

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Chester		
Unit of Assessment: 17 Business and Management Studies		
Title of case study: Embedding the micro-dynamics of ethics across professional fields		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Paul Manning	Professor	2014 – ongoing
Neil Moore	Senior Lecturer	2002 – ongoing
Danny Moss	Professor	2010 – ongoing
Peter Stokes	Professor	2010 – ongoing
Tony Wall	Professor	2010 – ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Chester Business School's (CBS) research explores how ethical behaviours are deeply embedded in the everyday micro-dynamics of practice, an issue negatively impacting the 828,000 workers suffering from anxiety and stress in the UK. CBS's closeness-to-practice, especially through its board memberships, consultancy and its Researcher Development Hub events, connected current issues with CBS's researchers. As a result, CBS was invited to use the findings to design applied research interventions with a wide range of practice communities: Cheshire West & Chester, Wirral, West Lancashire, and Oxfordshire councils, Lapidus International (professional body), and the European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC). These interventions then led to changes in workplace environments for, and behaviour of, >8,800 employees, improvements in the services for 1.1m residents, and the creation or refinement of industry-wide professional body frameworks and development programmes. Such changes represent deep changes in practice reaching >130,000 practice-based learners in the UK, and practitioners in >20 countries.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The underpinning research in this case study draws from CBS's 'responsible enterprise' and 'work-based learning for decent work' research clusters, particularly from researchers examining ethics in relation to ambidexterity and resilience: Prof. **Stokes** (2010-2016), Prof. **Moss** (2010-present), Dr **Moore** (2002-present), Prof. **Wall** (2010-present), Dr **Smith** (2015-2016), and **Ward** (2015-2019); and ethics and social capital and networks, such as Prof. **Manning** (2014-present) and Prof. **Wall** (2010-present). These researchers typically led conceptualisation and data collection [R1-6], collaborating with Professors **Liu** (Birmingham University Business School), **Tran** (Australian Research Council Fellow, Deakin University Melbourne), and **Lichy** (Lyon) for contextual application.

With the rise of the 'decent work' agenda, where workplaces and spaces should be free from damage and discrimination, there is increasing recognition that managers need to better manage the ethical tensions inherent in balancing immediate demands of profit and productivity against longer term uncertain outcomes such as health and wellbeing. A key theme of research at CBS has been to challenge the dominant focus on senior management in organisation and human resources research, in order to amplify the significance of 'everyday' encounters in ethical sense-making and shaping relationships [R1, R2, R3], and as a result, their ethical impacts on resilience and wellbeing in organisations [R4, R5, R6]. By omitting this 'micro' level dynamic, research and practice miss subtle ethical dynamics which can undermine productivity in workplaces, employee resilience and wellbeing, and in turn, the wider communities to which people and organisations are intimately connected.

A key finding was that everyday 'micro-moments' in individual or small group contexts had a vital influence in ultimately underpinning, and contributing to, the way individuals balance the need for dealing with operational demands of the moment, as well as accommodating the uncertainty of unfolding situations [R1]. Importantly, these micro aspects not only express sources of ethical values, beliefs, and attitudes, they are closely rooted to a broader sense of purpose (spiritual

Impact case study (REF3)

capital) which interacts variously with wider organisational management behaviours and systems [R2]. Our research into overseas professional learners [R3], for example, has found that when this higher purpose was oriented towards a 'collective one-ness', practices prioritised valuing the unique cultural 'assets' of individuals from their own perspectives, which are shared openly for dialogue and collective learning. This is significant as it directly counters the dominant andragogic practices which typically treat such professional learners as 'deficit' or 'lacking'. These research studies have direct relevance to how individuals perceive, make sense of, and act ethically in relation to the needs of other stakeholders, especially in terms of social purpose and value.

A second key finding was that resilience and wellbeing in organisations are underpinned by these everyday behaviours, including those acts which might be considered positive to help people connect in the workplace, as well as those which might be understood as disruptive acts of scepticism or resistance [R4]. Further research highlighted how arts-based methods such as storytelling created open, collaborative and imaginative spaces that revealed the granularities and nuances of management behaviours and systems that could be improved for wider social value [R5]. These improvements led to a wide range of outcomes such as a greater sense of voice and connectedness for employees and service users even in highly regulated health and social care organisations. Importantly, other research [R6] demonstrated that although there were significant ethical advantages to strong social relations (social capital), such as building and maintaining social wellbeing, paradoxically it also illustrated that such deep relationships can develop an excessive level of trust, and thereby lead to unethical outcomes which negatively implicate others as demonstrated through history in financial fraud. Overall, these research studies have a direct relevance to practitioner sense making with a more holistic and nuanced sense of resilience and wellbeing in organisations, including the limits and consequences of connectedness.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1: Stokes, P., Moore, N., Moss, D., Mathews, M., Smith, S. M., & Liu, Y. (2015) The micro-dynamics of intraorganizational and individual behavior and their role in organizational ambidexterity boundaries. *Human Resource Management*, 54 (1), pp 63-86.

R2: Stokes, P., Baker, C., and Lichy, J. (2016) The role of embedded individual values, belief and attitudes and spiritual capital in shaping everyday postsecular organisational culture. *European Management Review*, 13 (1), pp. 37–51.

R3: Tran, L. T. & Wall, T. (2019). Ubuntu in adult vocational education: Theoretical discussion and implications for teaching international students, *International Review of Education*, 65(4), 557-578.

R4: Stokes, P., Smith, S., Wall, T., Moore, N., Rowland, C., Ward, T., & Cronshaw, S. (2019). Resilience and the (Micro-)Dynamics of Organizational Ambidexterity: Implications for Strategic HRM. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 30(8), 1287-1322.

R5: Rossetti, L. and Wall, T. (2017). The impact of story: measuring the impact of story for organisational change, *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 9 (2), pp. 170-184.

R6: Manning, P. (2018). Exploiting the social fabric of networks: a social capital analysis of historical financial frauds. *Management & Organizational History*. 13(2), pp. 191-211.

Each of these outputs was subject to double-blind peer-review in international journals, and R5 received an Emerald Literati Award for co-production with practitioners. The research was also used to acquire esteemed funding from **(1) the British Academy** for the "Empowering Ethnic Minority Youth in Vietnam to Re-Vision the Future of Decent Work" (£266,077), a collaborative research project with Hanoi, Tay Bac, and Phu Xuan universities in Vietnam; and **(2) the Medical Research Council** funded "Prevention of Disease Using Trade Agreements" (£308k) with Imperial, Cambridge, Sydney, and Monash universities, and senior staff at the World Health Organization, Public Health England, and Public Health Wales. The outputs also underpinned the continued delivery of the Practice Assessment Record & Evaluation project and service funded by **Health Education England** (£1.9m in this REF cycle).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Local government senior leaders and employees in England

As a result of dialogue between practitioners and researchers in CBS's Researcher Development Hub events, CBS was invited to use its research to design and deliver R&D interventions in a

Impact case study (REF3)

range of councils. The interventions adopted appreciative storytelling activities to create open and creative spaces [R3, R5] to increase team sensitivity to the ethical interconnectedness of everyday behaviours, relationships, and wellbeing [R1, R2, R4], to then be able to identify new and sustainable ways of working for individuals, teams and the wider organisation. As such, this research is directly tackling the national problem identified by the Health & Safety Executive, whereby stress in public services is double that of the average across all sectors nationally (HSE, 2020).

In **Wirral Council**, the approach was initially adopted in the customer services team, but led to changes which were then rolled out across the entire organisation, and directly changed the way public services were delivered. The Head of Customer Service confirms that the intervention *“massively reframed how important every day behaviours were to our own and others’ wellbeing”* and as a result, directly informed *“a new performance management framework which I embedded through linking ‘wellbeing maintenance plans’ with services objectives”* [S1]. The new approach prioritised everyday wellbeing behaviours rather than simply work tasks alone. However, because of a demonstrable difference to workplace culture in delivering services, the framework and wellbeing maintenance plans were then rolled out to the entire organisation through leadership events and 1-2-1 capacity building, and ultimately *“fed directly into the Wirral 2020 corporate plan and the staff ‘pledges’ towards wellbeing... As a result, it has directly improved... the wellbeing of over 4,500 employees and the service experience of the 320,000 residents on the Wirral”* [S1]. The Head of Customer Services then adopted the same practices at **West Lancashire Council**, through embedding everyday wellbeing work behaviours within the Council's People Strategy, changing the *“practices of over 300 staff, their stress levels, and has directly improved the services received by 110,000 residents”* [S1].

A similar R&D intervention was applied in **Oxfordshire County Council**, where storytelling intervention aimed to promote a sense of connectedness amongst the senior leadership team [R3, R4, R5]. The Corporate Director of Public Health confirms that the *“[s]torytelling enabled deep empathy... and enabled a fundamentally different way of delivering public health... moving from a silo into being embedded across distributed but deeply interconnected services areas. Second, I changed the profile of my own leadership team to build stronger resilience and agility... These changes were reflected in the way the £30m public health budget was allocated, for example, in the commitment of £800K to support partnership working across services. [t]hese changes were critical to managing the health of Oxfordshire’s 687K residents with agility during COVID-19”*. [S2] Corporate Director of Adult Services also confirms this: *“As a result of the process... we have avoided silo’s thinking and we now have a much stronger collective engagement as well as stronger and more strategic decision making. I adopted the co-created story with my own management teams to accelerate culture change towards greater effectiveness and innovation, leading to a more positive working environment for over 4000 employees working across teams in the council.”* Stephen Chandler Corporate Director for Adult Services [S2].

Finally, research [R3, R4, R5] directly informed the arts-based methods adopted in the **Cheshire West & Chester Council’s** approach to poverty reduction, a strategically significant issue for the council because it houses 34 neighbourhoods ranked in the top 20% most deprived areas in England [S3]. The methods enabled deep dialogue and collaborative action taking between civic and business leaders and people with lived experience of poverty who would not normally connect [S4]. This led to a variety of changes such as a housing association re-configuring their evictions from a ‘process’ to a ‘wellbeing’ approach which prioritised relationships and empathy, and was calculated to contribute **£1,678,276 in additional social value** [S3]. Louise Gittins, Leader of the council confirmed that *“the legacy of this work is the golden thread for our new plans as a council”*, through anti-poverty policy and calling a “Poverty Emergency” affecting all council policies for 340k local residents [S3].

Creative wellbeing practitioners across 20 countries

The helping professions are another group adversely affected by stress levels significantly above the national average, according to the Health & Safety Executive (2020). Helping professionals using creative practices (such as storytelling) for wellbeing is a relatively new professional field

Impact case study (REF3)

which is highly skilled and specialist, but which is applied across a wide range of organisations (e.g. hospitals, libraries, community organisations, and businesses). However, it has not been regulated by a common ethical framework, and the professional body in this area, Lapidus International, had noticed an increasing risk of harm to participants across the 20 countries it operates in. After hearing about CBS research and creative interventions through the involvement of its researchers on the Lapidus board, Lapidus International approached CBS for research consultancy. As a result, CBS utilised its research [R1, R4, R5] in a participatory R&D approach to elucidate subtle and holistic understandings of ethics with a wide diversity of specialist practitioners to co-create a new practice framework intentionally sensitive to context and higher purpose [R2] [S5].

The framework produced guided reflection and supervision prompts to enable practitioners to build awareness of contextual features which could affect ethics and safety across different practice settings [S6]. The framework was then fully adopted by the professional body as the industry standard across the 20 countries it operates in, and to underpin its own national training and dialogic supervisory programmes to build the effectiveness of its 400+ highly skilled and specialised practitioners. The new practice framework is now freely available in open access form in 19 languages enabling extensive reach across the countries creative wellbeing practitioners operate in (Albanian, Bulgarian, Chinese (2 languages), Danish, English, French, German, Greek, Icelandic, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Sinhala, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Welsh).

Barbara Bloomfield, Chair of Lapidus International confirms that the research has enabled practitioners to *“develop a much greater understanding of, and skill in, how to deliver effective, safe and ethical practice through a form of reflective practice which uniquely promotes closer awareness of the interrelatedness of contextual factors”* and that *“As a result, the work has impacted 100s of practitioners in the field, and we estimate that this in turn has both improved the health of, and prevented harm to, 1000s of people supported across organisations”* [S7]. An expert practitioner explains the depth of this work, by confirming the work has added *“a profound understanding into the moment-by-moment complexity of risks and mitigations in practice; an understanding was not readily available or accessible before. As a result, I now engage in interdisciplinary peer group supervision. I am confident that this new knowledge has directly and positively impacted the social isolation and self-esteem outcomes of over 40 participants in areas of high deprivation, where sustained disadvantage means such outcomes are normally extremely difficult to change”* [S8].

Coaching practitioners across Europe

Coaching is another relatively new helping profession, and despite it having established professional and ethical standards, the EMCC (a leading professional body for the field), had identified significant gaps between coaching practice and the rigorous processes of research [S9]. CBS researchers approached the EMCC and were selected as international research advisors, and to advise policy in relation to the “bridging the gap” agenda. CBS research was adopted to challenge these gaps through the *Policy & Practice Provocations* series where practitioner and researchers collaborated to reveal dominant values, attitudes and beliefs [R2], where operational demands often require immediate, responsive action over uncertain longer-term outcomes [R1], and where practices which might be ethically questionable or might create unethical outcomes for coaches or coaching clients across different settings [R6].

Insights from these collaborations underpinned the formation of challenging questions in each *Policy & Practice Provocations* report, for example, around research utilisation, coaching evaluation, and coaching ethics across cultural boundaries, and were then shared through ‘LinkedIn Extended Conversations’ accessed by over 700 to date. As Zoltán Csigás, previous Vice President of Research at the EMCC testifies, that the research *“significantly raised the profile of more robust and ethical practice, an issue which our previous collaborative research had found was significantly lacking. In turn, this has directly impacted the way professional standards are understood in accreditation systems, with even more stringent expectations about ethics and evaluation. Such systems ultimately impact all of our 4,500 members across Europe, and I believe*

Impact case study (REF3)

this work has directly underpinned a deeper rigour in professional judgement and enhanced practice.” [S10].

Health and social care work-based learners in England

Research into how ethics is embedded into every day, micro-moments [R2] and how this influences sense-making in professional situations where immediate pressures are balanced against longer term outcomes [R1] in practice-learning settings [R3], was used to design the Online Practice Assessment Record & Evaluation (PARE) service (£1.9m funded by Health Education England). Again, CBS’s Researcher Development Hub supported interdisciplinary conversations and relationships across health, business and the Strategic Economic Development department to bid for Health Education England funds. Specifically, the research underpinned the design of the real-time, everyday reflective practice between health and social care practice-learners with their clinical educators and supervisors, often needed in-the-moment when the features of a critical incident are top-of-mind. This was significant as the system has substantively removed the major delays and barriers that were previously typical due to excessive workloads preventing face-to-face supervisory meetings.

The system has also empowered these practice-learning communities to enhance learning environments and patient care: it has increased the return of learning environment evaluation from 20% to 80%, enabling close, granular management of learning environments across England which directly tackles the major national issue of practice-learner retention. The system now has >130,000 users across 18 professional groupings (which is significant given that this represents 41% of the nursing workforce in the NHS). Caroline Williams from Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust says PARE has *“significantly reduced the amount of time and manpower required to ensure learners are supported”*, keeps learners *“on track and feel more supported”*, and enables *“efforts to be targeted to those needing additional support”* which has improved retention [S11]. In addition, *“joint action planning makes developing and improving the learning environments eminently more achievable and timelier”* leading to significant efficiency savings for Trusts [S11]. Similarly, Richard Williams, Practice Lead at Edge Hill University, confirms the system *“has had an indescribable positive impact... thus making better registered practitioners that improve the health outcomes for patients and improve their experiences when they are at, potentially, their most vulnerable”* [S12].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

S1: Email: Head of Corporate/Customer Services, West Lancashire Council and previously Wirral Council, 24.11.20.

S2: Email: Director of Public Health, Oxfordshire County Council, 22.11.20.

S3: Cheshire West & Chester Council’s West Cheshire Poverty Truth Evaluation Report available [here](#), accessed 18.1.21.

S4: News release: *Business leaders collaborate to tackle poverty in West Cheshire*, available [here](#), accessed 18.1.21.

S5: News release: *New guidance for using creativity for wellbeing in the workplace launched*, available [here](#), accessed 27.11.20.

S6: International Creative Practices for Wellbeing Framework available in 20 languages & Policy Action Report - <https://www.lapidus.org.uk/resources/report-wellbeing>

S7: Email: Chair of Lapidus International, 23.11.20.

S8: Email: a wellbeing practitioner for a creative practice 23.11.20.

S9: EMCC’s Policy & Practice Provocations Reports: Towards renewal of research practice and utilisation (2016); Coaching evaluation in diverse landscapes of practice (2017); Coaching and ethics in practice (2018), available [here](#), accessed 18.1.21.

S10: Email: former Vice President of International Research at the European Mentoring and Coaching Council in Brussels, dated 27.11.20.

S11: Email: a representative from Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, 27.11.20.

S12: Email: Practice Lead at Edge Hill University, 27.11.20.