenda exists as an expectation at an institution or school level, and as such this is why they feel less of a need to engage with such an agenda. It may be the case that there are a select few academics who are seen as an impact "star" who can, essentially, represent a particular department or group. The lack of formal expectation at an individual level was touched upon by some participants:

> *I wouldn't say a formal expectation, just in that I think there's recognition that there are different kinds of people who make different kinds of contribution across the school and that some will never particularly get involved in that agenda, whereas others will be doing loads of stuff. So I think it's a question of, you tend to report back on everything you've done in the year. And I think where there is good societal value, it'll be commented on. You'll certainly get positive feedback about getting involved in anything like that. But it is not an actual expectation.* (Participant 11)

> *The university would like us to engage a bit more, but it doesn't push an individual to engage more. It would put the ask back on the school. And you know yourself, you can think of people who you come across from academia, some people you couldn't let loose with the business community, and they're far better writing interesting theoretical papers. And there are others who flourish in that kind of environment.* (Participant 44)

4.6.1.3 Impact as something measurable

Impact that is direct to practitioners and/or society and perceived as being measurable closely resembles the behaviours prescribed by the *accountability logic* and reflects the likes of impact case studies or an engagement with an mKTP. Thus, what is now commonly perceived and recognised as being "impact" is embedded within the wider impact narrative and the impact agenda. Interestingly, this metric-driven approach to evaluating impact mirrors the metric-driven culture stemming from the *academic profession logic* and the *business logic*, whereby it is important to be able to benchmark and compare outputs and activities for the purpose of external assessment and progression.

The REF, therefore, has fostered a view that the measurability of impact is what makes impact "worthy" in the eyes of institutions:

The kind of impact I've had, I think it's very nice and it makes me feel good, but I don't think it's really the level the REF are talking about. The REF want more than that. (Participant 6)

Impact is a very particular thing in the REF, of course. It's not just about engagement, it's showing a very particular process from a piece of research to a piece of output. (Participant 15)

Assessing impact is problematic. I mean, the way they traditionally measure impact is, I guess, is "has your research led to this policy change and has this policy change been good for this population or this group or led to this change in how Government does stuff?" It's mainly seen, impact is mainly defined in terms of policy change or maybe in terms of contributing to some form of economic development, one of those two. (Participant 5)

Participant 14 inferred feelings of disillusionment with the impact agenda because their own impact doesn't meet the definition of impact as prescribed by the REF. This creates an impression of institutional disinterest in impact that lies outside the realm of impact case studies:

They want you to do it, they'd be really happy and they'd love it and you'd probably get promoted faster if you could do like a really good impact case for the REF, right. But like, general impact, I mean, there could be maybe media coverage or, I don't know, to me I've got some impact because people read the articles, I've written text books, so there's like teaching impact. But I can't, I mean, I might put that on my CV but, you know, I think when they say impact, they really want, I think, they must really want impact cases. That's what they mean. Because some people have really big impact in the media and they never get promoted. (Participant 14)

Participant 37 explicitly made the argument that many in academia are *only* interested in the theme of impact in REF terms. They highlighted that this culture of focusing on impact only in terms of impact case studies can be exclusionary to those forms of impact that are perhaps less measurable or less observable:

I think sometimes there's a danger, certainly at my previous institution, like a lot of academics were only interested in impact insofar as it related to kind of, like REF income rather than impact for its own sake. But that you've actually got something useful to say that could help whoever, you know, communities or whatever. It was more kind of like, impact - can it make a good impact case study? And so you focus on those kind of

> *elements of impact, which are scored highly in some previous REF exercise [...] rather than actually various other sorts of forms of impact that could make a difference. Which are measurable as well, but just maybe not as kind of tried and tested before.* (Participant 37)

Other participants pointed out that this phenomenon of being interested in impact primarily as it relates to the REF goes beyond individuals, but to institutions also. Participant 57 spoke of the risk in going for an impact case study, concerned that if it did not come to fruition, the institution would value the impact-focused endeavour less favourably:

> *So I was kind of actively working towards this impact case. It's paid off because the impact case actually went in. If that hadn't have gone in, I think it could have been a really risky strategy, in terms of the university going like, well, what have you done? And you go, well, I nearly had an impact case. It's not enough. Whereas if you have, well I have three papers instead of four, that's not too bad. But an impact case either exists or it doesn't.* (Participant 57)

Participant 57 also spoke of the lack of support for impact when it is not associated with a future impact case study. When asked if they were supported for engaging in impact activities, Participant 57 noted:

> *I would say yes, now, but only fairly recently. And probably only because they could see that I was going to be able to put an impact case in. I think up until the point at which that would become a real likelihood, I don't think there was very much support at all.* (Participant 57):

Some participants noted that there is an expectation there that, if you engage with impact, you should be able to clearly articulate the changes that are seen (and preferably, measure them somehow). However, as Participant 55 highlighted, this is not straightforward for business schools in the way that it can be for, for example, the hard sciences:

> *One of the things that the KTPS do, is that you do have to articulate the success from having the project, so you can see changes. But if I'm in science and I've just invented the, if I was the one who invented the Covid-19 vaccine, that is just so easy to see. And in management it's much harder.* (Participant 55)

Another element of the measurability focus of impact is that impact from teaching and student engagement is very much missing from institutional narratives. By its very nature the REF is a research assessment tool, and the likes of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) are much less institutionally forceful than the REF. Because teaching impact does not fit into the impact case study narrative, and because it is not perceived as particularly measurable, it often feels excluded from the impact agenda altogether:

> *We have an executive education branch and some of my colleagues really work a lot on those executive education programmes. I do work on some of them, but not as much as some other colleagues of mine. And we often run this executive education programme for companies. So we'll have the managers come over - pre Covid-19 - to here, where we give them three days of management programmes. So something like that for a few days, that is certainly impact. Right? I mean, we are helping a company to kind of rethink their way of running their business [...] if there is some way for REF to sort of see that there can be an impact there, then that would be great. On the other hand, REF is for research, right? So if you deliver impactful teaching, but not research, then why should the REF count it? So maybe they should have separate metrics for business school impact or academic impact, that is not related to research, that is more related to teaching.* (Participant 48)

Some participants were cognisant to the issues of measurability with educational impact. Academic staff may never know, for example, if a particular way they have taught a module has a material impact on how a student approaches a particular issue in their future vocation, or if introducing a particular concept has inspired the career choice of a student. Because educational impact is not celebrated in the same way research impact is, it can create conflicting feelings among academics:

> *I think my main impact is through teaching. So this is how I understand my impact. And this is, when I do my research, I always tell my interview participants that this is important for my teaching. And I think it really is because I'm mostly a qualitative researcher and students really like my stories because everything becomes so much more alive for them [...] but it's really difficult to measure, obviously, and it doesn't really matter. And I think to some extent it's fine because I wouldn't know how to operationalise it.* (Participant 50)

> *The other factor is, it can be easier to measure some forms of impact than others. To go back to that example of students as critical thinkers, that may be harder to measure, obviously, than journal citations or the level of engagement with an article in a newspaper or an online platform. So it's still a challenge measuring some forms of impact.* (Participant 43)

> *The managers may come and do an executive MBA, for example. They become and do an MBA. And that's where we have an impact, I think. When we teach to MBA classes, but also undergrad classes, because they are managers in the making. So we can certainly change the world that way, in that if we're trying to explain to people, or to give people materials so that they think about what they do in a different way, then that's how we can change the world [...] but of course, it's not something that can be put into an impact case. Because nobody cares. But I think that's how we have an impact.* (Participant 23)

As highlighted in the methodology, the sample of academics consisted of a mixture of research-focused academics, teaching-focused academics, and balanced academics. It was inferred that teaching-focused academics are excluded from the impact agenda, arguably because the impact agenda is a product of research assessment. When referring to his head of group and pressure to engage in impact, Participant 40 (a teaching-focused academic) stated "*he's not put any pressure on me to go and do that*" (Participant 40). Participant 34 noted:

> *There's a REF impact case study in this school on [sector], and I could be part of it. And I'm not. Which is very interesting. So all of my* research *is on [sector], I do work with, one of our members is a member of the [committee], which is the [standard] for [sector], and I'm an engagement partner to that process as well. And I've done quite a lot in that space. All of the stuff that I do in the [sector] would fit into that. And just literally, it's like I don't exist. I'm not in that impact case study at all. Which is interesting.* (Participant 34)

Because academics are not encouraged to think about impact through teaching in the same way they are encouraged to think about impact through research, impact through teaching is not always obvious or appreciated. Participant 6 noted that this side of impact was only something they had recently began to value:

> *There's still plenty of cracks in the module where I can put a lot of subversive critical material, and I had a lot of very happy students saying, you know, that the module opened their eyes to things they never really thought about and opened their eyes to the tensions and contradictions in the role that they thought they were learning, because it's kind of a practical course in some sense. And so that is an impact, and that's, and I've only really begun to realise recently how important that impact is to me, and I've never thought of it really in those terms before. So it's something that I grew into as part of the role.* (Participant 6)

4.7 Implications of the institutional landscape for perceptions of impact

Having laid out both the institutional logics that were found to be prevalent in the business school environment, as well as the different conceptualisations and experiences as perceived by micro-level actors of the impact agenda, it is evident that an institutional logics approach can reveal rich insights about the notion of impact in a higher education context. The most significant revelation of applying this approach is the uncovering of two distinct issues that exist – one within the macro-meso layer of logics, and one between the macro-meso layer and the micro-level.

The first issue, a tension at the macro-meso layer of logics, relates to the coexistence of three distinguished logics that each prescribe different behaviours and approaches. Referring to the institutional orders identified in Table 4.1, instructions stemming from considerations for accountability (state) are temporally restricted in an environment that is dominated by concerns surrounding the academic profession (market-profession) and business interests (market-managerial). In other words, the 'constellation' of logics does not favour impact. A constellation as demonstrated here reflects "the combination of institutional logics guiding behavior at any one point of time", which is a helpful lens for seeing "the ways that societal logics can combine to simultaneously influence professional work" (Goodrick and Reay, 2011 p. 399). Concurrent with Goodrick and Reay (2011), the current study shows that a multiplicity of logics can coexist competitively for a significant amount of time, which is something felt acutely by business academics.

The findings related to the logics are exemplary of the idea that "there is increasing pressure to publish in a select list of top journals, students are being rebranded as customers, and there is an expectation to be not just successful, but to also have a positive impact on organizations and societies" (Sandhu *et al.*, 2019 p. 180). The maintenance of this constellation of logics could perhaps be a consequence of a segmentation of practices, as argued by Goodrick and Reay (2011), whereby different logics take up a proportion of time, effort and resources relative to each other. This was even reflected in the day-to-day practices of respondents. To illustrate, Participant 4 spoke about an explicit divide of "basic research" projects, which satisfy the *academic profession logic*, and "applied research" projects, which satisfy the *accountability logic*, with no cross-fertilisation between the activities and a completely separate allotted time in the academic year for teaching-related practices. Participant 9, when asked if research and impact could be achieved together, inferred a publication-impact trade off:

> *No, I don't think so. I think it would have to be separate projects. For something to be impactful, it is not necessarily going to go into a top journal or any journal at all [...] no, I don't think they go together necessarily, from my experience.* (Participant 9)

Thus, whilst the *academic profession logic* is arguably somewhat at odds with the *accountability logic*, this competitive coexistence is maintained. It can be argued that the segmentation of practices is a necessary process within the business school environment due to the *centrality* of logics. In other words, the logics illuminate core features of an organisation and its purposes and cannot be ignored (Besharov and Smith, 2014). Drawing on the ideas of Martin *et al.* (2017), it can be argued that business schools cannot easily reduce logic centrality because their strategic direction and objectives are subject to a very strong influence from external forces (e.g., the likes of the government with the REF).

The second issue relates to the consequences of the institutional prescription of impact (primarily through the *accountability logic*) as it exists within the current constellation of logics within the field, and the range of impact activities that are actually executed “on the ground”. Specifically, the *accountability logic* and the expectation for evidenced impact it encapsulates are not inclusive of impact that can occur more organically. As per the institutionally driven perception of impact, it was clear that participant views of impact are heavily shaped by the institutional prescriptions. The authority of the *academic profession logic* and the *business logic* has made it difficult for the *accountability logic* to emerge as a dominant logic in this space, leading to feelings of *impact as a non-primary mission*. The *accountability logic* in itself is highly problematic for how impact is perceived; the one-dimensional view of impact it advocates has generated a perception of *impact as an elusive concept* and *impact as something measurable*. This institutionally driven view is exclusionary of a range of different impacts that can be achieved. Some participants acknowledged impact through teaching, but this was often downplayed, suggesting the environment has led them to only look favourably upon measurable impacts that are eligible for an impact case study. Speaking of executive education, one respondent remarked:

> *You definitely see with executive education that you can help people with their careers [...] and you can see that [executive education] definitely helps people on their career journey and makes them more competent with finance, or you give them confidence to talk the language of marketing, or something like that over a few days. And you know, that's nice enough and pleasant. And I suppose that is impact. Yeah, but I don't come away having delivered an executive education course and feel like I've massively changed the world for the better or anything. So a more meaningful impact would be to*

> *change policies and government regulation [...] I don't do that in executive education, but I don't do that in my research either, and maybe I should. So I think it's a different type of impact, really. But it is impact - not REF style impact.* (Participant 31)

Thus, there appears to be a certain level of distortion at the individual micro-level, stemming from an institutional view of impact at the macro-meso level. This has implications the actors who operate within this space, with taken-for-granted education impact and hidden research impact less celebrated or even acknowledged in comparison to “measurable” forms of impact, with many being socialised into understanding impact according to strict criteria provided to them by the *accountability logic*. Therefore, there is little appreciation towards so-called organic impact; not only for the fact that the *accountability logic* is subservient, but it also only illuminates a limited set of prescriptions in comparison to what impact actually can be.

4.8 Discussion and conclusion

In their analysis of the impact of business and management scholarship, Hughes *et al.* (2019 p. 638) noted that “creating the conditions to support and encourage academics in (impactful work) depends on the environment created by academic organisations and institutions”. This philosophy of a deeper understanding of the institutional and organisational dynamics of business schools underpins the direction of this study. Subsequently, the findings of this study contribute to a (currently scarce) body of knowledge that is building a clearer picture of *why* business schools have been criticised over the past two decades for having “little impact on management” (Khurana and Marquis, 2006 p. 406).

For over two decades now, a growing number of authors have debated and discussed problems business schools face, much of it focused on the so-called gap between rigour and relevance and the consequences for creating impact (see Grey, 2001; Kieser and Leiner, 2009; Sharma and Bansal, 2020; Starkey and Madan, 2001). The findings of this study contribute to this wider discussion, utilising a lens that has uncovered the institutional factors that elucidate the problems with impact. In summary, drawing on this study’s empirical insights, it can be argued that the *accountability logic* appears subservient to the dominant *academic profession* and *business logics* in an institutionally complex environment, with subsequent negative consequences for how impact is both prioritised and perceived. Impact is recognised as something far out of reach for the majority of academics because of the narrative around output measurement and formalisation of engagement activities, but the respondents also revealed some nuanced day-to-day experiences arguably can come under a definition of impact as much as something that is worthy (and measurable) for an impact case study.

This study has heeded the call of a multitude of authors who have stressed the importance of building a clearer empirical picture of the business school environment (e.g., Butler *et al.*, 2015; Hommel and Thomas, 2014; Kieser *et al.*, 2015). As Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2010 p. 1202) put it, the divide between theory and practice in management has been subject to a great deal of "armchair philosophising" with little rigorous empirical assessment. Furthermore, Johnson and Orr (2020 p. 559) confirm that "few studies have focused specifically on academics working in business and management disciplines". Yet, this study has been able to augment some conceptual observations made about the business school environment with evidence from those "on-the-ground". This empirical work provides support for the notion that "many management researchers will currently find themselves in a double bind of needing to fulfil the requirements of their employers' expectations of their publication output and their desire to have an impact on practice, practitioners and on wider societal, political and economic issues" (Anderson *et al.* 2020 p. 30) – something which has been principally a theoretical and/or anecdotal argument.

Delving deeper into the relationship between the three logics, it is apparent that there is a stark similarity between them. Although these logics coexist competitively and prescribe different behaviours, one cannot deny that they both appear to embed the same preoccupation with measurement and metrics. This reflects the "metricisation" of HE (Knowles and Burrows, 2014), a byproduct of the widely discussed marketisation HE (e.g., Natale and Doran, 2012). It could be argued that academics have become so used to things being measured: why would impact be any different? In some respects, the *accountability logic* mirrors the *academic profession logic* in that it prescribes measurement of outputs, but in a different domain. This embeds a culture of measurement and metrics and thus it is no surprise that impact being something measurable is a significant institutionally driven perception.

Beyond exploring the parameters of the academic environment, this study has amplified some of the existing concerns related to the impact agenda. In terms of how impact is defined, respondents within the study expressed frustration with not fully understanding what impact *is* and what explicitly constitutes an impact. It was found that this is due to the strict, exclusive impact narrative that trickles down to those expected to exercise it. Indeed, in their own empirical study of business academics and other stakeholders, Johnson and Orr (2020) found that "academic respondents often called to mind the REF definition of impact" (p. 565) and that "the models of impact incentivised by the REF reflect narrow, knowledge-based conceptions that account for only a minority of the approaches adopted" (p. 569). This suggests a need to broaden the horizons of what impact can involve. Indeed, research in business schools can have an impact on practice and society in "ways that are typically not formulated" (Simsek *et* *al.*, 2018 p. 2024). This is something that the likes of Wickert *et al.* (2021 p. 316) – who carefully unpacked “five forms of impact: scholarly, practical, policy, societal, and educational” – have examined.

The exclusive impact narrative that has developed from the likes of the REF fails to account for the enormous contribution that teaching and learning activities make in the endeavor of impactful work. The micro-level findings in this study make a case for more celebration and acknowledgement of this contribution. This is supportive of Johnson and Orr (2020 p. 568) who similarly found “the significance of learning and teaching as providing important vehicles for generating impact”. This theme resonates with the call for a more pluralistic approach to impact that appreciates the role of students as key stakeholders (Aguinis *et al.*, 2019). Although the purpose of this study has not been to assess in-depth the different activities associated with teaching and learning, or to determine how best to make an educational impact, the findings lend support to the idea that the impact agenda should be widened to consider education – especially education that is relational and co-productive (Anderson *et al.*, 2017). Viewing impact in this sense, it can be argued, opens up the possibility of business academics becoming confident in themselves as impactful agents.

This findings of this research make a contribution to the wider study of institutional logics in HE. Previous studies have examined what they term the *academic logic* in the HE context. For example, Conrath-Hargreaves and Wüstemann (2019 p. 788) argue that, under the academic logic, “scholars derive their legitimacy from their scholarly reputation which, in turn, depends on the opinions of their peers”. Another example is Brantnell and Baraldi (2020 p. 684) who argue that the academic logic “puts value on publishing and peer recognition”. This resonates with the current study and the representation of the *academic profession logic*. However, the *academic logic* has previously been conceptualised as a logic that is representative of the institutional order of the profession (e.g., Henningsson and Geschwind, 2022). However, the data in the current study supported a hybrid “market-professional” logic, as explained by Mountford and Cai (2023) as a logic that “combines field-level elements of the societal-level logics of market and profession” (p. 370) whereby knowledge is “valued by the market” (p. 371). Taylor and Kahlke (2017 p. 144) found, in their own study in the HE context, that “there was evidence of a hybrid market-professional logic, particularly in relation to knowledge, since the value of the university is increasingly tied to the personal expertise and professional status of academics within a knowledge market”, and that the market-professional logic “constructs a university’s success in terms of its global ranking and production of professional knowledge”. The *academic profession logic*, as is named in the current study, reflects this market-professional focus. It goes beyond the idea of publishing for individual reputation and peer recognition. Arguably, the same esteem gained from publishing in an ABS 4* journal extends to the wider school's reputation and is recognised in progression structures that are largely a by-product of a dominant external force that exists to measure knowledge in the so-called knowledge market (i.e., the REF).

Other institutional logics studies in the HE context have found a *business logic* similar to the one identified in the current study, and so the results here are generally supportive of those. For example, Grossi *et al.* (2020 p. 822) describe the *business logic* in universities as being "aimed at generating revenue and increasing commercial activities", which reflects sentiments shown in the data in the current study. Other studies have looked at institutional logics in the HE context and examined the theme of balancing academic interests and commercial interests, such as Kallio *et al.* (2021) (the *professional logic* and the *business logic*), Grossi *et al.* (2020) (the *academic logic* and the *business logic*), and Gebreiter and Hidayah (2019) (the *professional logic* and the *commercial logic*). Beyond examining academic interests in light of market-professional demands, the current study introduces a third logic, the *accountability logic*, to account for the changing landscape of HE in the UK and to appreciate the increasing complexity of the academic career portfolio. Further research into the *accountability logic*, and how it is becoming embedded in the evolving institutional system, would be useful for building future understanding of both business schools and the wider HE literature.

From a practical perspective, this study calls for universities and business schools to recalibrate their efforts to provide clarity in the working lives of their academics. In science and engineering subjects, academics often benefit from the expertise and support of an in-house Technology Transfer Office (TTO) (Macho-Stadler *et al.*, 2007), yet there does not appear to be the same level of support for those in the social sciences or humanities. One could argue that employing academics or support staff who are specifically responsible for connecting research outputs with practice akin to a TTO – but instead with an emphasis on knowledge and expertise – could be helpful for those feeling the pressures of "figuring out" impact. Future research is needed to determine the viability of such a strategy, as well as the challenges associated with it.

This leads to some further calls for future research in this field. First, it became acutely clear during the interviews with academics that differences occur between them in how they experience logics and how they manage them. Future research should aim to explore these individual-level differences, both in terms of how logics are felt by different individuals and in terms of the strategies employed to move ahead despite the complexity. For example, drawing on the work of Pache and Santos (2013), identifying the individual responses to complexity in this environment would generate a fruitful contribution to the institutional theory literature as well as enhance understanding of the institutional landscape of business schools. Second, future research that looks at what can be termed *taken-for-granted education impact* and *hidden research impact* is encouraged. It is beyond the remit of this study to examine in detail the processes that are involved in these nuanced forms of impact, but it would be useful to shed a light on exactly how these can be achieved and recognised, given that they have received little attention in both a theoretical and practical sense. Finally, this study is limited to a sample of research-intensive universities. For comparison, and also to see if there is anything that can be learned, future research should look into the institutional dynamics of teaching-focused business schools. It may be the case that the logics are experienced differently or take a completely different form in an environment that is less dominated by publishing pressures.

Chapter 5 Exploring the constraints on individual engagement with the impact agenda

5.1 Introduction

Business academics operate within an increasingly complex environment where they must learn to manage multiple pressures related to different areas of the job. Those who work within research-intensive business schools must juggle an expectation to be excellent at research, teaching, and impact (Sandhu *et al.*, 2019) – alongside the many administrative responsibilities that may come with working in higher education (Kinman and Johnson, 2019). The stress and increased workload of managing the many facets of an academic career are well documented (e.g., Boyd, 2014; Shin and Jung, 2014; Steenkamp and Roberts, 2020). However, the longstanding questions regarding the relevance of business school practice to students, society and practitioners (e.g., Pfeffer and Fong, 2002) would infer that the impact and knowledge exchange activities are perhaps those that are the most challenging to engage with, given the multifaceted and complex career portfolio of the modern academic.

Business schools are established and important components of the higher education landscape in the UK. This can be seen with, for example, growing student numbers – the British Academy (2021 p. 4) reported that "business and management continues to be the subject group with most students in UK higher education". Despite the overall successes, research has suggested that the backdrop of these accomplishments is a diverse and mounting set of pressures and expectations placed upon business academics (Clarke *et al.*, 2012; Miller *et al.*, 2011; Salter *et al.*, 2017). Arguably, these have manifested in a state of institutional complexity (Bullinger *et al.*, 2015; Keiser, 2011; Paterson *et al.*, 2018). As explored in Chapter 4, the business school field can be conceptualised as enduring three distinct institutional logics – the logic of the academic profession, the logic of business, and the logic of accountability. Whilst there has been increasing interest in the study of institutional complexity in a variety of contexts, there is unfortunately little empirical work looking at the institutional environment of business schools (Paterson *et al.*, 2018).

Business schools, and specifically the academics within them, form an interesting context in which to extend our understanding of how an institutionally complex environment can manifest in the lived experience of individual actors and dictate how they should navigate such an environment. Business academics are expected to publish scientifically rigorous work, frequently, in high-quality academic journals (de Rond and Miller, 2005). Business schools are also uniquely placed as the “cash cows” of many modern universities (Wilson and Thomas, 2012) due to large student numbers. In addition to these core missions, business academics must also strive to engage with external stakeholders through research and teaching in order to be impactful (Lejeune *et al.*, 2019). Given this aim to be impactful seems to be the area where business academics are apparently falling short, it is important to understand how the institutionally complex environment is perceived and what may be constraining these academics from fully engaging with the impact agenda.

It is useful in this context of complexity and constraints to draw on the theme of *autonomy*. In the context of a job, autonomy refers to “the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employee in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out” (Hackman and Oldham, 1975 p. 162). Autonomy at the level of the university has been studied in a range of contexts (e.g., Akalu, 2014; Enders *et al.*, 2013; Hayden and Thiep, 2007). However, given the idea that individual freedom is “among the most compelling attractors to academic work” (Lindholm, 2004 p. 606) and is a valued enabler of carving out a distinguished academic career, exploring autonomy at the level of the individual is a fruitful avenue for investigation.

Thus, the aim of this research is to explore how the complex institutional environment of business schools’ manifests in the lives of individual actors (i.e., business academics) and shapes their experiences of, and degree of autonomy in, engaging with the impact agenda. In order to meet the research aim, this study is guided by the following research objectives:

> Research objective 1: To explore what constrains individual-level actors in business schools in balancing core academic activities with being impactful on society and practice.
>
> Research objective 2: To explore how the constraints experienced are perceived and navigated across the academic career lifecycle.

This study makes a significant contribution to the wider literature on business schools. Decades of criticism aimed at business schools and business academics for their lack of awareness of wider societal needs have made little progress in exploring a diagnosis of such problems from an empirical perspective. Comprehending areas of constraint within the work context of business school academics – and understanding how this reflects the prescribed behaviours and attitudes of the multiple logics that exert influence over the field – is helpful for advancing this diagnosis and building an empirical evidence base to support the conceptually-saturated speculation of so-called irrelevance in business schools. Furthermore, empirical work from Chubb *et al.* (2017 p. 565) found, in their sample of scholars in the UK and Australia across a range of academic disciplines, that the impact agenda contributed to academics' "professional enfeeblement, particularly in the terms of being self-directed and autonomous, and thereafter as detracting from the appeal of an academic career". The clear emotional repercussions of such an agenda raise important questions about its appropriateness and the role it plays in the wider constellation of academic pressures. As Balaban and de Jong (2023 p. 942) note, "given today's rapidly changing academic environment, it is crucial to understand how academics negotiate multiple – often contradictory – expectations and how this affects their attitudes and behaviour". It is important to understand how the impact agenda may disturb the flow of academic life, as inferred by Chubb *et al.*, (2017), but it is also important to understand how academic life in itself (inclusive of the agenda, among other expectations) can shape the ability of academics to fully engage with the agenda. Considering that business schools have been consistently at the receiving end of questioning and scepticism, they appear to be a useful context in which to examine this.

5.2 Navigating an academic career and the impact agenda

It is well-known that "university academic staff do complex work in an increasingly demanding environment" (Houston *et al.*, 2006 p. 17). This is reflected in the fact that the "purpose of the university is the production and dissemination of knowledge, and to this end its workers carry out teaching, research, and administration" (Harley *et al.*, 2004 p. 330). Increased managerialism in universities has somewhat increased performativity pressures, especially in terms of research – Kenny (2018 p. 378) found through a case study investigation that academics were "open to the notion of improving performance but were sceptical of top-down driven metrics used to measure their research output, while ignoring many of the other demands on their time". Moreover, developments in the HE landscape in multiple contexts have resulted in impact becoming a common concern for universities and academics alike, in addition to teaching, research, and administration. The arrival of the so-called impact agenda has arguably "disrupted the status quo" (de Jong and Balaban, 2022 p. 612). When exploring perceptions of the impact agenda across a sample of social policy academics, for example, Smith and Stewart (2017, p. 120) found that a common complaint was "the time-consuming nature of impact-related activities; work that many said was viewed as 'discretionary' and which was not accounted for in terms of workload allocation".

Academics in business schools in the UK must contend with what is referred to as the "audit culture" (Clarke *et al.*, 2012 p. 6) in order to navigate their careers, reflecting what is known as the *performance-based research funding system* (Banal-Estañol *et al.*, 2023) and the REF, whilst in many cases maintaining a teaching profile. The effective currency of business school academics appears to be high-quality publications in high-ranking academic journals, as explored in Chapter 4. As part of the top-down research assessment exercises (such as the REF) that have appeared in various contexts, there has been a recognisable orientation towards measuring the value of research publications using external rankings, and in business schools this is commonly the ABS list (Walker *et al.*, 2019). Butler and Spoelstra (2014 p. 543) note that "university administrators (and indeed scholars themselves) often use journal rankings as a proxy for quality in terms of decisions around submitting publications to external assessment panels", and thus the ABS list has had a material impact on the publication strategies of business academics (Nedeva *et al.*, 2012). This is reflective of the idea that the ABS list has "become embedded and institutionalised, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of use and attention by faculty, research managers and external actors" (Walker *et al.*, 2019 p. 743).

The audit culture experienced across universities in multiple contexts extends beyond research assessment. For example, in the UK, league tables and the National Student Survey (NSS) are some of the externally imposed mechanisms for measuring education quality (McCarthy and Dragouni, 2021). The growing popularity of business education (The British Academy, 2021) inevitably leads to more pressure on business schools and business academics to perform well in these alongside research evaluations. Thus, "many academics have found themselves under increased strain, stemming from higher accountability demands and increased bureaucratisation" (McCarthy and Dragouni, 2021 p. 2339). The audit culture experienced in HE is reflective of the "commodification and corporatisation of academia" (Tourish and Willmott, 2015 p. 39). Formalised modes of quality management of academic activities can be perceived as controlling and an intrusion on the professional autonomy of individuals (Hoecht, 2006). Indeed, McCarthy and Dragouni (2021 p. 2350) found that the increased exposure to a culture that revolves around metrics has decreased academics' "sense of freedom in research and teaching, their sense of skills utilisation and their feeling of participation in decision-making".

Navigating an academic career in light of the prominent audit culture has arguably become more complex with the formalisation of the impact agenda in how business schools are assessed, as explored in the *accountability logi*c that was introduced in Chapter 4. Chubb *et al.* (2017) uncovered unease among academics about how the impact agenda may transform their roles and concerns about the divergent pressures they face. Many of the interviewees in their study indicated that the "impact agenda disrupted their sense of purpose as academic researchers – where panic was induced in terms of how they might maintain coherence with an adjusted version of their professional selves" (pp. 564-565). Balaban and de Jong (2023 p. 952) studied philosophers and anthropologists at universities in the UK and the Netherlands, finding that "most participants from the UK conceptualised impact as an 'add-on', an additional requirement that created anxiety rather than personal or professional satisfaction". They also found that, among their UK sample, "many respondents insisted that teaching was in fact the most 'impactful' part of their work" (p. 953). It is important to remember that, given the multidimensional nature of universities and indeed business schools (Jensen and Wang, 2018), and reflecting on the findings in Chapter 4 that the narrative generated from the impact agenda is somewhat exclusionary of educational activities, that teaching and learning in business schools can also form part of the wider focus on accountability in HE. Thus, it is important to explore how the complex institutional environment of business schools – that relates to both research and education – manifests in the lives of individual actors (i.e., business academics) and shapes their experiences of engaging with the impact agenda.

5.3 Autonomy and academic freedom

There is some contention in the literature on how autonomous individual-level actors are when managing institutional complexity. Martin *et al.* (2017 p. 104), in their particularly seminal paper on this debate, point out that "at the macro level, theoretical and empirical studies have, as a rule, found that institutional complexity adds further constraints to organisations' and individuals' behaviour *[...]* yet such predictions have not always been borne out in micro-level studies of individual behaviour under conditions of complexity, which often find that actors on the ground exercise a remarkable degree of autonomy in their day-to-day practice". The authors go on to conclude that organisations – below the level of the field but above the level of the actor – act as a key mediator for autonomy by altering the ways that institutional logics become available to individuals.

However, it should not be assumed that an organisation would be the only determinant for the autonomy level of individual actors, or that individual actors do not differ in how they manage institutional conflict. This may be especially true in an environment such as academia where actors traditionally are expected to have a significant degree of freedom in day-to-day activities (Aarrevaara, 2010). For example, Hallett (2010 p. 69) noted that "workers resist impositions on autonomy" even under conditions of competing institutional pressures. Yngve (2022 p. 1251) highlighted the importance of sensemaking in individual-level responses to institutional complexity, finding that individuals "enacted their respective dominant logics as tensions arose". In their own study of actors in a higher education context, Vican *et al.* (2020 p. 159) found "little evidence of faculty acceptance of the corporate logic" and noticed "a subset of faculty actively resisting the corporate logic", demonstrating differences of how individuals may react to a certain institutional logic.

Smith *et al.* (2011) explored impact assessment in the REF and the influence of this on academic autonomy. They found that "the introduction of this 'new' element was perceived by many as a threat to researchers' autonomy and to fundamental academic freedoms" (p. 1372). However, they acknowledge impact assessment could "give researchers, individually and collectively, a more diverse repertoire for justifying their work, which potentially enhances their autonomy with regard to some of the constraints that operate at an institutional level" (p. 1373). At the time of writing, there have been two complete REF exercises (2014 and 2021) with the inclusion of impact assessment, giving the notion of impact time to become embedded in the HE discourse. Given this, it would be useful to revisit the theme of autonomy and explore how the manifestation and implementation of the impact agenda has been experienced by academics themselves. It is equally fruitful, however, to understand how the academic environment and the materialisations of the complex pressures on individuals in the environment have also *impacted* the autonomy for those individuals to engage with the impact agenda.

5.4 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology which was deemed to be appropriate for understanding the lived experiences of business school academics. Qualitative research is useful for identifying issues from an individual's point of view and understanding the meaning they attach to different phenomena (Hennink *et al.*, 2020). The data collection for this study followed the same procedure as described in Chapter 4, section 4.4. The data provided for both Chapters 4 and 5 stemmed from the same set of interviews.

It was decided to conduct semi-structured interviews; these "allow respondents to elaborate in more detail on their experiences and perceptions and enable researchers to ask follow-up questions" (Born and Lehner, 2022 p. 121). An interview guide (see Appendix A) was used as a blueprint for which the interviews were to be conducted, but due to the varying nature of academic work, specific interview questions were naturally variable from participant to participant. Whereas in Chapter 4 the focus was on establishing the logics and understanding the implications of these on how impact is perceived, this study focused on drawing out the experiences of everyday working life that culminate from the institutional environment and exploring the theme of autonomy within this.

The sample for this study, as for the study in Chapter 4, consisted of 59 business school academics across 10 business schools in the UK that are part of Russell group universities. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who were deemed to be suitable and likely to provide useful data for the research. The participants were sought through examining profiles on university websites and being contacted directly by the researcher. Participants were provided with a participant information sheet so they were fully aware of what the theme of the research was and what was expected of them. Due to constraints from the Covid-19 pandemic, and for the ease of data collection, interviews were carried out online. All interviews were transcribed and subsequently analysed.

A very similar data analysis procedure was carried out to that described in Chapter 4, section 4.4: open coding followed by focused coding (Saldaña, 2016) as part of a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) that took inspiration from the Gioia method (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). Qualitative data analysis can be a fluid and creative process, and as such, it was not always a linear process from codes to themes. Instead, the analysis was somewhat iterative, taking notice of emerging concepts from the textual data whilst acknowledging the role of prior knowledge and the research objectives at hand. The major theme for research objective 1 is the *constrained environment* in which business school academics operated, with three distinct sub-themes: *metrics & monitoring*, *administration & bureaucracy*, and *workload & wellbeing*. The major theme for research objective 2 is *seniority effects* on autonomy in business schools, with two distinct sub-themes: *early career expectations* and *late career empowerment*. The data structure that encompasses the entire research aim (i.e., inclusive of both objectives) is presented in Figure 5.1.

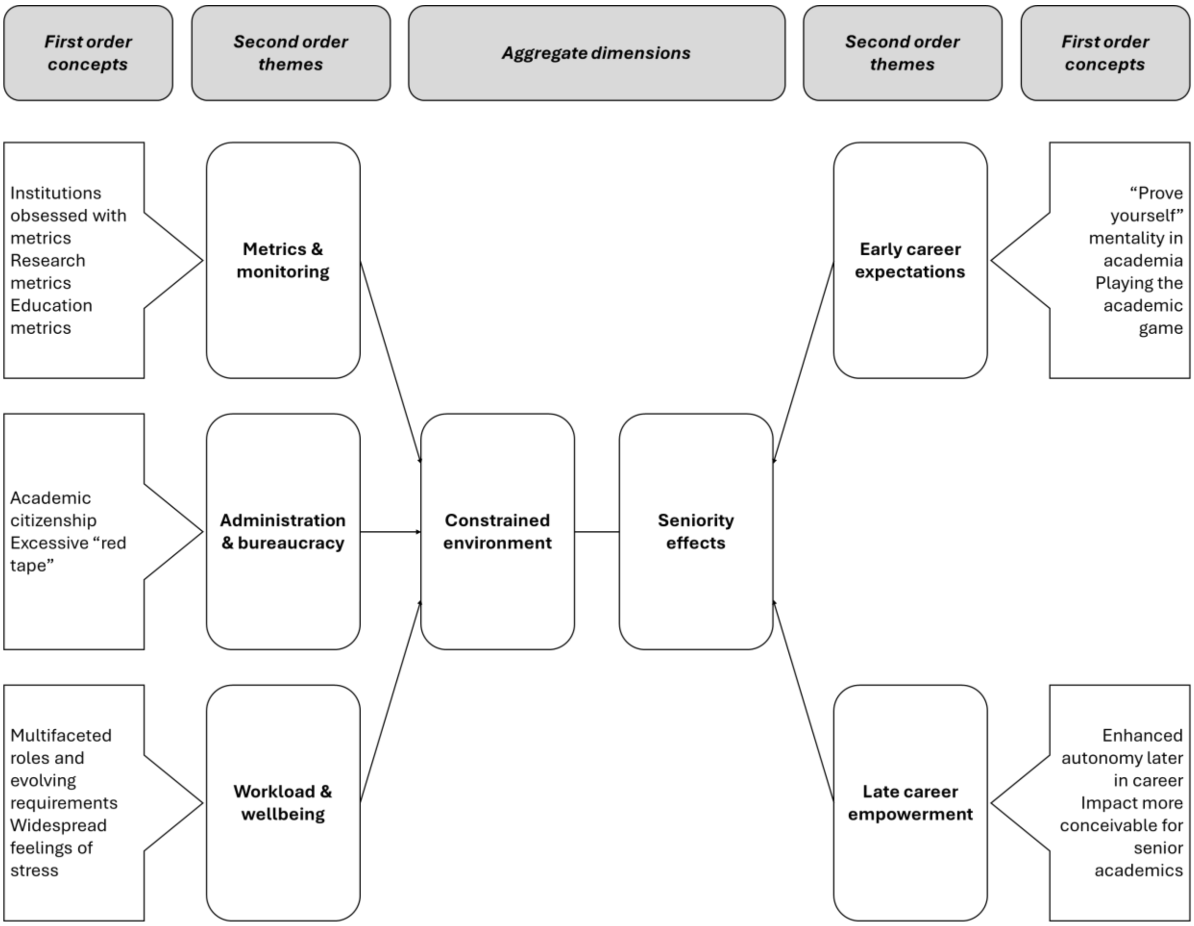


Figure 5.1 Data structure for Chapter 5

5.5 Research objective 1: Balancing core academic activities with the impact agenda

5.5.1 Constrained environment

It was evident throughout the interviews that academics are operating in an increasingly *constrained environment*, which arguably has a strong impact on an individual's ability – and indeed motivation – to engage with the impact agenda. The idea of a *constrained environment*, and how this was represented in the sample, can be conceptualised as comprising of three categories: *metrics & monitoring*, *administration & bureaucracy*, and *workload & wellbeing*. First, it was found that academics in the sample perceived that their performance is heavily judged on key metrics, explicitly and implicitly, which may not always take into account the nuances and variability inherent in academic life. This creates a highly specified persona of what a "successful" academic is and what is needed to successfully navigate the academic environment. Second, it was also found that universities are perceived as being bureaucratic and managerialist, increasingly operating in a way that creates numerous administrative burdens for academic staff. Although some level of administrative work is a necessity in many lines of work, academic staff in the sample evidenced a growing feeling that more and more time is being spent on activities that lack value and are a result of growing managerialism across universities. This is reflected in day-to-day tasks as well as dedicated administrative or leadership roles. Finally, and perhaps as a culmination of a heightened use of different metrics and measurements, alongside increased administrative and leadership burdens, the theme of workload and the associated wellbeing implications was littered throughout the interviews. Unrealistic workload models and unclear guidance from institutions led to a number of participants feeling overwhelmed with the sheer amount of work they have, leading to feelings of stress, burnout, and exhaustion. This feeling also culminated, in multiple instances, of a poor work-life balance. The following sub-sections will explore each of these categories with a focus on evidence taken from the transcripts.

5.5.1.1 Metrics & monitoring

It became clear throughout the interviews that business academics operate in an environment that is "obsessed" with metrics. Participants spoke of annual performance reviews and probation periods that are, to an extent, referent on how well an individual performs according to something akin to key performance indicators (KPIs). These KPIs offer a highly prescriptive view of what success looks like for an academic. The metrics are used as a method of comparison and are perceived as being a time-saving mechanism for management within the research-led business schools in the sample. Many participants were cognisant of the institutional preoccupation with metrics:

> *Generally in the UK university sector there is this real, well, I think one of the major problems is more the fact that it's so quantified. That they are all obsessed about metrics. And metrics don't capture everything [...] the reason for the obsession with metrics is that they do try to be kind of fair to people, and it's difficult unless you have ways to compare people, to be equitable in how you're treating people.* (Participant 35)

> *For the REF, it's all about journal rankings and publishing, you know, journals and papers that fit a certain standard. But often no one can agree on exactly what that standard will be beyond the ranking - beyond some list of rankings. So there's all sorts of different loosely interlocking mechanisms of expectation and appraisal going on.* (Participant 27)

> *I think there's a close overlap and like a symbiotic relationship maybe between [the REF and journal ranking lists]. I think they feed off of each other, certainly in the UK market, and I know they have equivalent ones in Australia and other places, it can actually vary quite a lot in how the list looks. But I don't think it's solely, I mean, I think if you took the REF away, people would just make another list based on impact factors or other metrics, you know? And it would just be replaced by something else. There's a feeling of inevitability to it, although you will, I guess there are academics who wish we could do away with it completely, but I just think it would inevitably get replaced by something else. So the question for me is, well, what other kinds of metrics might we use? I'm not sure there's an easy answer, but I think people would fall back on impact factors and other demonstrations of impact. So I think the REF has a lot to do with it, but it sort of formalises what's already going on anyway.* (Participant 27)

In terms of research activities, the commonly mentioned metric systems for measuring journal article quality were the ABS list and the Financial Times 50 list. Participants understood that, although not always explicitly communicated, thinking about research impacts in terms of these lists had been heavily internalised by individual actors, forming an integral part of the culture of the business school field. This reflects a clear link to the growth of managerialism and new public management in HE, as discussed in the *business logic* in Chapter 4:

> *So, okay, why did journals become the gold standard? I think it's very much to do with the kind of, like a joined up relationship between a certain kind of, metricised managerialism, if you like, totally linked up with the role of the journal ranking lists. I mean, again, I think there's been some changes since I was introduced to this in [year], but there was definitely a kind of high watermark where management was just being*

done by proxy. You know, it was like, nobody was interested in what you're working on, they just want to know what's your ABS score, you know [...] it was extremely reductive. And, you know, that invested a lot of power in the people formulating the journal ranking lists, the ABS, in particular. And it also, of course, invested a lot of power with journal editors as well [...] business schools, ironically, have been extremely poor examples [...] in terms of what management is, what it should be. I think you can set that in the context of the university as a whole, in terms of this kind of like certain kind of, let's call it managerialism or what have you, there's actually, in my eyes, and I think in a lot of people's eyes, a very crude version of management, you know? Not the kind that we would necessarily be teaching to our students in terms of best practice, right? Very reductive, you know, very top down, very systems oriented and completely inappropriate for the kinds of work that we're doing. (Participant 29)

This focus on metrics, in terms of research, can be linked to the funding model for research in UK universities. Specifically, the REF was seen to be a driving force for the preoccupation with the ABS list in business schools:

It's clear that's what the incentives are. It's very, very clear, the university has made clear how its funding comes, it's made clear how it's ranked, how it's judged, how it's evaluated in this REF framework. And that gets translated down through promotions and tenure. So, it's a very similar thing anywhere. If you're in [home country], you wouldn't have this formal paper star system. You know, there is just the internal list of A journal and B journals, and sort of a general understanding of what the expectations are. So here in the UK it's much more systematised in business schools. (Participant 30)

Largely it's to do with the REF and making a whole process of understanding who's valuable in the field. In a way it's an attempt to make it transparent, but of course it doesn't make it more transparent. It gives you metrics that you can work from, which makes it perhaps easier to compare if you trust those metrics. But I don't quite understand the obsession, coming from a different background. (Participant 46)

Generally, the ABS list was understood to be a fairly blunt instrument used to make a rudimentary assessment of the quality of a particular output. Academics within the sample had differing levels of acceptance of, and identification with, the list. Participant 31 was able to openly discuss their internalization of the ABS list, even though they were not totally comfortable with the idea of being focused on such metrics:

It's all about the ABS list these days. Deans will turn around and say "oh, we have a balanced scorecard to how we measure performance", or "it doesn't matter exactly if

> *you're publishing in a four journal as long as you're publishing something that's recognised as high quality according to other criteria, that's fine". But really, they just use the ABS list as a proxy for all that stuff. So that drives what I do to some extent [...] it's very metric driven, I suppose, because that's what matters to people. And I'm driven by that as well, by those standard measures of performance criteria. As much as I would like to say I'm above it and I don't pay attention to it, I'm not.* (Participant 31)

A number of participants had reservations about the ABS list itself. Despite adding an element of clarity to what makes a "good" publication for research assessment purposes, there were questions about its development and applicability:

> *I'm quite concerned about the ABS list. On one side, it makes it easy to understand what different schools want. So it helps you in that respect, especially if, I mean, sometimes it's a way of democratising it, in the sense that everybody is clear on the criteria. But of course the criteria was made by a certain group of people [...] it's very American, US-centric.* (Participant 46)

The ABS list and the associations it holds can evoke quite strong emotional responses for business academics who are trying to progress in their careers and navigate the academic environment. Participants were aware of the impact of the ABS list on how they are perceived as a researcher, fuelled by the importance that is placed on metrics across the business school field. Participant 47 made a connection between the metrics-focus in their business school and feelings of worth:

> *Because the business school has such a specific way of measuring performance through the ABS list, it does affect me more than it would have affected me if I was teaching a lot in a department that is not expecting me to publish in those journals that are really, really hard to get published in. It's like, if you don't get that, you don't pass your probation, you're not getting any promotions, and it actually makes you feel like you're worthless. Right now I don't feel yet that I'm worthless because I published in [ABS 4* journal]. But how terrible, I had a colleague that left recently and she was feeling like she was not worth it, and she's great. Because her paper got rejected from the top journals. I don't know. Maybe that doesn't happen just in business schools, but I feel it could be a bit more problematic because of the way the metrics work.* (Participant 47)

Notions of "playing" the academic "game" were explicitly and implicitly explored by participants during the interviews. The metrics feed into this idea of the publication game, making the environment often feel very target driven. This has the risk of creating and fostering an atmosphere of disillusionment with research and making publishing a chore:

> *The other issue has to do with how in the business school there's increasing gamification of everything, anything and everything you can imagine, becomes a game, becomes a target or something you need to improve. And so that makes life, you know, instrumental.* (Participant 58)

In terms of education metrics, most of the discussion centred around end-of-module evaluation surveys with the infamous score out of 5, although the TEF and NSS were also mentioned. Again, like research, participants felt that teaching activities were centred around hitting certain targets of satisfaction with students, which can be related to the idea of "students as customers" as explored in the *business logic* in Chapter 4. However, generally, these metrics were not felt as strongly with regards to progression as those metrics related to research, arguably because of the prominence of research evaluation in promotion and appraisal systems:

> *I think, nobody is overly critical on our module evaluations in a sense. I don't think it's considered like, if you get below a score, you're sacked type thing. I think it's more as a flagging system. So, it's pretty unusual to get anything below 3.5 or so [...] maybe you've got to look into what you can do to improve, but I think it's more used as a flagging system. You know, something's clearly gone wrong if the majority of the students have rated it as unsatisfactory. We tend to also aggregate it. It's a number of questions and then you might do better in some questions and weaker in others. So, it is part of your PDR, personal development review, basically our appraisal. It is part of that. But you don't hear about people worrying too much about it.* (Participant 21)

Nevertheless, education metrics elicited some negative sentiments among participants:

> *Our school has, one of the things I think for probation purposes is that you have to get a score of four out of five. But that is so meaningless. It's so meaningless, so subjective. So much comes down to whether the students like you or not.* (Participant 34)

> *At a certain level you feel like you're being judged. So I would very much like my ratings to be higher. And obviously I'm not only being judged by the students, but at a certain level being judged by the department. So obviously, the ratings are quite important.* (Participant 2)

Despite the importance placed on metrics associated with research, it was acknowledged that metrics associated with education do still form part of the appraisal process. Participant 53, for example, acknowledged developments in their institutions approach to appraisal, trying to enhance the importance of it for evaluating the performance of individual academics:

> *You hear the teaching alarm going off every time when it's almost the end of the year where the students have to submit their student satisfaction survey. That's when it happens. Please remind your students and teaching is valued and it's very important. So that's when it sort of comes to play. And the other place where I think it also comes in is the promotion process. So one of the things that the school and for example, the faculty, looks at is your teaching performance as well. So, for example, what has changed in my times in the same university is what the faculty have been trying to do is put teaching on a level playing field with research in terms of esteem, so that you are recognised.* (Participant 53)

The metrics can sometimes manifest in the performance monitoring of academics within business schools. Participants spoke of setting objectives and being examined against them, again with the REF being the backdrop for understanding the research productivity of an individual. Some participants were cognisant of the potential outcomes of not meeting the threshold expected:

> *Everybody is expected to be "REF-able" here. And the way in which that manifests most obviously is in terms of biannual performance reviews. So you're expected in a given period to submit your objectives, and then in the next period you're assessed against those objectives and you generate new objectives. So those performance reviews are the most visible and most obvious moments where a discussion is had over how productive or unproductive or non-productive you are. And I think in the last couple of years a few colleagues have been - thankfully not me - but a few colleagues have been relegated to teaching dominant or teaching only contracts because they're not "REF-able". So there is a kind of constant treadmill of set objectives, meet objectives, set objectives, meet objectives.* (Participant 49)

5.5.1.2 Administration & bureaucracy

When asked about their working lives and the different pressures on their time, participants in the sample consistently talked about academic "citizenship" (roles in this sphere were also referred to as leadership, service, and commonly, administration) with a mixed range of emotions. Some academics felt very passionate about their dissatisfaction with academic service roles and the burdens this can represent on their time – using words such as "hate" – whereas others showed an understanding of the necessity of these roles and accepted them as part of the job. One participant, who was carrying out a citizenship role that was closely aligned to their own interests, even remarked: "*I'm probably one of the few people who really loves their admin role, and actually I would consider it almost the core aspect of my job*" (Participant 43).

It was commonly expressed by participants that administrative roles are a clear expectation for the job of being an academic:

> *Being a full time academic and on a teaching and research contract, overall we are being encouraged to take up leadership roles.* (Participant 22)

> *In terms of administrative responsibilities, over the years in [current institution], there's a huge emphasis, I think, probably the case for most universities, but since this was my first job, so I can only speak for this one, there is an emphasis on doing certain kind of citizenship roles. So taking on leadership, essentially.* (Participant 42)

The expectation to engage in administrative and leadership activities form part of academic performance frameworks. This informs decisions made both in terms of probation, performance appraisals and promotions. Participants spoke about administrative roles in the context of their wider workload portfolio and the need to "tick" the admin "box" to meet requirements:

> *I will be, from September, looking at admissions for one of our MSc programmes. So there's a colleague within the group who is leaving, and it's a small service like, I think counts for 10 hours or so. But I also had this agreement with my head of department, because we have at [current institution], there's an academic performance framework and then you have the activities in teaching, research, impact and service [...] so then I discussed with my head of department after starting, she said, well, towards the end of my probation time, she would give me a small service role so that I could tick that box and then it coincided that this colleague is leaving. So I'm taking that.* (Participant 54)

Despite mixed feelings about administrative and leadership roles represented in the sample, many participants acknowledged the bureaucratic nature of such roles and the associated processes that come with them. These roles can often come with a great deal of responsibility and can sometimes be felt to be far-removed from the value-adding activities of research and teaching:

> *You have to be monitoring that everybody's marking within a certain deadline. You have to be monitoring timetables. You have to work with colleagues to schedule timetables. You have to work with colleagues to make sure that all the moderation is in place [...] if I could, I would only do teaching and research; I don't really care for the management side of things. And I don't really care whether it's prestigious or not and I don't really care for any pay rises that come out of it. Because this becomes very bureaucratic. And at the moment, if anything, my role has become more bureaucratic. And it's more management, overseeing, coordination [...] so, for example, [my meeting after this] is about preparing for the exam review with the external examiner. It's not speaking to*

students. It's not doing research. It's a purely admin, bureaucratic function. That has increased exponentially over the past year, and that's the reason I'm trying to move into teaching and research. Because admin is not why I got into this. And yet I've been doing a lot of admin. (Participant 1)

In some cases, participants felt that the administrative duties they have make balancing the different facets of an academic career difficult. This can create feelings of being overwhelmed. In some cases, this was aggravated during times of pandemic restrictions when teaching and student support activities were taking place primarily online:

I have to say that at the start of the academic year it was very hard. Because you can imagine, being online and having a lot of new students coming in, that probably was a period where it was not very easily manageable with all the other tasks. It took much more time. (Participant 46)

There were sentiments expressed by participants that suggest an adverse effect on autonomy if one has a significant administrative or leadership role. For example, Participant 14, who fulfilled a programme director role, described the serious negative impact their administrative responsibilities (alongside teaching responsibilities) have had on their ability to freely engage in research:

Admin, I don't really like. But if it was accounted for it would be okay. But I mean, the main thing [I'm interested in] is not the status [of being an academic], but kind of like, just the position that you're in. Like, you can, apart from contact time, you can manage your own time and you can read and write what you want, which generally has proved to be the case. I mean, until it comes to the point when you can't read or write anything, which is the situation I'm in now [because of administrative and teaching responsibilities]. (Participant 14)

Similarly, Participant 22, who fulfilled a head of department role, found that this was making research activities take longer than before. They acknowledged the role of the pandemic in this as well. These factors had an effect on their ability to plan or make significant process in their research, in comparison to previous times:

Before the pandemic and before my leadership role, I could plan much better how I carry out my work and then I could... even with research, it always takes more time than you plan. And then you set strict deadlines. But it was much simpler to do, to say to yourself, you do these things and then you actually do them. But over the last year, because of the pandemic and because of my admin role it's more like, every day you sort of, if you do even a small thing, then that's something. (Participant 22)

Within the sphere of administration, it was observed that Participant 31 (a Professor) made a strategic choice to choose a leadership position that would be less disruptive to their autonomy than some other potential administrative roles:

> *I know some people have this argument, and it's fairly common, that you do a leadership role, your research is really going to suffer. And I'm sure that's true in many cases. But that has not been my experience and in fact I would say it's probably the opposite. Because if I wasn't doing these leadership roles, what would I be doing? I'd have a higher teaching load and I'd have some crummy admin role anyway [...] so I'd be course director for some master's programme, right? Which would be probably, possibly just as time consuming, with less reward, and certainly less interesting. And I would have less flexibility with that because you're subjected to the bureaucratic machinery of exam boards and chasing up academics and the rhythm of the academic year. But what I'm doing just now with accreditation and executive education, it's a step removed from that. And yeah, there are busy times of the year, but it's not just like a constant stream of rubbish, right? So to summarise what I'm saying, if I wasn't in these leadership roles, I'd be busy doing other low level bureaucratic type stuff. And I think I don't think it'd be any less time consuming, potentially more time consuming and I'd be less in control of what I was doing.* (Participant 31)

The temporal aspect of administrative duties were particularly spoken about among those participants that discussed their citizenship roles. Administrative roles can take a huge amount of time, and these time pressures were keenly felt by some. This can take the form of meetings, sending and actioning emails, preparing for boards, planning, among many other endeavors:

> *You're not supposed to spend all your time doing administration, but unfortunately, you spend probably a heftier chunk doing that than you might really want.* (Participant 41)

> *The meetings really creep up on you, really, I can easily have like three or four admin meetings a day these days... they're tiring. They consume your time and effort.* (Participant 48)

Some participants were able to make explicit observations about the tension that can occur between administrative duties and research, due to the significant temporal requirements of academic citizenship:

> *I'm sure as you've talked to some of the other interviewees, you've had some people who are publication machines, very, you know, you might not call them a publication machine, but they have a real ongoing output that's, you know. I'm kind of, I've had*

> *peaks and troughs and dipped in and out and got interested, and then sort of had a few administrative roles, which kind of often can slow you down a little bit.* (Participant 19)

> *A close colleague was told when they took up massive responsibilities on one of our core programmes, they were told, well, forget about research for the next five years, which basically means forget about promotions and forget about, you know... even though it's not officially said or it's not written down, there's a very strong feeling that as long as you've got the publications, you will be promoted, even if you're not a great citizen and even if your classes do not go as well as our programme managers would expect.* (Participant 51)

Tensions can also occur between administrative duties and teaching responsibilities. As a result, some activities can easily be pushed to taking place outside of normal working hours:

> *The harsh reality is, with the teaching load being quite high, that sometimes it's evenings and weekends where a lot of administrative work happens, because it's the only time that you have available for it. I think it's one of those things that there's maybe a gap between what is espoused in terms of time for administration and citizenship and what is actually available in reality. So the likes of widening participation, and I've also been involved in gender equality and so forth, and a lot of that probably happens in the evenings and the weekends and in the scraps of time that you try to carve out in terms of your working day.* (Participant 43)

The heavy administrative expectations of academic staff reflects the acknowledgement of bureaucracy in the business schools studied. This is no surprise given the recognised state of managerialism in business schools in the UK (McCarthy and Dragouni, 2021). This can make even small administrative tasks feel laborious:

> *[Institution] particularly likes bureaucracy, I think universities are kind of infamous for it in a way. But [institution], I think, takes it to another level. We just, there is a committee for everything. There's a kind of subcommittee and whatever, so getting anything approved normally has to go through five different committees.* (Participant 21)

> *Universities are very bureaucratic, and there is a lot of time wasting, and that would be lovely if we had the time, but we're already really overstretched.* (Participant 42)

Participant 34 expressed relief at being an education-focused lecturer because it meant they did not have to worry about applying for grants and the *"admin and hassle associated with all that"* (Participant 34). Evidencing impact was also identified as an area that is associated with bureaucracy, seen as extra work that requires jumping through several hoops for such evidence to be deemed acceptable:

> *I let it be known what I'm doing. And it does have impact [...] but I don't push it forward enough it gets selected by the school [for an impact case study]. Because that requires a lot of work to write it up. And I went to a workshop on this, how to do this and just, it was so depressing because the basic idea was you need to write this in such a way that whatever, you know, person we get to sit on this committee can understand what you did in 500 words.* (Participant 30)

5.5.1.3 Workload & wellbeing

Given the level of administrative responsibilities that come on top of research, teaching, and the expectation to be impactful and engage in impact activities, there were many discussions about the theme of workload throughout the interviews. Academics are seemingly under pressure to be good at a wide range of things, and this is reflected in diverse and evolving responsibilities throughout the academic career journey. The job is, in a word, multifaceted. This can have serious impacts on the wellbeing of academics:

> *Several colleagues of mine, tough people [...] they'd been around, they knew the real world and even they had been put in a serious and demonstrable mental stress by the requirement to say you've got to be excellent at teaching and excellent at research and excellent at impact, next to everything else, at all times. It's just not reasonable.* (Participant 15)

Evolving requirements in the career portfolio of an academic was also touched upon during the interviews. The impact agenda has added an extra layer of complexity on-top of what was already a complex career:

> *One misgiving I would have [with the impact agenda] is that basically it becomes, you know, not only are we meant to be world class at research, we're meant to do amazing teaching, but now we've got to, like, try and save the world.* (Participant 5)

> *In some ways I'm a bit sceptical about the impact because I think that's another thing that we've got to chase after. We're asked too many different things in academia. We've got too many things up in the air whereas some of the things we're actually doing, like educating young people, we are not actually doing particularly well.* (Participant 24)

Workload pressures are often seen as a juggling act. Participants reported that the multiple aspects of their careers can be difficult to balance. This can sometimes make it difficult to know what to prioritise or how to manage time effectively. This can lead to feelings that there is a lack of institutional support in terms of workload:

> *We are not incentivised, encouraged, supported or facilitated to drop things, to let things go, in order to fix other things.* (Participant 39

> *We do have an enormous amount of different things to do, and we have to juggle all of that.* (Participant 6)

> *All of it together it has been absolutely hectic. It has definitely been very busy. Yeah. So it's basically, it has been quite challenging, there's no point in saying otherwise.* (Participant 16)

> *I don't know whether I'm going to stay in academia for the rest of my career. The workload is really intense, but sometimes it is weighing up whether you're prepared to give up that freedom or to forego that freedom in exchange for perhaps a lighter workload.* (Participant 43)

One element of the workload discussion that emerged throughout the interviews were feelings of being expected to be "good" at "everything". Academic careers are varied and it can be anticipated that individuals will be stronger in some areas than others. Yet, some participants acknowledged an uneasiness about the expectation of being a high performer in all areas of the job. The level of work that comes with high expectations in multiple areas can be overwhelming and intense:

> *There are very high levels of work intensification, and they are high because you're expected to do really good teaching, to have consistently high scores, and you can get called up if you're anything below a four. You obviously have to do like, you have to be REF-able, so you have to have a certain amount of outputs basically. And you also need to do admin because you need to show that you have citizenship and a sense of commitment to the organisation. Then, you need to do impact. And you are basically developing research projects for the future, because you are writing papers right now, but you need to collect data for the future [...] this level of work is not normal.* (Participant 42)

Furthermore, a variety of different skills are needed for different parts of the job. This can be seen as a significant burden on academics who may be particularly suited to one aspect of the role over another:

> *It's a job where you're required to be really good at so many different things. Research and teaching are so disparate in terms of the qualities and the skills and the attributes*

> *that are required of them. And so to expect somebody who is an absolutely sterling researcher to then at the same time be a fantastic teacher and vice versa, is a pretty significant burden. You have to be a great oral communicator, written communicator, and you have to be innovative and creative. So you feel like you're juggling all these different balls.* (Participant 43)

A number of participants spoke about the formal allocation of workloads and use of a workload allocation model (WAM). These models were seemingly controversial in some respects. For example, some participants touched on the inaccuracies of these models in capturing the full scope of activities they engage in and responsibilities they hold. They spoke of the hours being allocated to certain activities being inaccurate and less than the actual time certain activities take:

> *You fight for your research time every day. Because my agenda, my calendar, gets filled with so many things. And I do supervisory work as work as well, which is massively undervalued in the WAM. And it's a massively important thing because the PhD students that we work with, they are the future. And literally without working with them, like, at least for me right now, it's the way I do research, because my independent research has completely stopped since I started teaching this semester.* (Participant 47)

> *[Online education and student engagement] does take time, and that time has to come from somewhere. You've got a workload model which has already said teaching time is X, but in reality, teaching time was two times X or three times X or four times X. And so either you take that time from evenings and weekends, which is what people did, or you take it from research time. And what happened to me is I took it from both, right? And I think that's quite common, at least with the colleagues that I've spoken to. I hear that many of my colleagues haven't had the time to do much by way of research for the last year.* (Participant 49)

> *I was overloaded on my teaching. I have always been doing more teaching than research, even though in principle it should be the other way around. So, as I said, that impacted on my research and my writing. So I was, I suppose, not as prolific as other colleagues at the time. I was still publishing, but it was, I suppose, slower.* (Participant 53)

Unrealistic workload allocations and expectations placed upon academics means that they often work beyond their contracted hours. Overworking was a common experience of many participants across the sample – "*frankly, I work a lot more than my contractual hours*" (Participant 30). Workload models, that can be fairly blunt and simplistic, can fail to take account of important impact activities that may just be absorbed into research time without much consideration for the actual practicalities involved:

> *So we have 40% for teaching, 40% of your time for research, 20% of your time for admin. But things like KTPs are captured in a very blunt way - that's your research time, do with it what you will. And there hasn't been that level of quantification. And if you took, you know, half a day a week is 10% of your time for the entire year... there's no way the institution or the school would give you [that time in your workload allocation] - we work on hours, so an entire year's workload allocation is 1650 hours. There's no way we would get 165 hours for a KTP, even if that's what it took you to do it [...] we keep our WAM as, I suppose, simplistic as we can, which means that sometimes quite important things are not given the attention that perhaps they really deserve. But in the absence of anything better, at least it's some kind of fairly blunt barometer in terms of what we're all doing.* (Participant 41)

Participant 55 noted that the workload model is underestimating the amount of time taken to be a "good" educator, and thus does not allow enough time for the realities of the demands of teaching:

> *Our workload model is broken. Because it underestimates the time you've got for teaching. And certainly do good teaching in which you can actually give constructive feedback [...] so, the workload model is skewed away from teaching. It doesn't allow you enough time for teaching.* (Participant 55)

Some participants in the sample spoke of the wellbeing implications of the intense workloads they experience as a result of the multifaceted and complex careers they have. They spoke of the levels of stress that are generated by the responsibilities of being an academic and the expectations of them. This was recognised as an issue that is endemic in HE:

> *The workload has been a problem since the start. And the workload is, I believe, a problem across all institutions. It is really challenging. I would say that it's had a negative effect on, probably my physical and my mental health at times.* (Participant 43)

> *A lot of people are struggling with stress and getting completely burned out very quickly.* (Participant 47)

Some participants were able to see the negative wellbeing impacts on their colleagues. In some ways, this was aggravated by the pandemic because of the necessity to work differently:

> *I do see it from my role, interacting with colleagues, the whole aspect of wellbeing and how they manage things because of the pandemic. And I do see the stress levels, people*

are getting much more stressed, not just about the work, but I think it's a combined thing of the whole situation. And then obviously work is more demanding because you have to do things in a different way. (Participant 22)

Phrases such as "burnout" were used. This emphasises a sense of emotional and mental exhaustion from the job. This suggests experiences of stress have been long felt by participants. Feelings of burnout can stem from different elements of the job, such as the constant cycle of trying to publish, heavy teaching loads and student support responsibilities, and demanding administrative and leadership roles. Feelings of stress were felt by some on a consistent basis:

I'm struggling on a regular basis with being close to burnout. (Participant 32)

Feelings of stress, burnout, and poor wellbeing can take enjoyment out of being an academic:

There have been times in the last couple of years where I thought, even though there are aspects about this job that I really like, increasingly the pressure and the demand and the amount of workload are not really conducive to you enjoying yourself. (Participant 40)

There were instances within the interviews where wellbeing issues were directly linked to the pressure to publish. As explored in the *academic profession logic* in Chapter 4, evidence from the interviews shows that participants acutely felt in many cases that worth in business schools is tied to publications. Such pressures can be a source of anxiety on a regular basis:

The insane thing is that [publishing expectations] puts loads of pressure on people. And academia hopefully is getting better at looking after students, but I think we're not great at looking after each other and ourselves in terms of staff wellbeing and what have you. So, yeah. That's a constant source of stress and anxiety for my colleagues. (Participant 1)

The publication process, it can be long. It's an emotional process. Good and bad emotions, unfortunately. (Participant 7)

There were also instances within the interviews where wellbeing issues were directly linked to the teaching side of the job, including associated administrative roles:

[Programme directorship is] certainly a heavier emotional burden than all of my other responsibilities. (Participant 30)

The pandemic created a unique context for collecting data, and this context cannot be ignored. Participants spoke frequently about the pandemic and how this had effected their work and, ultimately, their wellbeing and state of mind. In many ways, the pandemic created a situation of reduced autonomy, due to the immediate pressures related to the education side of the job. This reduction in autonomy also was a potential source of stress, anxiety and unease:

> *I've given you the impression that, yeah, I don't really have a problem with any of it. But I have to be honest and say I do a little bit. Yeah, you know, I got really, really angry, and anger is a really bad sign. I've never, ever lost my temper, ever, because of work, but I did recently. And that horrible sense of stress and, you know, like when people, when you are not in control of something, you know, and literally, you know, most of my career I've had massive degrees of control. Now the job sort of feels like all those rubbish jobs I used to do. Little bits of that feeling started creeping back into my life again after 25 years of feeling like I was immune from all of that, like it wasn't work at all.* (Participant 12)

The intense workload issues experienced by participants led to, in some cases, a poor work-life balance. A previous study found that "the more hours academics worked during evenings and weekends, the more physical and psychological symptoms they reported, the less clear were their boundaries between the work and home domains, and the more work-life conflict they perceived" (Kinman and Jones, 2008 pp. 54-55). This creates a difficult situation for business school academics: deciding to what extent they can reduce their work-life balance, and the potential wellbeing consequences of this, in order to be successful:

> *I feel like there's a, in academia, there's kind of an expectation that your job is your life. And all the professors I see, they work all the time. Working in the weekends for them is the norm [...] and I'm not sure I want that for my life. Because I have other things that I enjoy in life too. I don't think I'm willing to put in the amount of time that other people do to really move up quickly. I think my strategy is to have more of a work life balance and just hit the targets that I need to, to be able to stay at [institution].* (Participant 35)

> *And I suppose I probably haven't had the best work life balance over the years. So you don't do the sort of stuff that I've done having a perfect nine to five existence. Or nine to four, you know, we're only contracted for 7 hours a day.* (Participant 39)

> *Probably one of the issues with academia is this way that we self-impose ways of working. Because no one forces you to, really, work at night. But I know a lot of people – I'm one of those – who work at night, writing papers, sometimes at night it helps me to think, or early on in the morning. Throughout the day it's more challenging because you have meetings and you get interrupted and stuff. I think there's an issue of the extent to which, when I think about it, my own approach works for me, but at the same time I wonder the extent to*

which I use it, I use the fact that it works for me as a justification not to look at it more carefully. (Participant 58)

5.6 Research objective 2: Impact and the academic career lifecycle

5.6.1 Seniority effects

Having established the existence of a *constrained environment* for engaging with the impact agenda, it is evident that such an environment can put constraints on autonomy for individual actors. However, when delving deeper into the idea of autonomy, it emerged that many participants both perceive and experience what is termed *seniority effects*. There are distinct *early career expectations* in contrast to what is termed *late career empowerment*. The power imbalance is elucidated in the following quote by Participant 47:

> *You also have inequalities across different academic, like, in terms of positions, like early career scholars and more senior people. You can see that the senior get more senior and more protected because they just keep playing the game, that just reinforces itself. Once you're in the game and you know how to play it, and you just get away with anything in the sense that the money is made out of the teaching, but the careers are made out of research.* (Participant 47)

When it comes to engaging in impact and knowledge exchange activity, it was found generally that identify as an early career academic (ECA) lack both the structural support and encouragement, and experience. In many ways, the constraints identified in research objective 1 are felt even more acutely for those at a junior level, and the prescriptions from the *academic profession logic* identified in Chapter 4 are perhaps more pertinent. This raises questions about the autonomy to engage with impact throughout the academic lifecycle. Participant 39 summarised:

> *The [lower grade staff] who are still trying to get their way up the promotion ladder, I think it is more difficult to make that choice [to pursue an impact case study], and it's more risky to make that choice. And there's a lot of huge amounts of work [...] it's tougher, it's more interdependent, it's riskier, it's probably more rewarding. It's probably more exciting, it's probably more creative, but equally, it's less clear how you do it. So I think it's quite a difficult area for younger or lower grade colleagues to experiment with. So there is a responsibility, I think on [higher grade staff] to sort of show the way and to really work with that.* (Participant 39)

5.6.1.1 Early career expectations

There are clear expectations of academics in terms of progression and success throughout the academic career lifecycle, but this appeared in the sample to be more pronounced for those who are junior. This was evidenced both in how ECAs acknowledged their own positions, as well as reflections generally across different grades of academic about the difficulties of being an ECAs. It was understood that the pressure to get high-ranking publications was greater for those who are yet to secure a high-grade role within a business school. There is an element of needing to prove oneself in a way that, for example, professors have already done throughout their careers – meaning an early career focus is commonly felt to be about the need to build a high-quality publication portfolio:

> *The idea that publication, research and publication was the key issue, and I think that still applies. Although it's become much harder because I think the journals are more picky. It's harder to get in four rated journals and above. And some of the top universities are asking you, business school scholars particularly, from a very early career stage, to be publishing in top American journals.* (Participant 25)

One thing that was noted by Participant 29 is, due to the focus in business schools being on journal articles from highly ranked journals, this is the particular output that is valued for progression. Thus, the freedom to choose the particular output for research – at least for those academics concerned about progression – is reduced:

> *Of course, people do publish books as well. And I guess that's, particularly with professors that's more of a kind of a currency, like if you're a professor, you're going to have a book or two. But I still think there's a kind of heavy journal emphasis where people are being expected to publish as kind of like early or mid-career researchers.* (Participant 29)

A similar sentiment was inferred by Participant 46, albeit relating instead specifically to the choice of which exact journal to publish in, given the expectations that reflect the likes of the ABS list:

> *Within my division I have the feeling there is an understanding that we need to achieve that balance of pleasing the school by getting some of those four star publications in, but also staying true to our field and doing what we want to do in our research community, even if that means deviating and publishing outside those core journals. And for a lecturer, I think that's difficult to do, for someone at the lowest stage of the career.* (Participant 46)

When talking about recruitment of early career staff at their own institution, Participant 30 noted:

> *Having a three star publication is pretty much standard. It would be difficult to get on a shortlist without it. And so that is essentially the key, just being able to frame your research, get it out there at an early stage, submitted for publication.* (Participant 30)

This pressure is evident very early on in a business school career, for example during doctoral studies and probation periods:

> *And I can see that with the PhD students that I supervise who come from a business background, they've been in the business school longer than I have or about the same time. But I can see how they are just as stressed as I am to get those publications, you know. "I need at least one four star so I can get a postdoc after this or a lecturer position". Yeah, that's what I mean by problems.* (Participant 47)

> *The probation period is quite stressful, and it's not just me, it's my colleagues who are also on probation - I'm no longer on probation, but my colleagues who are on probation still - many of them are three years because this is their first academic position as a lecturer. They really emphasise that in this time, in two years, three years, you're meant to have published a four star ABS level article.* (Participant 35)

Reflecting on the pandemic, Participant 49 spoke about the split between higher-graded staff and lower-graded staff and the types of responsibilities they have. They recalled their experience of teaching responsibilities given to those in the earlier stages of the academic career. They highlighted that, where teaching loads are particularly heavy, that can be problematic for ECAs who need to publish work to begin to build a reputation and show esteem for promotion. This can create a difficult environment:

> *You kind of have classic problems over seniority. So teaching tends to fall to teaching fellows, lecturers, and senior lecturers. Management tends to fall towards readers and professors. Now, that's not a perfect split, but it's a prominent tendency. So you kind of have this situation where the very faculty that need to - let's say early career researchers - the very faculty that need to use those first few years to get publications out, don't have the time to do that because they're teaching. And the very faculties who are kind of tenured or more secure or aren't as much in need of publications, they aren't at the front line as it were. So I think it kind of created, I won't call it toxic... but a difficult environment between faculty and university executives, and then between junior faculty and senior faculty.* (Participant 49)

Senior academics are able to recognise the importance of publishing for junior colleagues. For example, when reflecting on co-authoring papers with ECAs, Participant 55 recollected:

> *We had a deal that I was never first author. And I've kept to that in that I tend not to be first author now. Because while they're looking to develop their careers, I'm not going to lose anything by not being it.* (Participant 55)

Being an ECA with an expectation to build a research portfolio, whilst also engaging in teaching activities, is perceived as being a particularly difficult time of the academic career lifecycle. The workload pressures must be juggled with the backdrop of a lack of experience compared to their senior colleagues. This may give scope for very little room for engaging in anything beyond core research and teaching duties. The pressures are recognised as being immense and, at times, anxiety-inducing:

> *The first three to four years are immensely hard for early career researchers, because they are on probation usually. They have to publish journal articles at certain rankings to pass probation. But they have a full load of teaching, almost. In [institution], they have a little bit less because they've got the teaching training and because of that they reduce the teaching load a little bit. But even that's not enough.* (Participant 56)

> *I know colleagues who are on probation who were really worried about the fact that they've not progressed their publishing.* (Participant 57)

> *I would say definitely the probation period, the ECR period, is too tough in academia.* (Participant 56)

Junior academics also have an expectation to secure funding in the forms of grants, as alluded to by Participant 54:

> *it was always said to me, because of the REF, oh, you need to apply for funding. And I would apply, but wouldn't get any or get really little, really small grants, which the school at the time really didn't appreciate. So they were really looking for you to get the big grants. Even for young or just starting academics.* (Participant 54)

It is widely understood that an academic career requires a specific variety of skills. These skills relate to being able to produce scientifically rigorous research, deliver high-quality teaching, carry out citizenship duties competently, and provide value to external stakeholders in the form of impact. The vast array of activities that an academic can be involved in during their multifaceted career means that it is difficult to be prepared, or trained, in the necessary skills. However, things get easier with experience – meaning that junior colleagues, fresh from doctoral study, are at a disadvantage from those with more experience in the environment:

I think it becomes ever more challenging for the new cohorts that are joining. Because the bar always becomes higher, right? Always becomes higher. And we are not trained for a lot of things that are important in this job. (Participant 53)

There was talk by a number of participants about playing the academic “game” in order to progress; Participant 13 acknowledged that this is a primary focus for ECAs:

The question is that if you are a junior researcher or an early career researcher, can you afford to ignore the ABS and focus on impact? But if you're a professor, I'm sure that you can afford to do that [...] if they don't publish, they can do some other projects, they might have more flexibility than [early career researchers]. So while in the early career stage, you need to kind of play the publishing game as well [...] I think we would like to do impact, but then we still need to make progress on publishing and collecting ABS stars and that sort of thing as well. (Participant 13)

Because of this focus on publications, and the inclusion of teaching activities in the mix, ECAs feel somewhat excluded from the impact agenda. As Participant 9, a junior member of staff said, “*at this stage for me, where I am at the moment, it's not something that I'm obliged to do, required to do*” (Participant 9). It was acknowledged that impact, in REF terms, might be something that takes a number of years to achieve:

The kind of impact the REF is talking about is usually something that you gain over a lot of time, certainly in the social sciences. You know, it's gaining a reputation and expertise that people start coming to you and then applying your ideas or applying your insights. And that doesn't generally happen when you're only three years into the job. For some lucky people it happens. (Participant 6)

It was commonly understood that, in many cases, junior academics are unlikely to be reprimanded for not considering impact overtly in their work at such an early stage. Research and teaching, on the other hand, take a much more explicit focus in terms of how performance is assessed:

It's okay if you haven't achieved anything that fills the box of perhaps service or impact if you have just started. (Participant 54)

If they're quite happy with early career staff, early career researchers focusing on sort of getting their profile right in terms of teaching, administration, learning, that kind of thing, that maybe impact isn't necessarily a priority. Because no one's emailing me every couple of weeks saying that, oh, you need to make sure that you sort of increase your impact. Whereas when I was teaching that was always there in terms of the course *evaluation surveys, those kind of things. And your research kind of speaks for itself based on whatever ranking system that the university uses.* (Participant 59)

Participant 51 felt that there was, in the majority of cases, no incentive to work on impact-related activities as an ECA. Again, it was felt that the priority for junior academics ultimately is building a research portfolio, if indeed they want to build esteem and have success as a researcher:

Getting into this kind of deep engagement with organisations and with governments and other institutions requires a lot of time and a lot of effort, and sometimes it pays off in terms of not only the impact as you've defined it, but also the research papers that count for promotion and tenure and all those different things. Sometimes it doesn't. So I think it's important, it's important to have a voice and to take part in the conversations and discussions around issues related to organisations and management. But I wouldn't blame a more junior colleague from abstaining from engaging with those type of deep engagement issues because they need to get the papers out. Unless they are an ethnographer or a qualitative researcher who will be able to use this content in research papers, there's no incentive to work on impact. (Participant 51)

5.6.1.2 Late career empowerment

Later-career academics inferred a much higher degree of autonomy in how they choose to spend their time. It is no surprise to learn that senior academics have more freedom than junior academics, of course. However, it is not only about the sort of work that may be allocated to a senior academic, but it is also about the level of status that is achieved when becoming a certain position and how this reduces the expectations to conform to certain prescriptions of activity. Although they may hold positions of responsibility, they do not need to prove themselves to the extent that junior colleagues do:

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. (Participant 38)

I would say, of course, my job is not manageable, but it's much more manageable than it would be if I were a junior faculty member at the moment. Oh, absolutely. You can actually choose... we're in a privileged position to, after a few years in academia, you learn to say no. Which is a valuable skill to have, and you're in a privileged position to know colleagues and to really focus on... once you get tenure, you really focus on the research subjects and topics and programmes that are interesting to you, and you focus on working with people with whom you feel a real vicinity and you want to learn from *them and you want them to learn from you. It's a very pleasant form of a slightly unmanageable position to be in, in some ways. Freedom is what drove me to academia. The more senior you become, paradoxically, the more freedom you have in terms of research and teaching load. Maybe less freedom you have institutionally in terms of responsibilities and accountability. But that's a fair price to pay.* (Participant 51)

Participant 49 spoke of what they called a "seniority bias", relating this to their own institution being "elite":

There's definitely an ingrained seniority… complex is too hard a word, but seniority bias, and I think that's something to do with [institution] being a kind of old, established, elite institution. So I think there's a kind of cultural aspect of seniority preference. (Participant 49)

There was evidence throughout the interviews of those in more senior roles having more discretion about how they spend their time. This freedom is highly valued and important to those who experience it:

Well, I'm in my 60s, so I don't really want to do [leadership roles] anymore. I've done them for a long time and I really want to, in the next five years, concentrate on writing, I think. So, I think there's a thing about what stage of the career you're on. I probably thought differently 20 years ago. (Participant 26)

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. (Participant 38)

Once you show that you can be an active researcher, I think that there are opportunities to redefine what it means to be a researcher. And then there are ways of, there are some interesting alternative sort of forms of publications, you can pursue different types of research or collaborations, both within but also outside of academia. (Participant 6)

Teaching is something that can become easier with time and experience, and this is something that was touched upon by some participants. This, in some cases, relates to teaching the same or similar modules and courses repeatedly for a number of years – reducing preparation time and becoming well-versed in delivering material. Teaching, marking, and other student-related activities can often be a source of overworking. Thus, for more senior academics, this opens up time to spend on other activities, such as research and impact:

We do have large classes and that's why our teaching, marking, admin, they all take more time. So yes, the load is geared towards teaching. But again, I'm saying, I've passed that stage. So after I passed that early career stage, the first four years, then because I spend a little bit less time preparing, I have this basic thing prepared, I update it every semester, that doesn't take as much time as that used to. Now I can utilise that time a bit towards more research, other impact activities. But in the first four years I used to work every weekend to meet my probation criteria. (Participant 56)

I could knock a module together pretty quickly. Some of those that have just joined academia, it takes a long time. (Participant 11)

Having an increased research reputation, which can come with becoming a senior academic, can in some cases lead to a reduced teaching load altogether:

I am not teaching at the moment because there just literally isn't enough hours in the day. So I haven't been teaching for a couple of years, primarily because the EU project has bought me out of it in order to be able to balance that and the leadership management role. (Participant 39)

Because senior academics have, in a sense, "proven themselves", they are arguably less restricted by the pressures and expectations that their junior colleagues experience. Of course, research-active senior academics are still expected to contribute to the REF, but generally they already have a well-established research profile. Publishing work may also become easier with experience – similar to teaching. Participant 11 openly acknowledged that the institutional pressure on them was reduced:

I would say the pressure is less that I feel any institutional pressure to perform, more that there is stuff I'd really like to get done. (Participant 11)

It was also inferred by a number of participants that impact activities are much more achievable for senior academics as opposed to ECA colleagues. For example, Participant 46 noted that a colleague who was known for being good at the impact side of things can focus on these activities because they are at "the top", and Participant 26 recalled that the impact case studies they had seen were related to professors:

I guess one of the reasons [that colleague who is good at impact activities] can focus so much on impact is because they're already at the top. (Participant 46)

I mean, the three [impact] cases that I know, people were doing [the impact work] for years anyway. I don't know. And they're all professors. So I don't know what's happening *lower down at lecturer level, what with whether behaviour is changing there. I think it's more difficult there because they are less likely to have contacts.* (Participant 26)

It was felt by some that impact is more conceivable for senior academics. It seemingly is the case that senior academics are perceived as having the right skills and the relevant experience to lead the way in the area of impact:

> *The expectation in school at this stage was, certainly for this current REF, which is obviously closed, was that the professors needed to lead on the impact cases, because that's almost by virtue of their skill and their craft of getting to that stage, they needed to demonstrate that there was some impact from what they were doing.* (Participant 41)

> *So I'm not a fresh early career researcher, so I don't think mKTPs are for early career researchers. So, it took me some time to get to the stage where I can do them.* (Participant 56)

This can, in some cases, also be reflected in the progression schemes within business schools. Participant 36 spoke about impact being a factor that is considered for promotions, but that it is something that becomes more important the higher up you are in the career ladder. This is attributed to a more developed research stream and thus more opportunities to engage with the impact agenda:

> *We have that impact and innovation aspect of all levels of the promotion scheme, right? And it becomes much more salient as you go up. So as a reader for example, you should have some sort of demonstrable interaction with the wider community. This could be, you know, media reports, or maybe you're on some sort of local council [...] and that is an essential focus of the promotion scheme, but more at the senior level. I mean, it's fine. A lot of, some of our junior staff have impact as well, but it is something that you sort of develop over time, right? I mean, you're developing your research stream and hopefully over time that becomes more impactful as well.* (Participant 36)

5.7 The business school environment and engaging with impact

This study adopts a stance that acknowledges the evidenced ability of individuals to make decisions and carry out behaviours based on their own assessment of the goings on around them, and thus individual responses to institutional environments can differ (e.g., Pache and Santos, 2013), but also recognises the argument that both institutional structures and organisational practices can inhibit autonomy to an extent. What is being described here resonates strongly with the concept of bounded autonomy – an "individuals' perceived free behavior curtailed by external criteria" (Folger *et al.*, 2013 p. 908).

Many respondents cited the ideas of flexibility and autonomy as factors that drew them into, and keep them within, an academic career:

> *Maybe if I'd have gone down a more traditional path, like, I wouldn't even have recognised the joy of having such high levels of autonomy and flexibility in this profession.* (Participant 42)

> *You have got flexibility, you interact with wonderful individuals with beautiful, inspirational minds [...] it's a luxurious lifestyle, and you have control over what you do and you own what you do. It can be daunting, it can feel overwhelming at times, but it's yours. You design it, you take ownership, you carry it through to the end. And once you see that materialise in either, you know, that dissertation that you're holding in front of you or that acceptance letter from a journal. My gosh, the joy. It's indescribable.* (Participant 7)

> *I get a huge amount of autonomy. I like teaching. I like writing. You know, I enjoy my subject. And I can choose what I want to write about, which is remarkable, because if you think, most jobs you have, you know, I've been a researcher in various other environments, I had no choice. And order from up high would descend on my desk saying, "you will write a report on the subject X by next Tuesday". And you'd just go off and do it. But here in academia, within reason, it's pretty much up to me.* (Participant 8)

It is important to note that such sentiments were not universally shared across the participants, especially those with enhanced administrative and/or teaching loads. Nevertheless, there were instances of this perceived autonomy – and indeed, in many instances, business school academics can choose what they research, design modules to fit their own interests, and, to an extent, engage in hybrid and flexible working. This represents autonomy and flexibility at a surface level, and of course, these types of autonomy and flexibility are important in their own right. However, he autonomy that was enjoyed by participants – that in a number of cases had inspired them into becoming academics – appeared in reality to be confined within the limits of the prescription of institutional logics. This is an example of bounded autonomy. This realisation came through in some of the language used by respondents – speaking about doing what they wanted to do "within reason" (Participant 37) or pursuing a research direction "as long as it gets published" (Participant 6). Participant 35 spoke about freedom in research – later on in the interview inferring that this is within the confines of having highly-ranked outputs for the school – which was bounded by temporal pressures from their teaching load:

> *In research, well, yeah, you are left to do what you want to do, basically. This term I haven't done very much research at all, because it's my very intense teaching term. And with moving online, it has made it much worse than normal. So currently my hours are kind of like nine to nine, just trying to deal with teaching related stuff.* (Participant 35)

The findings related to *seniority effects* lead to a proposition that those with more accumulated social capital, expertise, and successes (i.e., those in more senior positions) are, in many ways, able to exhibit greater bounded autonomy than others – and thus appear better positioned to navigate the coexisting logics that prevail. The sample consisted of 12 professors; the remaining 47 respondents were a mixture of less senior positions (associate professors/senior lecturers, lecturers, and research associates/postdoctoral fellows). There were differences between experiences of the academic environment between those senior academics in professorial positions and the remaining respondents who still had further career progression ahead.

As elucidated when discussing *late career empowerment*, senior academics appear to have more leverage for responding to the *accountability logic* than their less senior colleagues. By the time senior academics have made it to professor, and in some cases a senior leadership position within their school, they have effectively carved out their own status with "proof" that they are able to meet the fundamental requirements of the *academic profession logic*. The result is that by this point in their careers, senior academics have more flexibility to engage in activities that may be more aligned with their own personal interests and ambitions, as may be the case with impact – equally, in some cases, they can also seemingly choose to ignore it. This suggests a higher level of autonomy bounded within the constellation of the institutional system. Participant 39, a professor who held a significant leadership position, commented on the fact they had the prerogative to focus more on impact because their strengths did not lie in the domain of publishing:

> *I'm also probably less skilled at writing four star publications. What I find quite interesting, and I've actually framed my upcoming sabbatical very much around impact, is that if I'm going to write a four star impact case study, which I think I have the potential to do and the work to do and the context to do and the opportunity to do, then I need to have dedicated time and resources and support to do that. So I've been working very hard to construct that and sort of said, look, the cost to this is that you don't get as much academic publications out of me.* (Participant 39)

On the other hand, as explored when discussing *early career expectations*, less senior academics are more bound to the "rules of the game" in order to progress within the environment. It is these academics who appear to have less autonomy to engage with the *accountability logic* based on their interests and ambition and are even more bound by the *academic profession logic* because of the requirements to build a research reputation. In the institutional environment of business schools, with the *academic profession logic* and *business logic* being dominant, ECAs seemingly have much less scope to "ignore" them. They are still bound by a need to "prove themselves" and thus are less empowered in how they balance coexisting institutional pressures. Participant 29 remarked:

> *I think if you're a lecturer or a senior lecturer, [impact is] like a nice to have, it might be something you're trying to develop, but I think, I suspect for most of us, it's still "get the papers". There will be an impact narrative you can figure out later. And that's quite contentious, I think. So, we probably hope for the best, some of us, that we can figure out the impact narrative as we go along, but we've certainly got to get those papers.* (Participant 27)

5.8 Discussion and conclusion

In summary, this chapter has revealed that there are three particular facets of the *constrained environment* that business school academics operate in: *metrics & monitoring*, *administration & bureaucracy*, and *workload & wellbeing*. These facets and the *constrained environment* itself are a byproduct of an institutionally complex context: an environment that has a high centrality of institutional logics, that strongly prescribe specific behaviours and approaches, and thus create an intense working environment. Findings have suggested that autonomy – although not entirely diminished – is restricted (or "bounded") across the business schools represented in the sample. These restrictions appear to be felt more poignantly by junior academics who have less scope for action due to the specific pressures placed on ECAs. Thus, the ability to navigate the *constrained environment* and perform more autonomously within it is seemingly influenced by the stage of the academic career lifecycle a scholar finds themselves at. The notion of bounded autonomy means that engaging with the impact agenda is difficult, given the subservience of the *accountability logic* explored in Chapter 4, and is even more pronounced at an early career level.

A key contribution of this study is a clearer view of how the institutional system manifests in the working lives of business school academics, grounded in their own lived experiences. The findings regarding the *constrained environment* are supportive of previous studies that have looked at these issues in different circumstances. With regards to metrics, for example, Mingers and Willmott (2013 p. 1065) suggest that journal quality lists such as the ABS list "induces a narrowing of scholarship". Tourish (2011 p. 369) similarly argue that journal quality lists, being increasingly used within universities, "limit academic freedom, particularly by pushing people to prioritize publication in a select band of supposedly elite journals above others". Looking at the ABS list, Hussain (2015, p. 135) argued that strict use of the ABS list "could damage the long term growth and enrichment of the academic environment for a generation". Additionally, Walker *et al.* (2019 p. 743) highlight that the ABS list "is a product of a wider shift in research assessment towards more formal, measurement-based methods of assessment" and that the widespread use of rankings such as the ABS list by "higher education institutions themselves for promotion and performance assessment helps to create a self-reinforcing cycle of institutionalisation". The current study augments these findings and positions this phenomena within a wider context of constraints, making links to difficulties of also engaging with impact due to the metric-driven culture.

The current study also proposes that the logics explored in Chapter 4 are contributing to the *constrained environment*. With the *business logic*, for example, this can also be supported with previous research. Grossi *et al.* (2020) argued that a key aspect of the *business logic* is **"**accountability and control mechanisms" (p. 822) and that the *business logic* elevates "metrics and indicators" (p. 823). Indeed, this is what was seen as a manifestation in the environment in this study, arguably as a culmination not just of the *business logic* but all three of the logics identified in Chapter 4. The other two manifestations of the institutionally complex environment, *administration & bureaucracy* and *workload & wellbeing*, have also been focused on in previous work. For example, with regards to bureaucracy, Bristow *et al.* (2019 p. 244) noted the "temporal rigidification of academic lives through the bureaucratisation and standardisation of working practices" which are "boosted by the routine management of academic labour and the growing administration that academics have to manage". Issues with work-life balance in academia has also received attention – Rosa (2022 p. 56) highlighted that "the large-scale organisational changes in the neoliberalised university accompany increasingly stressful work ruled by standards of academic excellence". The current study makes the link between these issues and the difficulties in engaging in the impact agenda.

The idea that ECAs have less agency to engage with the impact agenda was evident throughout the transcripts and resonates with previous work. Sutherland (2017), for example, studied early career researchers across three countries and found research productivity to be key for these academics in determining career success. This view of an unequivocal favouritism for publication outputs for rising the ranks in academia by ECAs has a great influence on what they feel they must prioritise at an early stage in order to "make their mark". In Sutherland's study, influencing public behaviour and connecting with the community were seen as subjective markers of career success. Another study by Marcella *et al.* (2018) found that early and mid-career academics, despite having eagerness to be impactful, were short of institutional support for engaging in research impact and found research impact to be an ambiguous concept. In a similar vein, Savage (2013 p. 198) highlighted that "for most early career researchers the goal is to obtain a permanent position in academia which requires publishing articles in refereed journals, gaining teaching experience and participating in disciplinary conferences *[…]* public engagement activities, while perhaps desirable, are not seen as integral to gaining an academic post and therefore developing the skills to engage with non-academic groups successfully is not seen as a high priority by either researchers themselves or their host institutions". Additionally, Smith and Stewart (2017 p. 120), in their study of social policy academics, pointed out that it may be "riskier for earlier career academics to engage in the kinds of activities required to achieve impact"

In terms of senior academics, Holbrook (2017 p. 4) argues that "provided that minimal standards are met, the tenured scholar is generally safe to go about her or his business of teaching and research without too many external constraints". Furthermore, Smith and Stewart (2017 p. 120) suggested that "when it comes to providing policy advice, a small number of senior academics tend to occupy privileged positions" for academics working within social policy. These sentiments are supportive of the current study's findings regarding enhanced autonomy for those in more senior positions.

To conclude this chapter, three potential avenues for future research are put forward. First, it may be worth looking at the themes of autonomy and the impact agenda in the context of less research-intensive universities. Looking at universities within the Russell group provided a level of homogeneity for the current study but meant that any conclusions drawn here are limited to research-intensive institutions. It would be interesting to understand how institutions that are more driven by teaching than research engage with the impact agenda, given the unique pressures they are also under. Second, it would be fruitful for a more in-depth investigation looking specifically at ECAs who have been able to adequately engage with the impact agenda and understand what institutional structures or individual circumstances were in place to facilitate them. Finally, it could be useful for a study to look more specifically at individual-level strategies for navigating the *constrained environment*. All business school academics exist within this environment, despite the idea that it may be easier to navigate for those who are more senior, but nevertheless, it is plausible that coping mechanisms differ across different individuals.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Revisiting the research aims

The overall purpose of this thesis, as stated in the introduction, is to examine the impact agenda in the context of business schools, both in terms of the academic discourse related to impact and relevance in business schools and understanding the lived experiences of those organisational actors (i.e., business school academics) who are navigating this agenda "on-the-ground". This aim was split across three academic papers, seen in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. The following subsections will revisit each of these papers in light of their stated research aims.

The overall aim of the first paper, in Chapter 3, was to review and synthesise the current knowledge base in the domain of business schools and the relevance and impact of the knowledge they produce and disseminate in their research and education activities. This aim was accompanied by two research objectives. The first one was to synthesise and thematically analyse the wide spectrum of literature in the area of the relevance and impact of business school research and education in order to generate themes that encompass the multidimensionality of business schools. The second one was to extend the synthesis, and contribute to advancing the business school literature, by identifying theoretical directions for the future and topics in need of empirical investigation led by a holistic thematic framework.

The first paper adopted a systematic literature review methodology (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003) in order to meet the research aim and the two objectives. Following a systematic search using predefined keywords in three databases (Business Source Premier, Scopus, and Web of Science Core Collections) and the application of strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, 266 peer-reviewed academic journal articles were part of the review. A descriptive analysis of the journal articles gave some interesting insights. It was found that academic interest in the relevance and impact of business schools had increased considerably from the early 1990s up to the time of the literature search in March 2021. It was also found that over half of the academic journal articles were from the European context, with very little representation from Africa or South America. The most frequent journal represented in the sample of academic journal articles was the *Academy of Management Learning & Education* with twenty-six in total, whereas the most common article types were conceptual (n = 97) and qualitative studies (n = 96). Over 60% of the articles in the sample focused on business school research (as opposed to education, both, or "other") and the majority of the articles had no specific management subdiscipline of focus. A variety of theoretical lenses were used across the sample of academic journal articles, but over 30% had no specified or explicit theoretical lens. The first paper also took stock of previous reviews in this area in order to elucidate the context of the systematic literature review as well as highlight the knowledge gap that necessitated it. It was noted that good progress has been made in the development of this field, however, previous reviews in this area were markedly different from the one in this thesis, in terms of both the focus and the objectives.

A thematic analysis of the literature resulted in the identification of four literature streams that encapsulate the different ways that relevance and impact have been discussed in the business school context. These streams are: (1) the business school environment; (2) criticism of core business school activities; (3) proposals for enhancing relevance; and (4) fundamental elements of relevant knowledge. It was found that there was a distinct lack of cross-fertilisation between the literature focused on research and the literature focused on education (i.e., the literature base was seldom viewing business schools in their entirety). Nevertheless, the four literature streams identified were conceptualised as, together, forming a bigger picture of the so-called relevance problem.

The first literature stream, the business school environment, was found to be a contributing factor to the relevance problem. This stream was referred to as "the *Source*". This reflects the interest in diagnosing the problems of achieving relevance experienced by business schools. It was found that various authors had pointed to the institutional environment, and the variety of pressures on business school academics, makes it a challenge for business school academics to balance the competing tasks of being scientifically rigorous yet practically relevant. Related to this phenomenon is the theme of legitimacy; rigour and relevance can be conceptualised as two conflicting sources of legitimacy, with implications for the academic environment. The overall theme within this stream was *co-existing expectations*, with three sub-themes: *publishing expectations*, *education expectations*, and *impact expectations*.

The second literature stream, the criticism of core business school activities, was found to consist of discussions that either explicitly criticise business schools or analyse the criticism. This stream was referred to as the "*Problems*". The criticism revolves around a lack of relevant knowledge production. It was found that the literature was skewed towards criticism of research activities, with less focus on criticising education activities. Within the theme of *research activities*, criticism generally arose in the areas of *research outputs* and *dissemination*, whereas within the theme of *education activities*, criticism generally arose in the areas of *MBA programmes* and *executive education*.

The third literature stream, the proposals for enhancing relevance, was found to consist of hypotheses, speculation, and recommendations of how the so-called relevance problem could be improved. This stream was referred to as "the *Solutions*". There is a sense of hope and optimism in the academic journal articles that discuss these prospects, with a central argument that things can be done to make business schools more relevant and impactful. It was found that, as could be reasonably expected, the proposals for enhancing relevance were in one of two camps: research *or* education. Two overall themes emerged here: *Mode 2 research*, consisting of ideas related to *design science*, *engaged scholarship*, *action research*, *pragmatism*, *critical realism*, and *interdisciplinarity*, and *curriculum and pedagogy improvements*, consisting of ideas related to *social responsibility in teaching*, *action learning*, and *practice-focused education*. It was also noted that two forms of stakeholder engagement were discussed in the literature: *direct stakeholder engagement*, consisting of *knowledge co-production*, and *indirect stakeholder engagement*, consisting of *knowledge transfer*. However, it was noted that there was only a tentative connection observed in the literature between the theme of *knowledge co-production* and the education-focused proposals for relevant knowledge production.

The fourth literature stream, the fundamental elements of relevant knowledge, encapsulates the central facets of what relevant knowledge is. This literature stream was referred to as "the *Outcome*". The elements identified in this literature stream are seemingly the base criteria for business school outputs to be determined as relevant and impactful beyond academia. The overarching theme of this literature stream was *relevant and impactful knowledge*, consisting of *solution focus*, *societal value*, and *visibility*.

A holistic thematic framework was developed to go beyond the identified literature streams by augmenting the development of our knowledge of business schools with some of the relevant theoretical considerations for advancing the business school literature. This involved four aspects. First, reconceptualising the expectations identified in the *Source* literature stream as comprising of coexisting institutional logics. Second, taking into consideration the lack of cross-fertilisation between discussions related to research and education, a hypotheses was put forward for framing business and management as a temporally dominant discipline. Third, an argument was put forward for understanding the plethora of suggestions of how business schools can enhance their relevance and impact in the wider context of value co-creation. Finally, after analysing the components of what is discussed related to knowledge being relevant and impactful, an inclusive definition of relevant and impactful knowledge was generated: "knowledge that assists in solving problems (solution focus), experienced by those in practice and society (societal value), that is readily available to and usable by those who need it (visibility)".

The overall aim of the second paper, in Chapter 4, was to understand the institutional landscape of business schools and the implications of this for the notion of impact as perceived by individual-level actors within the environment. This aim was accompanied by two research objectives. The first one was to identify the nature, salience, and prescriptions of the different institutional logics in the environment of business schools. The second one was to explore how the institutional logics shape perceptions and understandings of individual-level actors in relation to impact in business schools.

The second paper adopted an exploratory qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, using semi-structured interviews as the data collection method and a Gioia methodology (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) inspired approach to thematic analysis for analysing the data. This paper was motivated by calls to build our knowledge of business schools' institutional environment (e.g., Hommel and Thomas, 2014; Paterson *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, it was important to recognise the extent of the institutional environment given the multidimensional nature of business schools (Jensen and Wang, 2018) and the range of activities they engage in. Some previous authors who have focused on institutional complexity and institutional logics in the business school environment have focused exclusively on research activities within the context of the rigour-relevance gap (e.g., Bullinger *et al.*, 2015; Kieser, 2011; Paterson *et al.*, 2018) without an explicit consideration for the simultaneous educational and teaching pressures bestowed upon business school academics. In addition to this, there is a lack of empirically grounded understanding of how institutional logics are perceived and understood at the level of the individual. Indeed, there is a lack of empirical research into institutional logics in the business school context generally (Paterson *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of previous research into the notion of impact in the business school context (Lejeune *et al.*, 2019).

Through the analysis of interview data, it was discovered that three logics seemingly saturate the institutional environment of business schools: the *academic profession logic*, the *business logic*, and the *accountability logic*. The *academic profession logic* was found to be grounded in the notion of *academic reputation*, with a culture of comparing outputs and achievements between individuals and schools. This culture embedded a feeling of individual worth being contingent on publications among participants, and this being centred around academic journal rankings such as the ABS list. This manifests in the *academic progression structures* within business schools, whereby the priorities of the research-intensive institution are reflected and embedded in performance appraisal mechanisms. This has led to what has been termed in this thesis as the "superficial balanced scorecard", a phenomenon in which, although there is an espoused focus on a balance of factors for progression, in reality it is the publications that will get an individual over the line to the next stage of their career. Teaching and administrative duties are felt by some to be a hygiene factor for progression, whereas impact-focused activities are seen largely as optional or those endeavours that are reserved for the few who are well-versed in this area. As such, the *academic profession logic* prescribes behaviours related to publishing in highly ranked academic journals.

The *business logic* was found to be grounded in the *economic goals of the institution*, with business schools being in a unique position as "cash cows" of the wider university. Participants commented of the pressures on business schools to maintain a high number of students to contribute to the financial position of the institution. This translates into increasing pressures on individual academics with increasing student numbers. The economic pressures that underpin the *business logic* are also evident in the concerns for research assessment, in the form of the REF, and the associated research income that comes with performing well. Furthermore, participants reported that emphasis is put on securing research funding in the form of grants by the business school. This economic and financial focus is reflected in the experiences of the "marketisation" of HE whereby students are increasingly being seen as "customers" instead of learners. The trend of marketisation is also felt with regards to the metrics used to measure research and the introduction of things such as impact case studies, which attempt to monetise academic labour and thus presents academic outputs as a commodity.

The *accountability logic* was found to be grounded in *external pressures for evidenced engagement*, which has emerged with the formalisation of the impact agenda as part of the REF. Impact assessment, in the form of impact case studies, has created a requirement for business schools to evidence their own impactful activities, and thus there is more pressure – at the level of the school at least – to be more accountable. Sentiments in the interviews showed that there is a general understanding that this is largely due to the need to justify research funding. Other forms of funding, such as from individual organisations, may also come with an expectation to provide actionable outputs which also feeds into the *accountability logic*. These pressures manifest in an *institutional narrative*, whereby impact is celebrated and promoted in the discourse of an institution. It was found that business schools encourage knowledge exchange and impact activities within their narratives, although there are not always necessarily the structures in place to make this available to everyone.

It was discovered that the institutional environment has fostered an institutionally driven perception of impact composed of three ways impact is observed. First, impact was perceived as an elusive concept – difficult to define and difficult to evidence. What individual academics may feel is impactful in their everyday working lives may not fit with the institutionally favoured description of impact, as per the likes of impact case studies. Furthermore, there is a lack of common understanding of what impact is or what it necessarily refers to. Second, impact was perceived as a non-primary mission – perhaps due to the subservience of the *accountability logic*. It was felt to be an additional tension on top of research, teaching, and administrative duties. In this vein, it was felt to be a "nice to have" – essentially, it is good to show that you have impact in your research, but not doing so is not necessarily going to hold you back. Thus, impact was seen as being non-mandatory. Finally, impact was perceived as something measurable – although there was understanding that not all impact can or should be measured, the way that the *accountability logic* prescribes impact-related activities creates a significant preference for measurable outputs. As a result, educational impact was excluded from the impact narrative. Impact through education in many cases would be difficult to measure or evidence, and there is no significant expectation to measure such impact in any case.

It was therefore found that an institutionally complex environment exists – three institutional logics that, to an extent, can co-exist, but they also prescribe different behaviours and in ways are conflicting. This is reflective of a large variety of different pressures and expectations placed upon business school academics. Furthermore, there are clear consequences of the institutional prescriptions for impact and how impact that is more organic – and perhaps less measurable – in nature is excluded from the agenda.

The overall aim of the third paper, in Chapter 5, was to explore how the complex institutional environment of business schools' manifests in the lives of organisational actors (i.e., business academics) and shapes their experiences of, and degree of autonomy in, engaging with the impact agenda. This aim was accompanied by two research objectives. The first one was to explore what constrains individual-level actors in business schools in balancing core academic activities with being impactful on society and practice. The second one was to explore how the constraints experienced are perceived and navigated across the academic career lifecycle.

Similar to the second paper, the third paper assumed an exploratory qualitative approach to the collection and analysis of data, utilising semi-structured interviews as the method for data collection and a Gioia methodology (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) inspired approach to thematic analysis for the analysis of data. This paper was motivated by a desire to better understand what is constraining business school academics from engaging with the impact agenda, given the plethora of criticism that has been aimed at business schools about the impact of the knowledge they produce and disseminate on society and practice. Furthermore, with regards to autonomy, it has been examined how the impact agenda can contribute to a constrain on autonomy how research is approached (Chubb *et al.*, 2017), yet there is a lack of empirical understanding of the reverse of this relationship – how a constrain on autonomy in itself can complicate engaging with the impact agenda. In other words, it is unclear how the other aspects of academic life can shape the ability of academics to fully engage with the agenda. Given the rapidly changing academic environment, it is important to understand how academics are able to negotiate the various expectations they experience (Balaban and de Jong, 2023).

Through the analysis of interview data, it was discovered that business school academics do indeed exist in a *constrained environment* whereby the multiplicity of logics and the associated expectations and activities create a specific course of action for what is deemed successful. Furthermore, this *constrained environment* manifests in the everyday working lives of business school academics across three themes: *metrics & monitoring*, *administration & bureaucracy*, and *workload & wellbeing*. With regards to the metrics, business school academics exist within an environment where metrics are used as a gauge for performance, both in relation to the research *and* education sides of the job. It is widely felt that, due to the intensity of the expectations, institutions are somewhat “obsessed” with these metrics as a means to make progression decisions. With regards to bureaucracy, the variety of different parts of academic life, and the increasing managerialism of universities in the UK, means that there is an increasing burden on academic staff to spend large amounts of time on administrative tasks. It is also felt that universities are bureaucratic machines, with many rules, regulations, and layers of decision-making. With regards to workloads, business school academics perform multifaceted roles with changing requirements, and in many cases unmanageable workloads were reported by participants as a result. A consequence of this for many are a poor work-life balance and feelings of stress and burnout.

It was also found that *seniority effects* can interact with this *constrained environment*; it was found that those in more senior positions are generally better equipped to navigate the institutional constraints. This is due to distinct *early career expectations*; there is a “prove yourself” mentality in academia, in that at an early stage of the career, there are strict expectations in terms of publications and building a research reputation. This means that junior academics are largely preoccupied with playing the academic “game”. This appears in contrast to *late career empowerment*, whereby there appears to be an enhanced level of autonomy later on in the academic career lifecycle. Senior academics were found to have already conformed to institutional prescriptions at the earlier stages of their career, and as such, with a built-up research portfolio, had more perceived freedom in how they navigate different parts of the job. As such, it was generally felt that engaging with the impact agenda is more conceivable, and achievable, for senior academics.

The findings regarding the *constrained environment* resonated strongly with the idea of *bounded autonomy*. Indeed, many aspects of an academic career are inherently flexible, but many of these flexibilities are within the limits of what is institutionally prescribed. This is seen strongly in research, whereby although there are many freedoms in choosing what to research, this choice is strongly expected to still result in publications in highly ranked academic journals. The findings with regards to *seniority effects* lead to a proposition that those with more accumulated social capital and success – those in more senior positions – are generally able to experience greater bounded autonomy than others. Thus, they appear better situated to navigate the prevailing coexisting logics. Thus, senior academics appear to have more leverage for enacting the *accountability logic* than those who are less senior.

6.2 Theoretical implications

As explored in the previous section, it is clear that the thesis has met the intended aims and objectives. However, it is important to expand this inward view of the achievements of the thesis itself to an outward view that contemplates what contributions this thesis makes to the wider theoretical understanding of business schools and the impact agenda. It is hoped that the findings of this thesis can inform future researchers within this domain, and also inspire the appropriate use of an institutional theory lens for exploring some of these issues going forward.

It has been noted in this thesis, and it is common knowledge, that business schools are multidimensional and complex entities (Jensen and Wang, 2018) with various avenues of focus and activity. It was therefore a primary goal of this thesis to conceptualise and investigate business schools as a unit of analysis that takes stock of these different avenues. Thus, in each paper of the thesis, it was important to consider the role of the educational side of the academic portfolio and how this may interplay with research and impact pressures. It was particularly noted in Chapter 3 that discussions related to relevance and impact are commonly divided between either research *or* education, and that the rigour-relevance debate also follows this pattern. Furthermore, examinations of rigour and relevance utilising the lens of an institutional logics approach have focused exclusively on the research-impact tensions (e.g., Bullinger *et al.*, 2015; Kieser, 2011; Paterson *et al.*, 2018). This thesis, therefore, contributes with a rounded approach to studying business schools as a unit of analysis with an institutional approach. Approaching business schools with a view to elucidate their multidimensionality meant that participants for the empirical chapters drew on the entire spectrum of a business school academics' experience, which undoubtedly has generated rich insights that would have been lost if this was not the case. In the case of Gebreiter and Hidayah (2019), a more holistic approach was also taken to understanding institutional logics, in that business schools were viewed with respect to both research and education. They discussed professional and commercial logics, the latter being akin to the *business logic* explored in this thesis. However, instead of a professional logic, this thesis conceptualised the environment as having an *academic profession logic* that is an instantiation of a hybrid market-professional institutional order rather than just the institutional order of the profession, and an *accountability logic* that is an instantiation of the institutional order of the state.

In this vein, given the holistic view that has been adopted for business schools as a unit of analysis, this thesis contributes to the wider conceptual understanding of impact and how business school academics may approach this. This thesis lends support to the findings of Johnson and Orr (2020) who argued that the mode of impact that the likes of the REF promotes only account for a minority of the ways in which impact can be achieved. In their own empirical study, participants spoke of impact through education and teaching as often being overlooked. As such, the participants who engaged in interviews for this thesis were able to talk about the education side of their jobs, and some contemplated how the idea of impact could be related to this. Yet, as found with Johnson and Orr (2020), participants felt that this is something that is not deemed sufficient for, or particularly relevant to, the impact agenda – despite the idea that business school graduates are arguably the first "line" of impact from knowledge produced by business schools (Wickert *et al.*, 2021). This finding related to the dismissal of educational impact has been augmented by the institutional lens applied for this thesis. The findings related to the institutional logics can show a direct impact of the prescriptions of these logics and how impact related to education is perceived and judged by those who are faced with navigating the impact agenda at an individual level. In other words, how individuals make *sense* of the impact agenda. Sensemaking refers to "the process through which people work to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way violate expectations" (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014 p. 57). The impact agenda, as discussed, is a relatively novel phenomenon in that it has only become formalised since the introduction of the REF, and as such, it has been demonstrated how actors at the individual-level have made sense of this in light of the institutional forces at play. Other works have emphasised the importance of highlighting the relationship between institutional logics and individual sensemaking (e.g., Bévort and Suddaby, 2016; Gautier *et al.*, 2023; Hemme *et al.*, 2020).

There are also wider theoretical implications with regards to the individual-level view taken when exploring institutional logics. Where other studies of institutional complexity have, for example, looked at the level of the organisation (e.g., Bjerregaard and Jonasson, 2014; Greenwood *et al.*, 2010), with regards to neo-institutional theory, the focus on individuals is arguably lacking (Bévort and Suddaby, 2016; Suddaby, 2010). Indeed, it has been argued that "the previous two decades of institutional logic research have been focused on field-level studies that remain vague or silent about the connection between logics and human behaviour at the micro-level" (Hemme *et al.*, 2020 p. 101). Thornton *et al.* (2012) pointed out that social actors are critical to understanding institutional processes, positing that their "model of human behaviour views social actors as embedded in social, cultural, and political structures and as guided by cognitively bounded identities and goals" (p. 80). Thus, this thesis contributes to a seemingly under researched element of the institutional logics approach and wider neoinstitutional theory. The findings have demonstrated that institutional complexity can manifest in a *constrained environment* for those individual-level actors, and this can constrain autonomy for enacting the *accountability logic* in business schools. This complements the notion that "institutional logics shape individual preferences, organisational interests, and the categories and repertoires of actions to attain those interests and preferences" (Thornton *et al.*, 2012 p. 77) – and it was found that these organisational interests in particular have geared business school academics towards particular courses of action. Furthermore, this bounded autonomy is contingent on the level of experience and accumulated social capital of an individual within the environment, providing evidence that contextual factors can greatly influence how individuals navigate coexisting logics.

Another theoretical contribution of the thesis is focused on the idea of autonomy and, specifically, bounded autonomy. Sahlin (2012) argues that "many universities and university systems around the globe have recently been subject to extensive organisational and regulatory reforms" (p. 198) and that "with much dependence on external funding, strengthened top management and the proliferation of assessments and measurements, autonomy is clearly bounded" (p. 214). The findings of this thesis support this notion but augments the overall idea of bounded autonomy in universities by proposing that this bounded autonomy permeates the boundary of the organisation and top management, or "universities and university leaders" as Sahlin (2012, p. 214) refers to, and reaches those on-the-ground individual actors. The findings related to autonomy complement those of Vican *et al.* (2020). Similar to Gebreiter and Hidayah (2019), they explored corporate and professional logics in HE, but instead they looked across a range of disciplines. They posit that academia is traditionally perceived as a profession with a high degree of autonomy, as per the professional logic, but the corporate logic is a threat to this autonomy. They highlight this intrusion on autonomy through administrative control that "supports increased use of metrics and assessment at the organisational and individual levels, via focus on institutional rankings and accounting of faculty work" (Vican *et al.*, 2020 p. 158). In this thesis, this constraint on individuals has been related to the phenomenon of the impact agenda.

6.3 Practical implications

On a practical level, there are certain findings in this thesis that could inform policies and approaches within universities and business schools. Indeed, the HE landscape in the UK has gone through a dramatic transformation in recent times with regards to funding and how HEIs are audited. Universities and business schools are, in a sense, still "finding their feet" when it comes to the impact agenda and how this should be navigated at an *organisational* level.

The findings of this thesis include the idea that the institutional logics prevalent in the environment have created an impression that impact through education is less viable or important than impact through research. Business schools often signify that they are hubs for developing future leaders and entrepreneurs, so in the spirit of them carrying out this important role, they should actively look to seek out examples of "impactful education" and elevate the importance of this in terms of teaching evaluations. The TEF has a section on student outcomes, whereby institutions can submit, for example, "positive feedback from graduates or alumni about how their higher education experiences have enhanced their knowledge, skills, personal development or careers" (Office for Students, 2022 p. 33), which indeed can be seen as impact. Yet, such sentiments may be difficult to tie to individual staff members or learning units. As such, it may be appropriate for business schools to design their own systems for assessing practical relevance and impact in teaching and incorporating this into how they approach the impact agenda. This would be a positive step forward in appreciating those academics who see teaching as their most impactful activity but are currently feeling as though this does not meet the criteria for "impact" as prescribed by the institutional environment. Celebrating educational impact in this way could help to create some flexibility in how impact is perceived and understood by individual academics.

There are also findings related to how the academic environment in business school can constrain individuals and thus impede their ability to engage with the impact agenda. If universities and business schools truly want their academics to take impact seriously, there needs to be thought put into how issues related to metrics, administrative burdens, and workload are handled in order to promote an impact-focused culture. At the moment, there are seemingly many forces that hold academics back from being able to identify with the impact agenda. This would by no means be an easy task, but certain things, such as carving out allocated time in WAMs for impact and engagement activities could be a positive step for the agenda.

Finally, it was suggested from the interviews that those in more senior positions are able to exercise more autonomy within the limits of what is expected, and thus have a greater ability to engage with the impact agenda and the *accountability logic*. ECAs, on the other hand, are bound by the rules of the game to an extent that feasibly engaging with impact activities would potentially be at the expense of progression. If business schools wish for impact to be an equitable endeavour across all stages of the academic lifecycle, then consideration needs to be given to the requirements of ECAs and how these requirements are communicated. Furthermore, it seems from the findings that there are certain academics who are "better" at the engagement part of the academic career portfolio, and this arguably is something that can come with experience and seniority in some cases. To lessen the feeling that impact is something reserved for an “exclusive club” of academics, more training opportunities for knowledge exchange and engaging with society and practice should be a priority for universities and business schools.

6.4 Limitations and avenues for future research

The focus of this thesis has been very much on research-intensive business schools, and this formed the context in which data was collected. Although this ensured a certain degree of homogeneity in the sample, in which participants were experiencing similar institutional environments, this leaves questions about how pressures and expectations are experienced by those operating in teaching-focused institutions. A comparative study of the two groups of institutions could have yielded interesting results to this effect. Thus, future research in this area could consider the institutional environment of teaching-focused universities and how the impact agenda has become institutionalised within them. In a similar vein, the focus of this thesis has been on universities in the UK. Findings have been embedded in the context of the UK’s specific research assessment tool, the REF. Similar investigations in different geographical contexts could be interesting, such as in other contexts with formalised research assessments (e.g., the “Performance-Based Research Fund” in New Zealand) or in developing nations to offer a different perspective.

In total, there were seventeen management sub-disciplines represented in the sample. Business schools are an amalgamation of different subjects, and as such, it was deemed appropriate to interview academics from a variety of these subjects. Some sub-disciplines, such as organisational behaviour, were only represented by one participant, whereas marketing, for example, was represented by nine participants. It was also not part of the interviews to try and find out specific information related to sub-disciplines as they relate to the impact agenda. As such, it was not the aim of this thesis to account for any differences or nuances between disciplines. It may be useful for future research to look more in-depth at particular sub-disciplines within business schools, given that they may feasibly have differences that this thesis has not considered.

Finally, although the transcripts of the interviews were littered with discussion on how the impact agenda is inaccessible and elusive, there was much less discussion of success stories. There were some participants who had very successfully engaged in the impact agenda, but a lot of the discussion around impact throughout the sample was based on perception rather than explicit experience. It would be useful for future studies to explicitly focus on interviewing academics who have engaged with the impact case study process to garner more insight into what structural and personal factors help to encourage impactful work in business schools. It would be fruitful to understand how those who have been successful in this area have navigated the different manifestations of the coexisting institutional logics.

Appendix A Interview guide

NB: The semi-structured approach to the interviews meant that the below interview guide was indeed only used to give a rough idea of how the interview could proceed, but in practice, the interviews were very much based around responding to what the participant was mentioning and what was important to them. Furthermore, the interview guide developed and evolved throughout the research in response to emerging themes. As such, the interview guide shown below is a summarised version that takes into account how the interview guide developed throughout the research. The below points are worded as questions but are meant to signify more general discussion points and in many cases were asked in different ways.

Introductory section
✓ Please could you tell me about yourself in terms of your background, career and current role? ✓ What led you into this career path? ✓ [If from a different disciplinary background] did you envisage yourself ending up in a business school?
Responsibilities
✓ What kind of responsibilities do you have? ✓ How much of your time to you spend on different activities? ✓ What is required of you? ✓ What is expected of you? ✓ What kind of pressures do you experience? ✓ What administrative roles do you have?
Impact
✓ What stance does the business school take towards impact? ✓ Does the impact agenda filter down to your role? ✓ Do you feel an expectation to be impactful in your research? ✓ Is it clear how to go about engaging with the impact agenda? ✓ What does impact mean? ✓ [If confident about engaging with the impact agenda] why is that the case?
Career
✓ What do you need to do to progress?

✓ What is the most important thing to the business school? ✓ [If senior] what did you have to do to get to where you are now? Did you have a strategy? ✓ [If senior] what advice would you give to a junior academic?
Navigation
✓ What is your workload like? ✓ How do you manage your workload? ✓ Do you have a strategy or do you take things more day-by-day? ✓ How do you decide what to spend time on?

Appendix B Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Include	Exclude
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Journal articles without peer-review; conference papers; book chapters; working papers
Articles that bear some relevance to the topic and objectives of the review	Articles that do not bear any relevance to the topic and objectives of the review
Quantitative research; qualitative research; mixed method research; conceptual papers; review papers	Viewpoint papers
Articles from journals ranked in the ABS Academic Journal Guide 2018 as 4*, 4, 3, 2, or 1	Articles from journals that are not included in the ABS Academic Journal Guide 2018

Appendix C List of previous reviews

Author(s)	Year	Type	Summary	Focus
Hemsley-Brown	2004	Literature review	A review of the literature pertaining to the utilisation of research across three sectors: management, education, and medicine. Suggested that there is a tension between those producing new knowledge (academics) and those who use new knowledge (practitioners) which can be attributed to a difference in the goals of these two groups.	Research
Oesterle and Laudien	2007	Literature review	A review of the discussion of the future of international business research with a focus on practical relevance. Suggested that international business research, as a “young” discipline, lacks both legitimacy and a strong link between theory and practice.	Research
Rubin and Dierdorff	2013	Literature review	A review of the literature pertaining to MBA programmes from the *Academy of Management Learning & Education*. Highlighted previous literature that has emphasised insufficiencies in the MBA curriculum related to excessive focus on *shareholder* value and not enough on *stakeholder* value.	Education
van Weele and van Raaij	2014	Literature review	A review of purchasing and supply management literature under the lens of rigour and relevance. Argued that there are ways in which the research methods used in this field can advance and initiate enhanced relevance and rigour.	Research

Kieser, Nicolai and Seidl	2015	Literature review	A review of the literature pertaining to the relevance of business school research with the aims of: (1) evaluating articles that suggest ways of solving the relevance problem; (2) evaluating articles that concentrate on the interplay between business school research and practice; and (3) drawing on the evidence to develop a research programme to encourage the utilisation of business school research.	Research
Pettigrew and Starkey	2016	Literature review	A review of the literature pertaining to the legitimacy and impact of business schools. Acknowledged the interconnectedness of legitimacy and impact and noted the excess of viewpoint articles in this area that reflect on personal experiences instead of empirical findings.	Both
Carton and Mouricou	2017	Systematic literature review	A systematic literature review of the rigour-relevance debate in top-tier journals. Acknowledged that various positions on the rigour-relevance problem co-exist and are consistently repeated. Raised issues such as dissemination and collaboration.	Research
Brammer, Branicki, Linnenluecke and Smith	2019	Literature review	A review of business school research related to “grand challenges” to examine the extent to which business school researchers contribute to significant global problems. Suggested that barriers for engaging in grand challenges research include the complexity of grand challenges and the difficulty of publishing interdisciplinary research in top-tier management journals.	Research

De Frutos-Belizón, Martín-Alcázar and Sánchez-Gardey	2019	Literature review	A review of the literature pertaining to the different perspectives put forward to bridge the gap between business school research and practice. Identifies several different perspectives within this area and argues that the one-sided discussion between scholars is stifling the development of the research-practice debate, calling for the involvement of the professional community in order to fully understand the gap from both sides.	Research
Lambert	2019	Literature review	A review of the literature pertaining to the relevance of business school research with a focus on logistics and supply chain management. Suggests that scholars need to build relationships with policymakers and executives, and that journal editors in this area should avoid following some other management subdisciplines which produce less practically useful research outputs.	Research
Moeini, Rahrovani and Chan	2019	Multimethod review	A review of information systems strategy research using a framework of "potential practical relevance". Argues that relevance should be considered in topic selection, knowledge creation, knowledge translation, and knowledge dissemination.	Research
Anderson, Thorpe and Coleman	2020	Systematic literature review	A systematic literature review of a 24-year period of articles from *Management Learning*. Argues that research has moved away from an applied focus on management development to a more theoretical approach to the field, and consequently the connection with practice has been weakened. Urges critical	Both

			reflection and for researchers to be more outward-looking.	
Svanberg	2020	Literature review	A review of logistics and supply chain management journals in order to produce guidance for demonstrating practical relevance. Advocates for research in this area to be problem-driven, timely, important, and implementable for practitioners.	Research
Ungureanu and Bertolotti	2020	Literature review	A review of the theory-practice debate among business school academics. Argued that scholars and practitioners are represented as separate and incompatible groups. Proposed an alternative way of understanding the relationship between theory and practice that involves different boundary-spanning strategies for exchanging knowledge.	Both
Govender and Vaaland	2022	Literature review	A review of the literature pertaining to work-integrated learning in business schools. Argued that gaps exist between the business school domain and the business domain which are related to, among other factors, irrelevant curriculum and a lack of institutional support.	Education

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