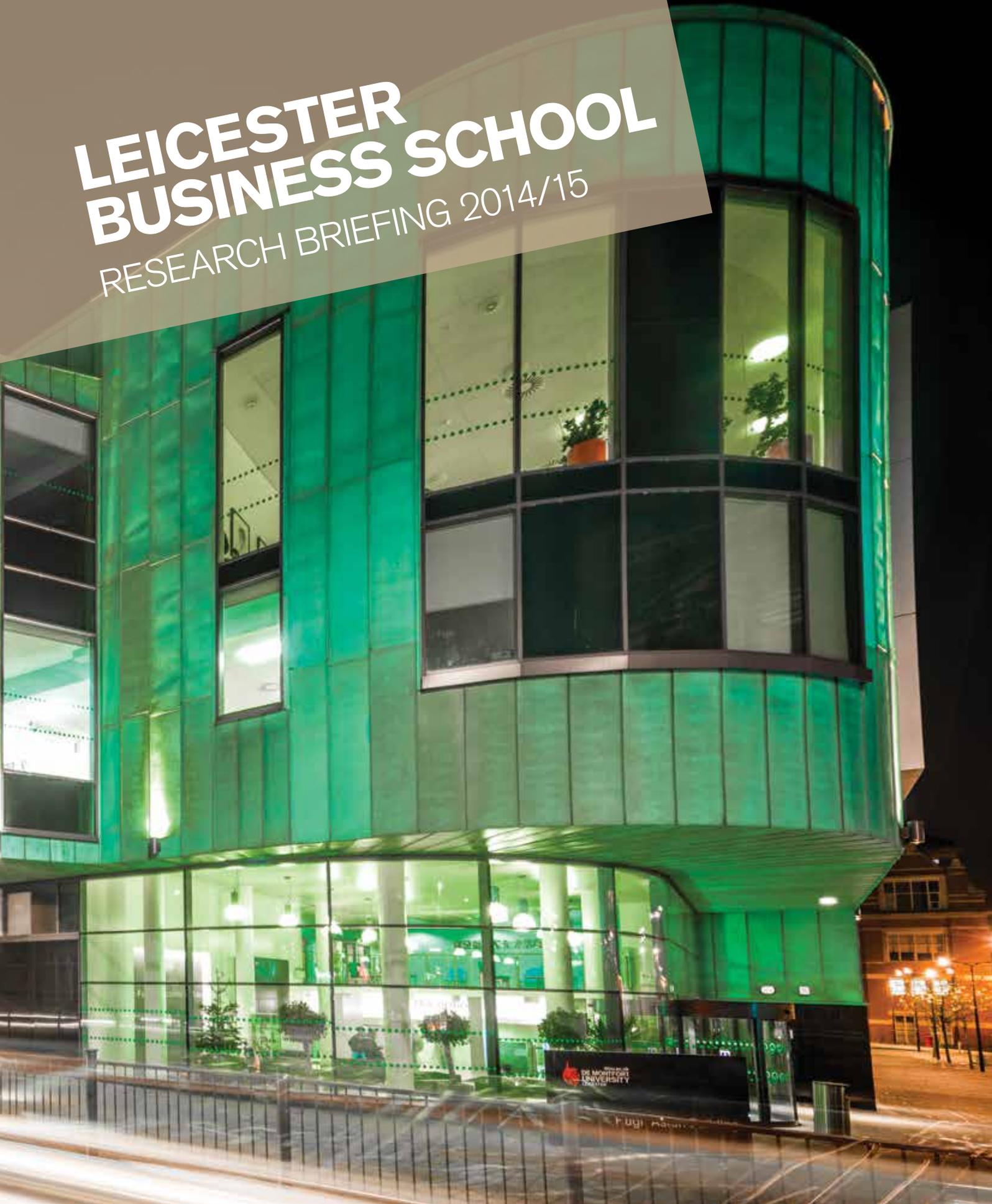


LEICESTER BUSINESS SCHOOL

RESEARCH BRIEFING 2014/15



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Introduction

Welcome to this edition of Leicester Business School's annual research briefing.

“ Since 2012, Leicester Business School scholars have published over 100 high quality papers, books and reports, and they collaborate in research programmes with a variety of world-leading universities to produce powerful and significant research.”

Our growing reputation for applied research which benefits society has been confirmed with the publication of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 results, the UK-wide initiative to assess the quality of research in UK universities. Leicester Business School has been ranked as the top modern university in the Midlands, joint third overall among modern universities in the UK and has had research classed as 'world leading'*, confirming our commitment to providing research-informed teaching.

Our mission as a Business School is to be a world-class community of scholars and this ambitious goal challenges us to continuously develop our research activities and wider engagement with existing and emerging stakeholders. The 2014/15 Business School Research Briefing showcases just a small sample of our recent research activities and achievements.

Since 2012, Leicester Business School scholars have published over 100 high quality papers, books and reports, and they collaborate in research programmes with a variety of world-leading universities to produce powerful and significant research. Coupled with our substantial professional body accreditations, Leicester Business School continues to be distinctively engaged with real-world practice and is well placed to energise policy agendas both nationally and internationally.

In this edition of the research briefing we present three articles featuring work from scholars from across the Business School:

In 'What's in a Name? Managerial Work and Job Title Inflation – evidence from the UK café sector', Jonathan Payne reports on his research in the UK café sector, and asks questions about managerial job quality and what it means to be a manager in the 'mass' service economy, particularly if café managers' jobs are extremely limited in terms of autonomy and decision-making influence.

In 'Engaging Small Businesses in Public Sector Procurement – Rhetoric or Reality?', Kassa Woldeesenbet examines the factors that affect small businesses' strategic choices about whether to engage or otherwise in public sector procurement opportunities. He argues that if government

is to increase the engagement of small business in procurement, it requires a flexible approach that accommodates the diversity across the sector and reduces the gap between rhetoric and reality.

In 'Councillors and Political Leadership: Informing Policy and Practice', Professor Colin Copus discusses his work with the Communities and Local Government Parliamentary Select Committee, and investigates the attitudes and values of local councillors and how they address the multiple challenges of community leadership.

The report also features news items from a range of our research centres and groups, and profiles of two of our recently successful doctoral students. If you are interested in finding out more about any of our featured research, please contact the project teams at the email addresses provided, or email me at the address below. This briefing provides just a snapshot of our recent achievements and they continue to grow. To find out more about research at Leicester Business School, please visit our website and DORA, the De Montfort Open Research Archive (research repository):

www.dmu.ac.uk/balresearch
www.dora.dmu.ac.uk



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* Based on overall Grade Point Average in the REF 2014 exercise and the classification of 4* or 'world leading' research outputs.

Research News in Brief

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Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) for Globalisation Research

Researchers in the Department of Human Resource Management were awarded funding from the Higher Education Innovation Funding programme in August 2014.

The funding will support a study of the theoretical and practical challenges of institutional and organisational renewal in the governance of work and employment in the global era. In particular, the project will examine how organisational and institutional actors try to build comparative advantage at local and national levels in the context of globalising capitalism. The project team of Professor Phil Almond, Dr Anita Hammer, Dr Heather Connolly, Jonathan Payne and Dr Peter Butler will collaborate with partners in a variety of international institutions, including the University of Montreal and the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, along with other collaborators in India, Turkey, Spain, Ireland and Slovakia.

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Major Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Grant to Study Austerity Governance

Professor Jonathan Davies (Department of Politics and Public Policy) is leading an international research consortium, which has won a major ESRC grant of approximately £400,000 to investigate how public bodies, community, voluntary and private sector organisations collaborate during periods of austerity. The research team brings together eleven academics from leading universities across eight countries to understand whether, and if so how, collaboration among public officials, citizens and business leaders and other actors contributes to austerity governance. Working in partnership with the Association for Public Service Excellence, the research team will inform politicians and public officials about how collaboration works under austerity and the different strategies for citizen activists to engage (or not) in new spaces of urban collaboration.

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Prestigious Funding Appointment for the Faculty's Deputy Dean

Dr David Russell, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Business & Law, and Head of the Department of Accounting and Finance has recently been appointed as Chair of Research Bursaries for the British Accounting and Finance Association's Committee of Departments of Accounting & Finance. As one of the UK's oldest learned

societies for accounting professionals, the British Accounting and Finance Association (BAFA) aims to enhance collaboration between teaching and research in accounting and finance. The Association's membership includes UK higher education academics and professional accountants from leading firms both in the UK and overseas.

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Global Integration and Comparative Capitalism Event at Leicester Business School

Leicester Business School hosted a British Universities Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA) Comparative Industrial Relations (IR) Study Group event in June 2014 to bring together different elements of the debate on comparative industrial relations, including well-established institutionalist perspectives on national difference and the context of global integration of capitalism. Through contributions covering both Western Europe and emerging economies, the event examined the extent to which the pressures of globalisation felt in very different economies can be analysed using similar frameworks. Organised by Professor Phil Almond, speakers included Dr Anita Hammer of the Department of Human Resource Management, and Dr Marco Hauptmeier (University of Cardiff).

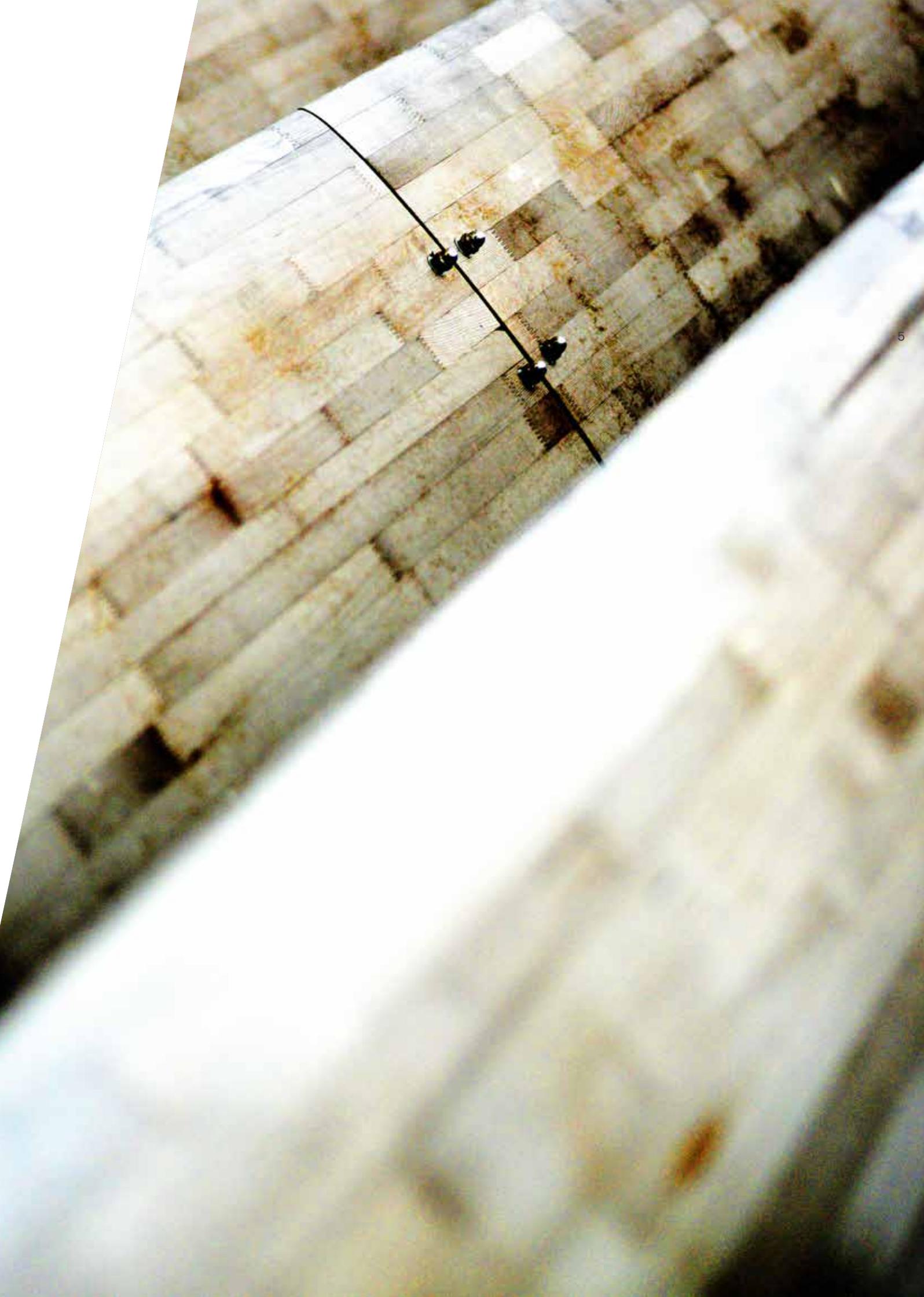
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World-renowned Social Scientist Invited to Give Politics and Public Policy Annual lecture

Leicester Business School welcomed Professor Bob Jessop (Lancaster University) to give the second Politics and Public Policy annual lecture in February 2014. Professor Jessop is recognised as a world-leading social scientist in the fields of British political culture and the sociological theory of reform and revolution. A packed lecture theatre heard Professor Jessop bring together complexity theory, cultural studies, international political economy and systems theory to examine the origins and evolution of the recent financial crisis.



What's in a Name?

Managerial Work and Job Title Inflation – Evidence from the UK Café Sector

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Jonathan Payne, Department of Human Resource Management, along with Professor Caroline Lloyd, Cardiff University, have been looking at what it might mean to be a front-line 'manager' in the UK's service economy. Here **Jonathan Payne** reports on their research in the UK café sector, and asks questions about managerial job quality and the evolving role of managers in the 'mass' service economy, particularly if café managers' jobs are extremely limited in terms of autonomy and decision-making influence.

The proportion of managers in the workforce currently stands at 10 per cent, with this figure set to rise to 11 per cent by 2020 (UKCES 2011). In Germany and France, the figure is 5.7 per cent and 8.7 per cent respectively. The growth in the managerial workforce is often cited as evidence of the UK's transition towards a high skill, 'knowledge-based' economy and as support for the view that 'graduate jobs' are still expanding. However, such assumptions are far from unproblematic.

One question which arises is, what does it actually mean to be a 'manager' in today's service economy? While there is no doubt that 'manager' can equate with knowledge work, status and high pay, many commentators have drawn attention to the heterogeneity of managerial jobs. Keep and Westwood (2002: 5) refer to management as a 'catch-all' phrase that might include a chief executive of a multinational company or the manager of a section in a local supermarket. The lower managerial job category in this case is identified by the Office for National Statistics as the second highest occupational group in terms of social class. Indeed, studies on social mobility often assume that these positions, if taken by individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, represent evidence

of upward social mobility, irrespective of job content or pay.

The 'catch-all' nature of management is also pertinent, given that management (in general) has long been implicated in Britain's productivity problem. It has been argued that the UK has a 'long tail' of managers whose qualifications are lower than their counterparts in other major economies and that this managerial skills gap impedes the application of modern managerial practices. The problem is felt to be particularly acute in the hospitality and retail sectors, where low levels of qualification held by managers are seen by industry bodies as holding back productivity improvements. There are around half a million managers in retail, hospitality and leisure services in the UK. And yet there has been surprisingly little discussion of what these managers actually do, whether they need higher level qualifications, and the opportunities available within the job to use the skills they currently have.

While the shift towards a service dominated economy has inspired a critical literature on service work, these studies, until recently, have paid little attention to the first-line manager. Bolton and Houlihan (2010: 379) suggest the latter has been treated as a somewhat 'ghost-like figure'. They

conceptualise the manager as the 'third party' in the labour process, alongside the customer and worker, whose role is that of a 'mediator of the divergent interests of employees, senior managers and customers' (ibid. 378). They highlight the 'powerlessness' of the front-line manager to effectively resolve these tensions in the face of limited budgets, insufficient resources and the centralisation of decision-making within head office (HO). Keep and Mayhew (1999: 11) suggest that store managers are often little more than 'ciphers with minimal discretion who implement detailed plans and formulae created by a small band of high level experts.' In one of the few empirically-based studies, Grugulis et al. (2011: 194) found that supermarket managers had little decision-making autonomy, with 'ordering, product ranges, stock levels, pricing, special offers and staffing policies all set out by respective functional divisions at head office.' Interestingly, however, these managers had more freedom when it came to how they managed their staff.

If it is the case that many lower level managers have little space to exercise high level knowledge, judgement and analytical skills, then the claims made by industry bodies that having more graduate level employees in these roles will transform productivity and performance may be open to question. First-line managers in services are, however, a heterogeneous group and with empirical studies remaining relatively few, it is important to build the knowledge base before jumping to conclusions. The under-studied café sector provides a fertile area for inquiry given its rapid growth, while the big chains are now significant employers in their own right.

This briefing draws upon research conducted in 2010, which set out to explore managerial work in the café sector. The research was based on multiple case studies and semi-structured interviews with unit managers and staff across 10 organisations located in the Midlands. These included four branded café chains, a sandwich chain,

“ While there is no doubt that ‘manager’ can equate with knowledge work, status and high pay, many commentators have drawn attention to the heterogeneity of managerial jobs.”

an outsourced department store café, an airport café operated by a multinational company, two café/bakery chains and a newly established café operated by a small regional company. The research sought to explore the levels of discretion available to café managers and how arrangements in different organisations might impede or encourage localised performance improvements. It also looked at broader aspects of managerial job quality. For example, even if these jobs were to provide few demands in terms of higher levels of skill, there is still the question of whether they might offer reasonably paid employment and opportunities for social mobility.

Managerial work in the UK café sector

This section summarises the main findings from the research (for details, see Lloyd and Payne 2014). Of the nine managers interviewed, six were women, all but one aged over 35 and all worked full-time. Their qualifications were varied, with two holding degrees (both from overseas) and five with no or low level qualifications. All, except two, were salaried. The lowest paid (in the sandwich chain) received an hourly rate of just £6.25 in 2010, 45 pence above the National Minimum Wage of £5.80. Most received a salary

of between £16,000 and £18,000, with the highest pay of £25,000 received by an experienced manager in one of the branded coffee shops. Median pay rates for managers in the restaurant and catering sector (£20,908 in 2011) are significantly lower than the average UK worker’s wage which then stood at just over £26,000.

The café managers’ role typically included ordering, checking stock levels, cashing up, dealing with customer complaints, meeting targets, liaising with senior management, recruitment, and overseeing the unit and its staff. While the role varied across the establishments, a significant element involves performing many of the same routine tasks as those whom they supervise. In one of the coffee shop chains, the manager claimed she was spending 95 per cent of her time ‘working on the bar as a member of staff’. The manager of the sandwich chain commented, ‘we all do the same job... You are still serving people, you still sometimes have to prep stuff, the washing up still needs doing, and then you’ve got to clean the store in the evening.’ This was graphically illustrated when the researcher went to thank one of café/bakery managers at the end of the visit, only to find her busily mopping the floor.

In all but one case, managers were expected to meet centralised performance targets, the most common of which related to sales and labour costs. Typically, managers had no influence over store layout or decor, which were dictated centrally as part of the ‘brandscape’. In the café-bakery chains, ‘planograms’ precisely specified how items were to be laid out right down to the exact alignment of cakes on a tray. It was a similar story with regard to menus and food/drinks preparation, with pricing also determined centrally. In most cases, managers and their staff received strict guidelines on the menu, including the exact number of slices of cucumber or tomato to be used on any given baguette. Interestingly, some managers were occasionally prepared to ignore such instructions where they felt this was necessary. In one of the café/bakery chains, the manager and her assistant had taken it upon themselves to sell hot turkey rolls during the Christmas period, knowing that if HO found out they would be reprimanded.

In the coffee shop chains, the organisation of service delivery varied, but again the approach was determined at the centre. Visits from regional managers and ‘mystery shoppers’ provided centralised oversight, with mystery shopper scores, in some cases, linked to managerial bonuses. Some managers referred to situations where lack of resources or rigid centralised control impeded their ability to deliver good customer service or accommodate local preferences. Among the problems identified were being constantly short staffed, the inability to meet a customer request for something as simple as a jam sandwich because of the way the till was programmed, and failures of HO to resolve issues of shabby decor or faulty equipment.

Echoing Grugulis et al’s (2011) work on supermarket managers, the one area where most café managers did exercise a real degree of autonomy was people management. Generally, they could hire who they wanted, and while they had limited control over staffing levels, how they

8 managed their team was largely down to them. Control over the allocation of shifts provided managers with the means to both reward and punish staff. In one coffee shop chain, some staff complained that if they failed to 'keep in' with the manager, they would have their hours cut. There were also cases where staff raised concerns over favouritism in relation to promotional opportunities and lack of fair treatment. For most managers, 'people management' revolved mainly around old-fashioned supervision, ensuring staff were pulling their weight and, at their best, supporting and encouraging their team in a busy and pressurised work environment. The latter was not always helped by senior management who in most cases were found wanting when it came to simply praising staff, thanking them for their efforts or providing a Christmas bonus (beyond a cheap box of chocolates from Poundland which was offered in one case!).

Final comments

The research clearly reveals that café manager jobs are not all the same. For example, we found a 'star manager' in one of the branded café chains who was earning £25,000 a year and on a fast track promotion. Their situation contrasts sharply with the manager of the franchised sandwich chain who was paid 45 pence above the National Minimum Wage, felt he was trapped in a job which offered no progression, and had learnt to just keep quiet and do as he was told. Some commentators (Lopez 2010) wonder whether first-line service managers and workers might make alignments (which could also include customers) against a 'remote' senior management. Even though many of these unit managers appear to be little more than 'glorified baristas', doing much the same job as those who they supervise, it is important to note that they are not simply co-workers. Most identify with the company and their position as a manager and they continue to perform a supervisory and monitoring function.

What about the ability of these managers to impact on performance? The main finding from the research is that café manager jobs are extremely limited in terms of autonomy and decision-making influence. Built around mass standardisation, the system resembles Mintzberg's classic 'machine bureaucracy' or Ritzer's McDonaldisation thesis, and is designed to be innovation proof at workplace level. Unsurprisingly, while managers recognise the need for consistency across the brand, some are frustrated by the lack of scope to accommodate individual customer preferences or meet local tastes. For senior management, any potential performance gains from greater local flexibility appear to be outweighed by the desire to ensure brand consistency and ease of measurement across units.

This is not to say that café managers cannot make a difference. How they manage their staff clearly matters for the day-to-day functioning of the team and the experience of work, although quantifying its impact on overall unit performance is more difficult. With little in these jobs which is 'strategic' or that involves autonomous action, however, it is difficult to envisage how increasing the proportion of managers with degree-level qualifications could have a significant impact on productivity or performance. These managers' skills needs would appear to be more basic, such as the sort of training offered in many organisations to first-line supervisors. More generally, the research invites consideration of what it can mean to be a manager in the 'mass' service economy at a time when we are seeing a proliferation in managerial job titles such as 'bar manager', 'train manager' and 'petrol station manager', to name but a few.

Acknowledgement

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Further Reading

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Engaging Small Businesses in Public Sector Procurement – Rhetoric or Reality?

Dr Kassa Woldesenbet from the Department of Strategic Management and Marketing

along with Professor Monder Ram (University of Birmingham) and Emeritus Professor Ian Worthington (De Montfort University) have been examining the factors affecting the strategic choices of small businesses about whether to engage or otherwise in public sector procurement opportunities. He argues that if government is to increase the engagement of small business in procurement, it requires a flexible approach that accommodates the diversity across the sector and reduces the gap between rhetoric and reality.

Annual spending on goods, services and works by public sector organisations is huge, amounting to £220 billion in the UK in 2008/09 and 1,800 billion in the EU in 2006 or 16 per cent of EU gross domestic product (GDP). The UK government hopes that 25 per cent of central government spend by value, either directly or through supply chains, will be with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) by 2015 through streamlining some aspects of the procurement process (Cabinet Office, 2013). Previous studies report benefits of engagement in public procurement to both the government and SMEs. For example, SMEs can benefit from an increased demand from the government, which ensures stability, security in payments and an increased profile for the enterprises. In return, the buying public sector organisations benefit from the responsiveness, flexibility, specialist knowledge, quality of service and low cost of small businesses. Public procurement is also an important policy tool for supporting smaller, local enterprises, stimulating innovation (Aschhof et al,

2009), promoting diversity (CBI, 2009), and improving service delivery (Loader, 2007). Significantly, SMEs comprise 99.9 per cent of all enterprises, contribute 48.8 per cent of private-sector turnover and 59.1 per cent of private sector employment in the UK (BIS, 2012). Data from the Office of National Statistics Annual Business Survey shows that on average, SMEs create around £33 of gross value-added per £100 of turnover to the UK economy, while large companies create around £26 (Cabinet Office, 2013). Thus, it can be argued that the more access the SMEs have to public procurement opportunities, the greater will be their contribution to sustainable local development, job creation, market competitiveness and innovation.

In this research briefing, we unravel the challenges of engagement in public procurement by smaller businesses drawing on the theory of mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman et al 1999; Kloosterman 2010) and empirical data from the Supply Leicester Project (SLP). Mixed embeddedness is essentially the idea that entrepreneurship (and entrepreneurial decisions generally) is not simply explained by the resources an individual business can mobilise but also by the time and place of specific opportunity structures (market openings) for a given firm. We contend that explaining why certain small businesses appear to find it difficult to break into the supply chain of large public bodies requires an examination of both the supply and the demand side of market engagement. By deploying the mixed embeddedness lens, we sought to examine the interplay between, and the extent to which, the contextual factors such as firm resources, the market and institutional environments shape small businesses' decisions to engage or not engage in the public sector market. A simple opportunity structure model (SOSM) developed by Kloosterman (2010) underpinned our study as it assumes that (a) opportunities are linked to markets; (b) markets have to be accessible; and (c) different opportunities require different

resources (human and social). We pose two salient questions to examine small businesses' level of engagement with the public sector market. First, to what extent is this market accessible to small businesses? Second, do they have the required types of resources (human, financial, social, and knowledge of the public sector market) which enable such an engagement? We discuss below the effects of interplay between these contexts drawing on the Supply Leicester Project data.

Our approach: Engaged scholarship for co-production of knowledge

We approached the challenges facing small businesses from both theoretical and pragmatic perspectives using an engaged scholarship approach. Engaged scholarship is a participative form of research for obtaining the advice and perspectives of key stakeholders, such as researchers, users, clients, sponsors, and practitioners, which is believed to result in greater insights than when scholars or practitioners work alone (Van de Ven 2007). Accordingly, our chosen methodology was a form of action research involving collaboration between the three main actors involved in planning and delivering the SLP initiative: the city council, DMU researchers and the four groups of consultants contracted to deliver themed business support for both the small businesses and the public sector buying organisations. The Supply Leicester Project (SLP) aim was to encourage and support small businesses across the city of Leicester and the wider county to access procurement and supply opportunities from large purchasing organisations in the public sector. As members of the project team, the research team identified the research problem on the basis of prior desk research, provided advice on methods of raising awareness of the initiative and subsequently observed the targeted business support delivered to over 200 small businesses. Initial discussions with project partners were used to identify 'real' and 'imagined' barriers to engagement, suggest appropriate forms

of intervention to deliver the initiative's objectives and help to design systems for capturing and reporting on the outcomes of the chosen interventions. Overall, the initiative provided around 1,700 hours of support for the small businesses which took part in the project and delivered an estimated 800 hours support for procurement professionals from the variety of public sector organisations, most notably local authorities and local health bodies. The empirical research, however, was based on the data collected using semi-structured interviews with 20 purposively selected small business owners and 11 public sector procurement professionals, along with non-participant observations of business support provided to all Project participant SMEs.

Understanding both demand and supply contexts is crucial

Productive engagement in public sector markets by small businesses entails a thorough understanding of both the demand and supply contexts. Such understanding is crucial in order for both the small businesses and the buying public sector organisations (PSOs) to benefit from the supply relationship. Our review of relevant literatures and the SLP project work indicate both parties are subject to very different contextual influences and there is a mismatch between the forces shaping supply decisions and those influencing demand decisions.

Public sector procurement is set to achieve multiple strategic objectives such as innovation, market competition, local economic development and sustainable growth. Further, the procurement process is governed by a legislative, administrative and judicial framework, and consequently it is said to be characterised by an unstable tension between the need for transparency and accountability and for efficiency and effectiveness in resource management (Schapper et al. 2006).

Recently there has been an emphasis on establishing supply relationships in order

to move from price-based, arms-length transactions to a procurement model based on value-adding and long-term supply partnerships. There is also a reported move from a system of competitive tendering to one based on aggregated demand by a collective of public sector organisations (termed as consortia buying or contract bundling) and the use of e-procurement for cost savings, efficiency and market development. In the process, procurement professionals have come under increasing pressure to meet competing demands, including achieving savings, improving service delivery and contributing to broader societal, economic and environmental outcomes (Erridge, 2007). The outcome, from our point of view, is the creation of unintentional barriers holding back small businesses not able to tender for the public sector contracts because such procurement models lead to an increased contract size and more complex tendering processes. What is not known, however, is to what extent changes in procurement practices and processes will lead to value-adding and long-term supply relationships between small suppliers and PSOs.

In addition, our analysis suggests that demand-side structural factors alone cannot fully account for the relative lack of engagement between smaller businesses and public sector procurers. Understanding how potential market actors see the question of enacting a supply-chain relationship is no less important than examining the conditions under which it operates. Such analysis raises a key question: To what extent does the public procurement provide 'real' business opportunities for small businesses? Investigation of this question is crucial, not least in respect of the capability and willingness of small firms to seek to gain public sector contracts, but also to further our understanding of the interplay of firm resources, the market and the institutional context in shaping managerial decisions to use the commercial opportunities available in public sector markets.

Our analysis suggests that public procurement can offer important supply opportunities for small businesses, which are significantly shaped by policy and institutional contexts mainly for three reasons. First, public sector organisations regularly purchase a wide variety of goods and services ranging from low-value items (e.g. clothing, food, stationery) to high-value supplies and public works (e.g. ICT systems, catering services, construction), thereby creating opportunities for smaller businesses to operate as either first-tier suppliers for smaller contracts or second-tier contractors for larger purchases. Second, the emergence of public procurement as an important policy tool, including its role in supporting smaller, local enterprises, also theoretically increases the chances of market engagement. Third, some local authorities have used the community provisions of the Local Government Act (2000) to include 'community benefits' clauses in procurement contracts – thereby broadening the criteria for deciding on would-be suppliers.

So what is the reality? Is the public sector market accessible to small businesses?

The interplay between small business resources and the market context shows a constrained opportunity structure (in terms of market openings and resource requirements) for smaller suppliers. For example, partly in response to budget cuts, local government purchasing practices (such as consortia buying, bundling of contracts, long-term sourcing and single sourcing with a greater emphasis on cost savings or efficiency) create a highly institutionalised market with very limited market openings for small businesses. Such purchasing practices inadvertently increase the scale of contracts that disadvantage small businesses. The current study findings provide evidence to support these claims: only a quarter of small businesses in the sample perceived a possibility of engagement with the public-sector market whilst the remaining three

quarters of small business owners thought otherwise. Of the latter group, there were some owners of small businesses who did not consider the public procurement as accessible to them mainly due to cognitive/mindset and supply capacity problems: 'it is not for us but for the big boys' dominated the perceptions of these small business owners. Some of the commonly reported barriers for engagement in the public sector market included: 1) a lack of clarity in tendering documents; 2) too much legal and administrative 'red tape'; 3) overly complex pre-qualification questionnaires; 4) the use of unnecessarily complicated language; 5) considerable and expensive resource requirements to complete the tendering process; 6) an over-emphasis on policies and procedures rather than on clients' needs; 7) a perceived high level of competition in the market place; and, 8) the structure of the market where the 'big' boys are favoured for reliability and delivery capacity.

Firm resource context is one of the crucial determinants in strategic choice making of the small businesses whether to engage or not to engage in the public sector market. With the risk of oversimplification (see further reading for more details), our findings show that small businesses potentially could be suppliers to the public sector provided that they have the required resources and capabilities, which at the minimum include:

- Sufficient knowledge of, and know how about, the public sector product market – how it operates (processes and practices) and the types of goods and services traded in it;
- An appropriate mind-set – positive perception of opportunities and their 'willingness' to exploit them;
- Appropriate level and types of resources: sufficient capital, supply capacity, an ability to respond to competitive tenders;
- Previous experience of supplying large purchasing organisations be it public or private (track record);

- Appropriate level of human and social capital, in particular, qualifications in higher education, public sector work experience, and networking.

Our work suggests that differentiated firm resource contexts interplay with the market context (the latter is also shaped by institutional and policy context) and both lead to very low-level engagement by the under-represented small businesses in public procurement in the study area. In particular, a perceived high risk associated with the tendering process; a perceived lack of the required types of resources and supply capacity; liability of newness; smallness in size; lack of track-record in supplying large purchasing organisations; and lack of current information on public procurement (processes, products/services and purchasing practices) were found to be the main firm-specific factors which hold back the majority of small businesses from engaging in public procurement. Having said this however, our data analysis shows that small businesses are heterogeneous in terms of their engagement with public sector markets. In fact we found three types of small businesses: those already 'engaged'; those who 'have had no previous experience but are interested in future engagement'; and those 'not interested'. We learnt that the second group of small business owners were able to change their perception favourably because of the Project intervention (through themed workshops and one-to-one diagnostic sessions). This observation implies that small business interest in, and level of engagement with, public sector markets could be enhanced by providing intensive, tailored, business support services to help build confidence, motivation and tendering ability.

“ Our analysis suggests that public procurement can offer important supply opportunities for small businesses, which are significantly shaped by policy and institutional contexts...”

Concluding remarks

The public sector market is a large and diverse one with a high degree of institutionalisation. The emergence of public procurement as an important policy tool, including the role in supporting small businesses, potentially increases the chances of market engagement. By using a mixed-embeddedness perspective and an engaged scholarship approach, our study supports the idea that the strategic choice of small businesses to engage or not engage in the public sector market is shaped by the interplay of firm resources, product market and institutional contexts. Our key conclusion from this study is that although the three structural variables influence variably the decisions to engage or not to engage, they do not have an equal bearing on behaviours across the businesses that participated in this study. In addition, our analysis shows a gap between organisational and/or policy rhetoric and reality in terms of enabling small business engagement in this market. Furthermore, the collaborative knowledge produced from the Supply Leicester Project emphasises the need for procurement culture change by streamlining the procurement processes and practices, the need to provide

intensive, tailored, business support, and the importance of researchers in acting as ‘critical friends’ for small and medium-sized enterprises. In doing so, our approach has implications for research, policy and practice in view of advancing knowledge and debate in this important area.

The research team is now working on research publications from the project data to inform theory, practice and policy.

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Further Reading

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Councillors and Political Leadership: Informing Policy and Practice

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Professor Colin Copus, Department of Politics and Public Policy, has an international reputation for his work on local political leadership. Here he discusses his work with the Communities and Local Government Parliamentary Select Committee, and his research into the attitudes and values of local councillors and how they address the multiple challenges of community leadership.

Influencing the debate

On 27th March 2012 the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Parliamentary Select Committee launched an inquiry into the role of 'councillors in the community'.¹ The research presented here and conducted by the Local Governance Research Unit (LGRU) fed into the evidence sessions of this select committee inquiry, as well as being presented directly to ministers within the Department for Communities and Local Government. Indeed, Professor Copus submitted written evidence to the inquiry and as a result of that submission was called to an oral evidence hearing in front of the full committee which took place on 2nd July 2012 where he was cross-examined by committee members. He was subsequently asked to submit further written evidence to the Committee based on the findings of a recent international research project in which he was involved.

The Committee published its final report, *Councillors on the Frontline*, in January 2013.² The Government produced its response to the Committee's report in March 2013 and Professor Copus

was invited by the chair of the CLG Committee, Clive Betts MP, to run a series of workshops to explore the issues raised in the Committee's final report and the government's response. The LGRU organised four regionally based workshops of councillors, with the first in October 2013 and the last in March 2014. Copus produced a third written report for the Committee on the findings of the workshops and presented that report as evidence to the Committee and Local Government Minister on 21st September 2014.

The research: councillors: Representatives, decision-makers and governors

The research was based on data from a number of related research projects exploring the developing role of the councillor, including a 2010 cross-European study of 17 countries, which examined the central role of the councillor in the dynamics of local politics. The survey that informed this cross-European study was completed at different times in each country throughout 2008. The data contained in this report is based on the responses of councillors

from England, Scotland and Wales. The survey was mailed to all councillors in 119 authorities via member services or equivalent. The distribution of authorities was as follows: 63 English districts, 13 English unitary councils, 10 English metropolitan boroughs, 9 English county councils, 9 London boroughs, 9 Scottish unitary councils and 6 Welsh unitary councils (104 English authorities in all). The distribution was proportionate to the number of councillors in those types of authorities; proportionality between the main political parties at the time was ensured. In all, 6,082 questionnaires were distributed. In total, exactly 700 questionnaires were returned – a response rate of about 11.5 per cent; 588 were returned from England, 22 from Scotland, and 15 from Wales.

The background against which the research was conducted is one where councillors are not in control of the way the roles they are expected to carry out change over time. It is a series of European-wide pressures, such as those below, which ultimately shape the tasks, functions, responsibilities and expectations of the office:

¹ The call for evidence can be found at: www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/news/councillors-and-the-community/

² The Committee's final report can be found at: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmcomloc/432/432.pdf

- The changing nature and context of local government and democracy;
- The organisation and activities of political parties in local government;
- Increasing public participation in local decision-making, emerging from exhortations by central government, or from demands made by local communities;
- The fractured and often conflicting nature of the role of the councillor;
- Changing institutional arrangements for local government;
- Changing views that politicians at other levels of government hold about councillors' roles.

A central concern for the development of the role of the councillor is the interest that central government in England expresses in shaping the office. One of the many problems with such central interest in the local political office is that government inspired reviews of local government that have explored the attitudes and roles of the councillor (see for example, Maud, 1967; Widdicombe, 1986) have posed questions about the office and provided answers that were very much a product of their time and based on the subservience of local government in the overall constitutional framework. The latter reflects a recurrent theme underpinning explorations of the role of the councillor, which assumes that somehow, this level of elected representative office, unlike those at other levels, is under-developed, ill-suited for the demands made upon it, unable to respond in an adequate fashion to newly emerging problems and issues and in need of constant re-shaping, re-forming and re-appraisal. Moreover, it is regularly presumed that the office of councillor is somehow disconnected from those local citizens that are represented and is a product of a lower level of governing capacity and ability. Some scholars (Greenwood 1981; Jones and Travers 1994) attribute this view as a result of a culture of disdain for local government on the part of central government and civil servants.

Political, community and local leadership and the councillor

A recurrent critique of councillors focuses on the amount of time they spend in meetings, particularly those of the local council itself, and consequently the insufficient time they spend working with local communities (Audit Commission, 1990; DETR, 1998). These views often arise from time allocation studies of councillor activity (Young and Rao, 1994; Widdicombe, 1986; ODPM, 2005). Such studies tend to underestimate the time councillors spend working within communities as they do not account for the proximity of the councillor to the community – particularly if the councillor lives within the ward represented. Nor do they adequately account for the fluidity and flexibility of the work of the councillor in ward and community leadership roles or how case-work and pastoral roles overlap with community leadership (Copus, 2004). Indeed, 'meetings' tends to be used to refer to council meetings only and not the array of party or public events councillors attend and nor does that term adequately capture the time councillors spend in meetings of bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, hospital trusts or other quangos.

The community leadership role of the councillor is often something that is recognised by its absence because of the lack of any clear, comprehensive and agreed definition, unlike the concept of political leadership. Moreover, community leadership emerges from the soft powers resting with councillors as elected representatives particularly where there is no executive decision-making ability or budgets available to individual councillors. Community leadership blurs with the wider 'representative' role of the councillor, a role which itself has been distinguished as focusing on constituents (communities) and policy (see, Jones, 1975; Newton, 1976; Rao, 1994).

In attempting to define community leadership research provides a framework for understanding the concept: community leadership can be related to communities of place or interest; the former will be geographical sub-units of the council or a ward or division which is often an artificial community of place; the latter can cut across the authority area, but communities of interest may also be geographically located. Community leadership entails complexity and interdependence between elected and non-elected sectors, between national and local organisations and between public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Indeed, councils and councillors operate in conditions of network governance where they are one among many bodies making decisions and forming public policy and where they also face competitors when it comes to decisions made that affect the communities they are expected to lead. As a result community leadership rests not on hard political powers resting with the office of councillor, but rather with the soft personal powers of negotiation, compromise, deliberation, influencing skills and coalition building.

Councillors are required to use soft political skills and powers to be able to bring together disparate bodies – many of which will be geographically larger than the communities with which councillors work. In so doing, councillors can use their electoral mandate as moral and political leverage to bring together diverse interests to focus on community problems, but such soft powers are no substitute for hard powers resting with the office to enable councillors to direct the engagement of non-elected bodies with issues arising from communities.

In further understanding the role of the councillor as a community leader, the survey explored the task orientation of councillors. It asked respondents the importance they attached to the various tasks that the councillor was required to undertake. The tasks presented to respondents were designed to provide an indication of the different roles undertaken by councillors

and to ask councillors to comment on the importance of broad aspects of council business and political representation. Table 1 sets out the responses received.

The responses show that councillors have distinct perceptions about their different roles and while the importance of these roles may vary somewhat, each are seen as a key task for the councillor. When we look at the community leadership orientated questions, namely representing local requests and issues, publicising debate on local issues, and explaining decisions to citizens, we see that councillors do place importance on their role in responding to the needs of each locality but we can also see that the idea that councillors are a conduit from the council to the citizen, rather than from the citizen to the council, has some credence. Much of the reason for this response comes from the relationship councillors have with their party – particularly if it is the ruling group on the

council (see responses to the importance of implementing the programme of the political party); the party is still clearly a prism through which councillors view most of the facets of their office. Taking the party orientated responses with the community leadership orientated responses, councillors do distinguish between what they do in formal settings, such as council meetings, where party loyalties and party discipline are important features of their activities, and what they do in more informal settings and interactions where party becomes less of a consideration, especially if party political opponents are not present. Thus, for many councillors, party looms large in their assumptive world.

Councillors and their parties

Currently as a result of the English local elections in May 2014 just over 90 per cent of all councillors in England come from one of the three main British parties:

Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat. That figure is a slight reduction on the 92 per cent held before the May 2014 elections and results partly from a surge in UK Independence Party (UKIP) candidates being elected and partly from a consistent tendency among some of the electorate to vote outside of the big three parties. The party politicisation of local government makes it important to understand the relationship between the councillor and the party of which he or she is a member and the public he or she represents. The international research tested the key reference points for the councillors by posing a hypothetical question that asked councillors how they would decide to vote come a difference of opinion between party, citizens and themselves on an issue. Table 2 displays the responses to this question. We see from the responses a clear display of what might be called a ‘Burkean’ approach towards representation at the

Table 1: Task Orientation

In your experience as a councillor, how important are the following tasks for you as a councillor	None	Little	Moderate	Great	Very great
Defining the main goals of the local authority	0.6	5.3	19.0	33.1	41.9
Controlling what the local authority does	1.0	3.6	22.0	36.8	36.6
Representing requests and issues emerging locally	0.1	0.4	6.6	35.2	57.2
Publicising debate on local issues before decisions are taken	0.7	4.3	23.0	41.4	30.6
Explaining decisions of the council to citizens	0.3	1.8	18.7	39.4	39.8
Implementing the programme of my political party/ movement	4.9	11.0	36.4	30.2	17.5
Supporting the executive	9.3	12.7	30.4	27.6	19.9
Mediating local conflicts	1.6	5.5	32.5	39.3	21.0
Promoting the views and interests of local minorities	1.8	9.9	32.9	34.2	21.2
Promoting the views and interests of women	6.3	15.3	38.0	24.9	15.6



local level. The majority of councillors state that they vote according to their own opinion rather than the views expressed by the two other reference points provided in the question. On the face of it the responses challenge the idea that party politicisation has a negative effect on the ability of councillors to make decisions about issues before them based on their own assessments.

More careful consideration is however necessary and we have to examine the interaction between councillors and the party group of which they are a member. Given that some 90 per cent of councillors in England are members of one of the three main political parties it is very likely that 'their own opinion' coincides with the collective view of their party group –this is so because councillors will have been present at group meetings, contributed to the debate and voted at any meeting. Thus, the councillor's 'own opinion' and the 'opinion of the party group' are likely to be very close together as a general rule, if not the same. Local representative democracy is not seen by the majority of councillors as necessarily based on expressing or voting for the views of local citizens and councillors certainly do not see themselves as delegates of the voter, rather delegates of their party.

While councillors, as party members, continue to be geared towards fighting and winning elections and focusing internally towards the working of the council and exchanges with their party political opponents, it is likely that they will continue to act in a way that benefits that role. In that case councillors are also likely to become more and more distanced from the governance of local communities. But, a key focus for the councillor in providing community leadership is in developing strategic, political priorities and policies.

Councillors: Strategy and governance

The research shows that the executive member may logically be seen as responsible for providing strategic direction

Table 2: Party Loyalty

If a councillor is opposed to the party line on an issue, and the councillor is also opposed to public opinion on an issue, and the party line and public opinion are also in opposition, how should the councillor act?	%
Vote according to his/her own conviction	57.8
Vote according to the opinion of the party group	25.0
Vote according to the opinion of the voters	17.2

and contributing to governance networks, but such responsibilities are not limited to executive members alone. Councillors outside the executive, through overview and scrutiny, are able to contribute to the strategic direction developed by the executive and to exerting some influence over the outside world into wider governance networks. The latter however, is generally an underdeveloped aspect of the scrutiny function. One of the implications of the separation of powers introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 is that councils should be able to speak with more than one voice and while executives and scrutiny are not in competition, they will make different contributions to leadership and governance. The notion of governance fundamentally alters local democracy and the role of the councillor and it requires councillors to focus externally on developing governing capacity to be able to shape, direct and influence the activities of non-elected bodies with which councils now interact or with which they work in partnership. In doing so councillors can again use the leverage provided by a democratic mandate to construct a shared vision for the development of the locality and communities within it; after all, councillors are the only player in governance networks that come with the approval of the voter.

Councillors within increasingly complex networks must integrate and mediate between competing interests and views of how the locality should develop,

reconciling not only competing visions, but also competing views about the use of public resources. Moreover, councillors are required to operate within networks that extend beyond the boundaries of a single council. These governance conditions place greater pressure on councillors to move away from traditional party-based representative forms of local government and democracy to be congruent with network governance, market and participatory competitors to the representative system. Rather than fundamentally undermining the position of local government, the existence of challengers, as either service providers or as decision-makers and players in the political market claiming some relationship with some section of the community, provides an opportunity for councillors to employ their mandate to hold these disparate and potentially chaotic elements to account. Indeed, if other service agencies, public and private sector bodies lack real lines of accountability, then any perceived weakness in the electoral chain of command, pales into insignificance. While other actors and agencies within governance networks may conduct public consultation, they do so without the same political link and the overhead chain of command that exists between citizens and councils. Even initiatives such as service user groups and committees, or discussion forums, survey panels, or the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter – does not provide a chain of command, or any form of direct

“ A constant experience for councillors is that of change in the roles, responsibilities, tasks, functions and powers of their office and that those changes are often beyond their own control rather than as a result of changes they are able to introduce locally.”

accountability. Thus, as such bodies have moved into the territory that was once the domain of local government – large scale provision of public services, decisions about the expenditure of public money, the development of public policy and developing an organisational and institutional structure to suit the geographical demands of its service administration (Copus, 2010) – then new territory is opened up for exploration by democratically elected councillors.

Summary and Conclusion

The research conducted by the LGRU submitted to the CLG Committee and the workshops commissioned by the committee and organised by the LGRU indicate the recognition of our work by central policy makers. The office of councillor is never far from the thinking of central government, which constantly seeks new ways of perfecting the office or casting it more in the image of the centre but without the powers of the centre. A constant experience for councillors is that of change in the roles, responsibilities, tasks, functions and powers of their office and that those changes are often beyond their own control rather than as a result of changes they are able to introduce locally.

Much central investigation into the work of the councillor and the roles they carry out is conducted with a view that it can be improved and that somehow it is lacking, rather than from a desire to explore what is required to enhance the governing capacity

of local government and councillors. Much academic work sets out to understand those roles, how and why they change and how they help understand what councillors do and indeed, what they should be able to do as local elected representatives. The research for, and three submissions of evidence to, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, drew the academic work together and presented the results of new research to attempt to influence the thinking of those developing policy towards local government and the office of councillor.

Our final recommendations reflected the concerns of councillors about the changes to their office and the request for a period of stability. We have suggested that the Communities and Local Government Committee conduct a national debate – a form of councillor constitutional convention – to come as close as possible to a lasting solution to the powers, functions and responsibilities of the office and then for central government to step aside and let councillors get on with the job.

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Further Reading

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News from Research Units

Centre for Comparative Housing Research (CCHR)

Research and consultancy expertise in the Centre covers a range of issues. The team frequently work in partnership with other organisations to deliver projects on the following themes:

- Affordable Housing Provision
- Choice-based Lettings
- Future of Housing Management
- Gypsies and Travellers
- Housing and an Ageing Society
- Private Rented Sector
- Theoretical Approaches to Housing

Our research and consultancy activities have an international reputation. We are involved with the European Network for Housing Research (ENHR) – which is the leading international housing research organisation. We undertake research and consultancy for a range of local authorities and housing associations as well as for the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and government departments.

The Centre has recently completed a major study for the Economic & Social Research Council on boosting affordable housing supply using conditional tax incentives. This project has involved an on-going partnership with Places for People, which is one of the largest housing development and management organisations in the UK. The study investigated the potential of lesson learning from France and the USA on tackling the crisis in affordable housing provision in the UK. In both countries, over the last 30 years extensive use has been made of tax incentives for private sector developers, corporate investors and individuals to provide affordable housing for a defined period of time (e.g. 15 years) targeted at low income households. Our conclusions and recommendations highlighted that there are considerable opportunities, in principle, to develop a

system of conditional tax incentives in this country. This was supported at a number of stakeholder workshops with key organisations including government departments. These findings have been fed into the Royal Society of Arts City Growth Commission Inquiry, the Lyons Review for the Labour Party on Housing and the Coalition Government's Elphicke Review on Affordable Housing. More details of this research including project papers can be found at housingsupply.our.dmu.ac.uk/

The Centre has also completed a major study for the CIH and the Wheatley Housing Group on the future role of frontline housing workers. The Frontline Futures Project found that welfare changes, the lack of affordable housing supply and the widening gap between incomes and housing costs are having the biggest impact on the roles and activities of housing professionals. It has concluded that people in the social housing sector need increasing levels of support especially as housing professionals are expected to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of other services. Frontline housing workers, therefore, want their employers to provide appropriate education and training, but also wellbeing support to help them cope with fear, distress and suicide threats from tenants under increasing pressure.

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The Centre for Research into Organisational Governance (CROG)

Corporate governance debates have taken centre stage in many disciplines across management and finance. The debates are sophisticated in content, context and in the myriad of methods applied. The Centre for Research into Organisational Governance (CROG) was established in 2008 to facilitate intellectual debate and enhance broad understanding of specific corporate governance issues from multiple dimensions and thereby contribute to the appreciation of the far reaching implications of these issues for individual, national and global actors.

Members of the Centre share a common objective with considerable overlaps in their areas of research interests which include:

- Corporate governance structure (both firm and national)
- Corporate governance implications of risk management in enterprises
- The interlocks between corporate governance and auditing
- Trust, accountability and transparency
- Ethics and sustainability (including climate change)
- Corporate governance implications of financial reporting issues including earnings management, disclosures studies.
- Corporate social responsibility

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Contemporary Research on Organisations, Work and Employment (CROWE)

CROWE is a research group within the Department of Human Resource Management at Leicester Business School, De Montfort University. It aims to contribute to debates on contemporary work and employment, through research of recognised international quality.

Our research focuses on how managers, workers, trade unions and policy makers interpret and attempt to shape the nature of work and employment. It covers a wide range of organisational contexts in the private, public and third sectors, both in the UK and overseas, and is based on an in-depth understanding of these different contexts. Our research aims to be critical, and theoretically informed, while being of relevance to the full range of stakeholders involved in the regulation of work, employment, and organisations.

Our current priority themes are: international and comparative research; equality and diversity; workforce skills, performance, and job quality; employee representation and participation; trade union policy and strategy; emotions and identity; and unusual and atypical work contexts.

Among other projects, CROWE is working with partners from Kings College London, Canada, Germany and Ireland on the globalising skills required by the managers of small multinationals, funded by the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE). It is also currently involved in National Trust funded research on managing a volunteer workforce. Researchers are also currently involved in projects examining the work of clergy women, and mapping the careers and practices of diversity consultants in the UK. Heather Connolly has recently lead-edited a book *Radical Unions in Europe and the Future of Collective Interest Representation* (Peter Lang, 2014). CROWE is organising, in July a mini-conference at the Society for the

Advancement of Socio-Economics Annual Meeting, Chicago on multi-level institutions and the changing global-local dynamics of production. Finally, in June 2015 it will host the Annual Conference of the British Universities Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA).

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The Digital, Sustainable and Consumer Marketing Research Cluster

Based in the Department of Strategic Management and Marketing we are an emergent group of talented, enthusiastic and committed researchers with a focus on contemporary developments in marketing. Our focus on consumer, sustainability and digital themes offers the chance for innovative work to emerge over the next five years. Key areas include:

- Services marketing research with focus on service quality and value in university services, service role and new knowledge processes in small scale services, led notably by the work of Dr Suha Omar;
- Digital marketing processes and emerging psychological elements of consumer identity in online environments, with ongoing work on online communities and social media networks and on consumer search behaviour, as evidenced by the work of Nichola Phillips examining Mumsnet and our doctoral students Shelton Giwa who is investigating location-based advertising

“ CROWE is working with partners from Kings College London, Canada, Germany and Ireland on the globalising skills required by the managers of small multinationals, funded by the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE).”

and mobile marketing, and Khalid Alatawy, who is currently researching online consumer search behaviour with a focus on Saudi Arabian consumers;

- Social responsibility and sustainability in organisations, both from a company and consumer perspective with current work in the area of CSR and brand management and on sustainability across retail organisations in the UK, led in particular by the research of Dr Nicola Thomas, who is gathering data on current experiences of retailer sustainability and collating sustainability indicators, and our doctoral researcher, Devi Gill, who is analysing corporate social responsibility discourses and brand narratives of UK retailers and is working with archive materials at the Co-operative Group and at Marks and Spencer.

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Health Policy Research Unit (HPRU)

The HPRU is a joint venture between the Leicester Business School and Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. It is led by Professor Rob Baggott and Dr Sally Ruane. Since its creation in 2000, the Unit and its members have generated over £5 million in external income. The Unit has secured research and consultancy income from a range of international bodies, research councils, government departments, the NHS, local government and the voluntary sector. Members of the Unit have produced over 350 publications, including leading books and journal articles. Some of our publications are cited and used by researchers and practitioners around the globe, including the World Health Organisation. Some publications have been translated into other languages, most recently *Understanding Health Policy* by Rob Baggott, which is now available in Chinese. Other recent publications by HPRU members include *Fundamental Aspects of Medicines (Rivers and Waterfield)*, *Responsible Citizens: health and policy under neoliberalism*, and *Partnerships for Health and Wellbeing (Baggott)*.

Our research interests are mainly in the following areas: health care reform; public health, diversity and inequalities; health strategy and management; and public and patient involvement. Examples of current and recent projects include; health promotion in pharmacies; partnership working in public health; public attitudes to minimum pricing of alcohol; performance management in hospital hygiene and infection control; lessons from the Cuban health system; social aspects of reproductive technologies; the role of patients' groups in policy making and service development; and patient and public involvement in the National Health Service (NHS).

The HPRU has excellent links with researchers across the university in areas such as healthcare acquired infection, pharmacy and communication technologies. It also has strong relationships with government agencies, NHS bodies, and research funders. The Unit and its members are linked to other universities, not just in the UK but in many other countries as well. Further details of our work are available on the website (see below).

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Local Governance Research Unit (LGRU)

The LGRU, based at Leicester Business School, is an internationally recognised centre of excellence for theoretically informed, robust and rigorous policy relevant research into British and comparative local governance. Our work focuses on local democracy and local politics, local responses to crisis and austerity, community empowerment and local citizenship and neighbourhood governance. We are specifically focused on working closely with the needs of practitioners and policy-makers at all levels in local and central government and are committed to putting our research into practice. As well as securing research council funding for academic projects, the Unit specialises in conducting commissioned applied research from local government and local government bodies.

The Unit organised and supported the Urban Studies Foundation Conference

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Interrogating Urban Crisis Governance Contestation and Critique, held at De Montfort University in September 2013. The conference brought together over 70 international researchers and was convened by Jonathan Davies, Professor of Critical Policy, with partners from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the University of Melbourne and Hunter College, CUNY.

The Unit's two new doctoral bursary PhD students, who commenced their studies with us in 2013-14, are linking their research into austerity and crisis to continue to explore the strategies developed by city leaders to respond to the economic crisis and on-going austerity. They are also conducting a critical exploration of governance transformations under conditions of crisis and austerity. We have also had two PhD students, studying with the unit, successful in their viva and now looking to publish from their

research. Indeed, the Unit has a thriving PhD community with 11 students researching a wide range of issues associated with local governance and local government, giving us a dynamic and growing research community within the Unit and a constant source of new research, innovative methodology and critical appraisals of existing policy and processes.

Academics from the Unit are active in international research networks and have presented papers, or been invited keynote speakers, at a range of academic conferences and symposium. We have made important contributions to academic conferences in the US, Canada, Russia, Spain, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Finland and the Netherlands, among others. We have forged strong international research links with overseas universities and are currently engaged in funded international projects in Russia, Norway and France. The Unit is an important contributor to a pan-European COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) funded project on public sector reform which will run until 2017. We are part of the Management Committee of the project and also lead one of the four working groups, co-ordinating the research activity of a group of renowned international scholars from 17 countries. Linking this academic work to policy and practice, experts from the Unit have been invited keynote speakers to over 50 events organised by practitioner organisations and for events organised by individual councils.

The LGRU were central in organising the DMU Policy Commission, which was part of the University's sustained commitment to the public good and engaging with practitioners in the policy community. The Policy Commission was designed to give our students a say in the future development of government ideas and direction. LGRU members ran two of the Commission's work streams: The Future of Urban spaces and Cities; and, Citizenship and Political Participation. The final report of the Commission was launched at an event at the House of Lords on 23rd June.

The Unit Director, Professor Colin Copus has, since 2010, been advisor to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee of the House of Commons on the Committee's inquiry into the constitutional status of local government. He is also working alongside the Communities and Local Government Committee exploring the developing role of the councillor. He is a regular contributor to the local and national media on issues relevant to local government and local politics.

We continue our ground-breaking practitioner orientated research, headed by Professor Steven Griggs, with the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) which is being rolled out to councils across the country. Professor Griggs is continuing the work of a successful ESRC funded Knowledge Transfer Partnership award which was given an 'outstanding' end of grant assessment by independent evaluators.

In partnership with Professor Steve Martin at the University of Cardiff, Professor Steven Griggs, Professor Colin Copus and Dr Melvin Wingfield have recently completed a national survey of councillors. The survey, funded by APSE, generates longitudinal data on the shifting role of the councillor and changing attitudes towards the modernisation agenda. In addition, Professor Griggs, Dr Wingfield and Eleanor MacKillop have undertaken work with Derbyshire County Council on how the council might develop strategies for leadership of place.

Professor Jonathan Davies' work currently focuses on the impact of austerity and the response from the public sector to continued financial constraint. He is currently working on research funded by the Norwegian Research Council for a 3 year project (2013-2015) led by the Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research, studying network governance in Russia.

Dr Mark Roberts recently completed an innovative AHRC funded research project with Peterborough Council to explore the effectiveness of policies designed to empower local communities. His work has helped to evaluate the effectiveness of local policies that are designed to enhance citizen participation in local government and provides invaluable lessons for local government generally.

Dr Melvin Wingfield, an associate of the LGRU, has been working with Professor Colin Copus, on a research project exploring the role of independent councillors in local government; and, they have been working together on an on-going comparative project exploring developments in local government across 17 European countries. Dr Wingfield has also worked closely with academics in European developments in e-government.

Dr Valeria Guarneros-Meza, joined the Department of Politics and Public Policy and the LGRU in July 2014 from Cardiff Business School. She will enhance our expertise in local politics, citizen participation and partnership working and strengthen our academic and commissioned research capacity.

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Organisation, Management and Learning (OMaL)

The Organisation, Management and Learning (OMaL) cluster within the Department of Strategic Management and Marketing includes our research activities in the areas of entrepreneurship and SMEs, policy and management, knowledge, innovation and networks, risk and crisis management, and organisational resilience. A common theme in our work is organisation, management and learning in specific settings – whether these be in ethnic minority/immigrant-owned businesses, small/medium sized enterprises, organisations in crisis or facing internal resistance, or organisations spanning their own boundaries through networks and collaboration.

Colleagues within the OMaL cluster have recently published (or had accepted for publication) papers in leading journals such as *Organization*, *Applied Economics*, *International Small Business Journal*, *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Work, Employment and Society*, and *Management Learning*. Our work has been presented at a number of high profile international conferences, including the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) conference, British Academy of Management conference, European Marketing Academy conference, and Organizational Learning, Knowledge and Capabilities conference.

Some recent highlights include:

- The award of Best Overall 2012 Paper Prize to Dr Kassa Woldeesenbet for his paper entitled “Supplying large firms: the role of entrepreneurial and dynamic capabilities in small businesses” (published in the *International Small Business Journal*).
- The Best Full Paper Award 2013 in the Entrepreneurship Track at the British Academy of Management conference 2013 for Dr Natalia Vershinina’s paper entitled “Russian entrepreneurs in London – are they flying business class?”
- Dr Brahim Herbane has recently been invited to provide post-broadcast materials, commentary and engagement for a new BBC4 television series entitled “Hidden Histories: Britain’s Oldest Family Businesses” broadcast in January 2014.
- Dr Ashley Carreras organised a Problem Structuring Methods Special Interest Group of the Operational Research Society around the theme of ‘Best Problem Structuring in Practice: Sharing lessons from analysts, consultants and researchers’ in November 2013.
- Dr Natalia Vershinina organised a one-day event at Leicester Business School on behalf of the Entrepreneurship Special Interest Groups of the British Academy of Management. Among the invited speakers were Professor Ossie Jones and Dr Dilani Jayawarna (University of Liverpool), Professor Monder Ram (University of Birmingham), Professor Claire Leitch (University of Lancaster) and Professor Simon Down (Anglia Ruskin University).
- Dr Martin Beckinsale is currently leading a 16 month Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) study into “Entrepreneurial Activities of Diverse SMEs at a time of Disruptive Change.”

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“ A common theme in our work is organisation, management and learning in specific settings – whether these be in ethnic minority/immigrant owned businesses, small/medium sized enterprises, organisations in crisis or facing internal resistance, or organisations spanning their own boundaries through networks and collaboration.”



Doctoral Research Students

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Dr Kanokporn Chaiprasit writes about the recent completion of her Doctorate at Leicester Business School entitled “An Evaluation of Organisational Processes Associated with the Transition to a more Internationalised Campus: An Investigation in Thai Universities”.

“ The Business School provided regular structured training days with opportunities to meet a wide variety of other research students and staff, and these events provided a warm welcome for international students, an ongoing sense of community, and opportunities to seek further guidance and encouragement from scholars.”

“ My recent PhD study explored the endeavours of management in Thai universities to facilitate the changes needed to achieve more internationalised campuses. Using the concept of ‘communities of practice’ in which cooperation and the sharing of skills and knowledge are dominant themes, the research examined the understanding of internationalisation as the expressions of staff experience in Thai universities, and it evaluated the organisational processes which facilitated the change to a more internationalised campus. While communities of practice as a way of describing and explaining organisational processes has been beneficial in Western contexts, this had not previously been the case in an Eastern organisational setting.

My research found very little evidence of staff participation, the sharing of ideas and knowledge, and cooperation in decision-making. My analysis reveals that a much more accurate and reliable explanation for the approaches by management to the internationalisation of University campuses can be found in the constraints on management structures and behaviour imposed by Thai cultural values. Thai management structures are based on strict hierarchical patterns in which the rank and status of individuals are predominant and which indicate the extent of the power which they wield. These structures are reinforced by an ‘ego orientation’ by which the ‘self’ is protected and given priority. If Thai universities are to respond effectively to global and regional pressures for changes to their services and to the autonomy required by the Thai government

policy, their management will need to move towards improved governance and decision making. This will require universities to reduce the hold that Thai cultural values currently have on their management and decision making and to develop more open, cooperative and flexible structure systems. The contribution of this study is that the theory of communities of practice is shown to be contextually restricted to geographically more developed educational systems. Furthermore, it has been shown not to apply in Thailand’s developing internationalisation context. Finally, an ideal organisation model is proposed to improve the internationalisation of universities in Thailand.

Studying for a research degree at Leicester Business School situated me in a research community with other PhD students who were interested in working in a fulfilling academic environment. Although I had no doubt before starting my PhD that it would be a long and challenging journey, I was convinced that it would be valuable for my career and that De Montfort University was the right institution for me. The Business School provided regular structured training days with opportunities to meet a wide variety of other research students and staff, and these events provided a warm welcome for international students, an ongoing sense of community, and opportunities to seek further guidance and encouragement from scholars. Set within the luxurious and modern Hugh Aston Building, this peaceful yet stimulating environment provides outstanding facilities for research degree students. Leicester Business School helped me fulfil my ambition of achieving a PhD in 2013 and I am greatly appreciative of the resources and support provided to me during my time at De Montfort University.”

Dr Kanokporn Chaiprasit is the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Research in the Faculty of Business Administration at Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand.

Dr Sorbarikor Lebura recently completed his PhD study entitled “The Nature of Stakeholder Relationships in the Nigerian Oil Industry” at Leicester Business School. Here he tells us about some of the findings and implications arising from his research.

“ My thesis was focussed on how corporate social responsibility (CSR) is used by multinational oil companies as a strategic tool to maintain good relationships with their stakeholders. The data collection involved semi-structured interviews and surveys with respondents chosen from major multinational oil companies, host communities, non-governmental organisation representatives, and experts working in community development. The collected data was analysed using thematic discourse analysis (TDA) as proposed by Singer and Hunter (1999) to ensure that the key themes that formed the different discourses around the topic under study were properly explored.

The key findings from the study showed that the nature of the relationships between stakeholders in the industry is dynamic in nature and influenced by other factors such as CSR activities undertaken in the different parts of the region, the honouring

of agreements (such as Memoranda of Understanding and Global Memoranda of Understanding) by the parties involved, participation of the host communities in the processes, and the role of the government. My study develops the proposition of a Micro-System Perspective Model which asserts that different stakeholders start their relationships with each other with varying objectives that can only be achieved as outcomes if specific mechanisms are properly applied to these relationships. These mechanisms (resources, licences and agreements) impact these relationships and the model also emphasizes the separation of the Government from the relationship between the oil companies and the host communities. The model further develops our understanding of the dynamic relationships between stakeholders in the industry and the influence of these mechanisms by the different stakeholders in their interaction

with each other. The findings show that such dynamism is also caused by the management of these relationships through the CSR activities undertaken by the oil companies operating in the various parts of the region. As a result, CSR is viewed in the region as being a social obligation owed to the host communities by the oil companies.

I had a splendid time at Leicester Business School, which lasted over 4 years (as I undertook both my Masters Degree and Doctorate there). The facilities available were good for my research, especially the availability of an office from where I worked as well as the best level of support anyone could ask for. I benefited from Faculty of Business and Law doctoral support funding which aided my attendance of international conferences to test my thoughts and ideas with colleagues from all over the world. My supervisory team was the best and they were the reason why I finished when I did, as they pushed and supported me even in the most difficult times. I would be glad to recommend Leicester Business School!”

Dr Sorbarikor Lebura is Project Lead of The Nigeria Ability Project (#tNAP), a new initiative designed to bring disability to the national and social agenda in Nigeria.

Join us

Leicester Business School has a dynamic, thriving research community whose work has an international reputation in a number of fields. Why not join us as a PhD student?

Research degree applications are welcomed from students working in a wide range of Business School disciplines including Accounting and Finance, Human Resource Management, Marketing, Politics and Public Policy, and Strategic Management.

The International PhD Programme

The International PhD allows students based outside the UK to register with DMU for a PhD but to undertake the majority of their studies in their home country.

Full details of the International PhD can be found at:

www.dmu.ac.uk/study/graduate-school/enquiries-and-applications/international-phd-programme.aspx

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